

“CALLED INTO PARTNERSHIP”

An Essay for the 58th Convention South Dakota District, LCMS Sioux Falls, South Dakota April 29–May 2, 2009

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Our Christian life is all about partnership. No matter who we are, what we do in everyday life, what we do in our church life, whether young or old, male or female, Jew or Gentile, living in the 1st or 16th or 20th century A.D.—it is all about partnership, a God-given reality in every Christian life. In Greek New Testament language it is about “κοινωνία,” a word with which the clergy among us are already well acquainted. It is also the key word of the text from which the theme of this convention has been taken, the apostle Paul speaking to the Christian of the church at Philippi of their “partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:5).

Such partnership often translated “fellowship,” our thinking easily moves in the direction of “church fellowship,” and then “altar and pulpit fellowship,” and then our corresponding practice of “close Communion.” While this is one facet of the concept of partnership and an important application for us as Missouri Synod Lutherans who take fellowship matters seriously, we will be left short-changed if we fail to recognize and appreciate the wide range of considerations that the phrase “partnership in the Gospel” covers.

The word we most often like to use to describe this partnership or fellowship that we enjoy together is the word “synod” with its image of people walking together. This word also, as meaningful and commonplace as it is among us, is more broad than we may recognize, our casual thinking regarding “synod” falling far short of all that is encompassed in this single Greek word, κοινωνία, in its various forms and usages in the New Testament, including the Philippians passage before us.

May the several hours of convention time allotted for this study together be a blessing to all of us, not only for us better to understand and appreciate this important concept but also to assist each

of us in honoring it more constantly and consistently in our lives, no matter who we are, what we do in everyday life, or what we do in our church life together.

PART I: BEHIND THE UNIQUE “Κοινωνία” WE ENJOY

After 27 years of life and ministry in South Dakota, my St Louis thoughts cannot but often return to where the proverbial “buffalo roam and the deer and antelope play.” I’m sure some of us will have opportunities over the next several days to recall mutual memories, memories enhanced by time to the point that we begin truly to believe that there “seldom [was] heard a discouraging word and the skies [were] not cloudy all day.” But most of all, those memories will fondly recall the sense of “partnership in the Gospel” that existed among us. Although challenged at times by everyday life and our sinful human condition, this partnership was a reality in the congregations I was honored to serve and the offices I was privileged to hold.

One particular time when this partnership demonstrated itself was in 1995, when the Russian Iron Curtain was being shredded and Lutheran survivors of Soviet oppression and persecution were emerging from 70 years of Marxist socialist rubble. Survivors from the Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia were calling out to their partners in the Gospel in America for assistance. Someone was needed on short notice to teach at their church basement seminary in the village of Koltyshe outside St. Petersburg. You may recall that the South Dakota District Board of Directors allowed me to respond to this appeal. With then-Vice-President Sattgast covering my duties, Tamara and I spent fall and early winter of 1995 in St. Petersburg. Teaching one and sometimes two four-hour sessions a day, I learned a thing or two about partnership in the Gospel in that basement classroom. But not all that I learned was learned in the classroom. One particular lesson, learned on the streets of St. Petersburg, will be the thread that hopefully will serve to hold the various parts of this essay together.

Like many presenters today, I hope to use a visual aid to enhance the thousands of words I will use to speak of this partnership that is ours in the Gospel. My projector will be the one you brought with you to this convention: your imagination. My words will project onto the screen of your mind a simple, basic picture known to all of us, that of two persons walking together arm in arm. With that picture in your mind, you not only have a very common picture from life on the

streets of St. Petersburg. With that picture in mind, you already have the beginning of a helpful understanding of κοινοῦντα, of “partnership” or “fellowship” in the Gospel.

Russian people regularly walk arm in arm, men with women, women with women, men with men. There are advantages to doing this on the streets of St. Petersburg, as will be noted in the time we spend together. Tamara and I learned to do so also, for reasons to be explained later. Suffice to say for now, one thing can be said for people walking arm in arm: they have a relationship. Something has brought their arms together, just as something has brought us together as partners. That something is the subject of this Part I of this essay.

Just what is behind this “partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now”? In 1962, one of the first assignments given to the Synod’s then-newly-created Commission on Theology and Church Relations was to take up the study of the “theology of fellowship” that had already been underway since 1956. The resulting document, *Theology of Fellowship*,¹ received for study, reference, and guidance by the 1965 and 1967 conventions, represented the best scriptural research of our Synod on this subject. It remains today a primary source for a scriptural understanding of what is behind the arm-in-arm partnership we enjoy in the Gospel and will serve as a primary resource for what follows in this essay.

Scriptural Fact: God created man for fellowship, *i.e.*, partnership, first of all, with Himself.

- *And God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.”... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:26-27). The image of God was and is, among other things, one of partnership, of three in one. The unity that exists between Christians finds its foundation in the very unity that exists among the three persons of the Trinity, where the Son and the Holy Spirit share in the deity of the Father. As stated in the Nicene Creed, the Son is “of one substance with the Father” and the Holy Spirit “together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.”
- Not only did God make man in His image, but He also made man a partner. He personally breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils (Gen. 2:7), blessed man with the power of procreation (Gen. 1:28), and entrusted to him a share in the government of

¹ *Theology of Fellowship*. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, unique among CTCR documents in that it was adopted specifically “for reference and guidance” by the Synod’s 1967 convention in New York.

the creature world (Gen. 1:28). Thus God made man a partaker and partner with Himself both in creation and government.

- This partnership with God included responsibility to God: *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die* (Gen. 2:16–17).
- And this was a personal fellowship that involved direct communication between man and his Maker: *And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth”* (Gen. 1:29). Clearly, God created man for fellowship, first of all, with Himself.

Scriptural Fact: God also created man for fellowship with his fellow man.

- *Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him”* (Gen. 2:18). Beasts of the field and fowls of the air wouldn’t do:
...But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him (Gen. 2:20). And so God created Eve, recognized at once by Adam as a creature designed for partnership with himself:
Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man” (Gen. 2:23).
- By this creative act, God ordained the fellowship, the partnership of husband and wife:
Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:24).
- And by the creation of Eve God also provided the basis for the even larger fellowship of the entire human family: *Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?* (Mal. 2:10). *And He made of one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth....* (Acts 17:26).

Scriptural Fact: Adam and Eve broke that fellowship with God.

- They broke it despite the commandment that was to preserve them and the fellowship:
“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).
- Our first parents did what we do daily, yielding to temptation and transgressing God’s commandment: *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made....[T]he serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For*

God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (Gen. 3:1, 4–6).

- The first casualty of this transgression was the partnership between God and man. This became evident when man and woman fled from God and attempted to hide from him: *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8).* The damage became most clear when God drove them from the garden: *Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—“ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24).* But there would be another serious casualty of man’s disobedience.

Scriptural Fact: When man broke fellowship with God, man’s fellowship with fellow man, created by God, was also broken, immediately evident in the garden.

- Adam now blamed Eve for his behavior: *The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12).* And Eve, although quick to blame the serpent for her deception, no doubt had a few choice thoughts regarding Adam after his attempt to save his own skin by making it all her fault.
- What’s more, it soon became all too clear that these broken relationships were passed on to the next generation. While *the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,...for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face fell (Gen. 4:5).*
- And then the one thing, a broken relationship with God, led to the other, a broken relationship with the brother: *And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:8–9).* The fall into sin destroyed man’s fellowship with God and with man.

Scriptural Fact: The consequences of these early broken relationships have continued ever since.

- Man has continued to negate this fellowship for which he was created—with God and with man: *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).*
- Although God continues to reveal Himself to fallen man through His works, man's response continually is to revolt and break the divinely willed fellowship between God and man: *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Rom. 1:19-32).*

Scriptural Fact: The revealed Law of God fares no better than the natural law.

- God's revealed Law clearly demonstrates His will for mankind, that men and women should live in communion with Him and with one another: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great*

and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–40).

- But God’s revealed Law provokes enmity and rebellion: *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot (Rom. 8:7).*
- And the tragic result is separation instead of fellowship: *Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear (Is. 59:2). We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our impurities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You, for You have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities (Is. 64:6-7).*

This is an awful truth: “We all fade like a leaf, and our impurities, like the wind, take us away,” away from fellowship with God and with each other. But now, the Good News: God has restored this fellowship—in Christ!

Scriptural Fact: Even as God initiated fellowship in the beginning, even so, because His very nature is one of amazing grace and mercy, He again took the initiative to restore fellowship after it was spoiled and lost. Martin Luther is said to have once said, “If I were God, and this world treated me the way it has treated Him, I would have kicked the wretched thing to pieces!” But such is not the nature of God.

- When man hid himself from God’s presence in the garden after the Fall, it was the Lord God Himself who sought out man: *And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:8–9).*
- And God did what needed to be done if they were to be saved—He called them to account: *But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen. 3:9–11).*
- There would be awful consequences from the fall into sin: *To the woman He said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” And to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I*

commanded you, 'you shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:16-19).

- But God also gave to Adam and Eve and to all generations to come opportunity to overhear the first promise of redemption, spoken to the evil one: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15).*

Scriptural Fact: The Old Testament is the record of the ongoing fellowship initiative of God until the fullness of time would come and God would send His Son, *born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).*

- God chose Abraham and his descendants for a life in a covenant relationship with Himself. He and they would walk arm in arm, a demonstration of His will to have $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omega\nu\iota\alpha$ with men. Said He to Abraham: *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).* And again, *I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you (Gen. 17:7).*
- According to this covenant, established by God, man would be privileged to live under the promise of God. At the same time, man would live under God's Law. The Old Testament scriptures are replete with mentions and proclamations of this Law-Gospel fellowship of God and men. Jeremiah 31:31-34: *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law within them and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. I*

will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.” Ezekiel 34:22–25, 30–31: “I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and He shall feed them: He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be a prince among them. I am the LORD. I have spoken. I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods....And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people, declares the Lord GOD. And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, I am Your God, declares the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 37:26: “I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.”

- *The prophet Nathan spoke similar words to David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:12–16: When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your Offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the through of His kingdom forever. I will be to Him a father, and He shall be to me a son. When He commits iniquity, I will discipline Him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from Him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever.*
- *And here are only a few of the passages in which the prophet Isaiah speaks of the covenant God made with His people: There shall come forth a Shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots shall bear fruit....but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked....The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them....He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Is. 11:1, 4, 6, 12). For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Is. 54:10).*

In short, the Law called mankind to the fellowship with God and fellow men which in the beginning was to be the norm for His creation, but the Law ended up instead judging mankind for failure to live according to that norm. The promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament, however, pointed man beyond divine judgment to a new covenant, to the redemptive act of God to restore Israel and all mankind to fellowship with God and with one another.

Scriptural Fact: One of the purposes for the new covenant, in addition to redeeming mankind, was to bring mankind back into fellowship with God.

- This new covenant was announced by the prophet Jeremiah: *“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”*
- God’s intentions for restoring fellowship with men are made clear by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:9: *God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- Those intentions to come close and be close were made vividly clear in John’s Gospel: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14).
- But nowhere are those intentions more clear than in the Supper He provided for His people, promising His real presence among them until He comes again in glory: *“Take, eat; this is My body.” And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom* (Matt. 26:26–29).

What kind of Creator is this, who desires to be this close to His creatures when He has the entire universe for entertainment? What kind of God is this, who designated His Son’s life, death, and resurrection as the great reconciling act that brings God and man back together? It should cause us pause in our lives. We give it pause with the words of the hymn:

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

Scriptural Fact: Reconciliation of mankind with God was not the only purpose for the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

- When Christ had completed His work on the cross and had reconciled all mankind to God, He committed to His church another of its blessings, spoken of by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19: *In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*
- The Word of reconciliation was accompanied by the command that it should be preached to all the world: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). *“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things”* (Luke 24:46–48).

Scriptural Fact: Through the proclaimed Word of reconciliation, men and women are summoned to faith, and faith is created in them by that Word.

- Holy Scripture could hardly be more clear: *You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this is the good news that was preached to you* (1 Pet. 1:23–25).
- Again, Romans 10:17: *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ,* and Romans 1:16, 17: *For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’* And again, James 1:18: *Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*

Scriptural Fact: This call to faith by the Word of God is also the call into fellowship with God.

- St. Paul speaks of this fellowship in his first letter to the church at Corinth: *God is faithful, by whom you were called in the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord* (1 Cor. 1:9).
- God brings man into this fellowship through Holy Baptism, as St. Paul writes: *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized*

into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:26–29).

- In the Lord's Supper, God strengthens and confirms man in this fellowship: *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:16–17).*

Scriptural Fact: This fellowship with God, created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, makes the Christian a partaker in Christ, a child of God, and an heir of God in time and eternity.

- We have this on good authority: *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:16–17).*
- And the consequences of this are eternal: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom. 10:9–13).* This call to faith by the Word of God is indeed the call into fellowship with God. But it is more. This call to faith is also the call into fellowship with our fellow man.

Knowing what we do about God's creation of man and woman and his gracious and merciful intentions for all the children of men (*who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4*), and remembering his instruction to the Galatians, *as we have opportunity, [to] do good to everyone (Gal. 6:10)*, we recognize that the call to faith is a call to good relations with all of our fellow men. Christians, with hearts warmed by the love of God in Christ, are among the most generous and caring people on earth when responding to tragedies and crises near or far. But fellowship with God through faith in Christ should also create an even more special fellowship with fellow Christians.

Scriptural Fact: Those who have fellowship with God through faith in Christ are also in fellowship with one another, as the apostle John writes: *That which we have seen and heard we*

proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3–4).

- As faith in Christ makes all men children of God, it also makes them brethren in Christ: *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:26–27).* And this fellowship transcends every difference created by God and every barrier set up by man, bringing about the highest unity possible among human beings, the unity in Christ Jesus: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).*
- This transcending of all differences and barriers is described wonderfully by St. Paul to the church at Ephesus: *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:11–22).*

The Lutheran Confessions, of course, mirror the Holy Scriptures where κοινωνία is concerned, but reformation times and circumstances required a re-application of the aforementioned scriptural teachings. While it was not Martin Luther’s intention to separate from the Roman Church, and while he was often troubled that he was instrumental in splitting the church of his

day, a significant outcome of the Reformation was a scriptural understanding of the church and corresponding church body fellowship that featured the doctrine of justification at its center.

Prior to Luther's day, the doctrine of justification was not understood adequately enough to understand the true nature of the church and partnership in the Gospel. Fellowship was thought to consist of being a member of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, that is, the Roman Catholic Church. It was *one* because it was one visible organization. It was *holy*, not so much through the forgiveness of sins but because it considered itself as the one and only. It was *catholic* in that it was all over the world. And it was *apostolic*, linked to the apostles by the apostolic succession of bishops. This one, holy, catholic, apostolic church was understood to be a visible, tangible body of men, with the bishop of Rome at its head. Luther's fellow reformer Philip Melancthon described this Roman understanding of the church in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession:

Perhaps our opponents demand some such definition of the church as the following. It is the supreme outward monarchy of the whole world in which the Roman pontiff must have unlimited power beyond question of censure. He may establish articles of faith, abolish the Scriptures by his leave, institute devotions and sacrifices, enact whatever laws he pleases, excuse and exempt men from any laws, divine, canonical, or civil as he wishes. From him the emperor and all kings have received their power and right to rule, and this at Christ's command; for as the Father subjected everything to him, so now this right has been transferred to the pope...²

With such a concept of the church, the doctrine of justification and a corresponding understanding of fellowship had necessarily been obscured and corrupted. The church was believed to consist of those who, within the visible limits of the Roman Catholic Church, gave allegiance to the pope and agreed with whatever was being taught by the church. Those who did so were considered to be in fellowship with the church and each other. Those who separated from this church, no matter how faithful they were to the teachings of Holy Scripture, were considered either heretics or schismatics, outside of the fellowship and without hope of salvation.

When Luther and his fellow reformers attempted to change this understanding in light of the doctrine of justification, they were excommunicated as heretics and excluded from the fellowship. They then drew up the Augsburg Confession, which they believed to be wholly in harmony with proper teachings of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church although at variance with the Church of Rome. This Augsburg Confession and the confessions that followed departed from Roman Catholic doctrine by setting forth the Biblical doctrine of justification by grace, for

² Apology, VII—VIII, 23.

Christ's sake, through faith—declaring this to be the central article of the Christian faith. Instead of stressing membership in a visible organization under the rule of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the Lutheran confession was:

The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly.³

Properly speaking, the church is the assembly of saints and true believers.⁴

We do not concede to the papists that they are the church, for they are not. Nor shall we pay any attention to what they command or forbid in the name of the church, for, thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd.⁵

Unlike the thinking prior to his day, when church fellowship consisted of membership in a visible organization, Luther and his fellow reformers understood from Holy Scripture that fellowship did not consist in participation in a visible, tangible body of men. It consisted in membership in the one, holy, apostolic church. This scriptural fact remains the heart and core of the subject before us during these hours of convention essay: the fellowship, the partnership that we enjoy as a synod, is the very same partnership enjoyed by St. Paul and the Christians at Philippi, to whom he writes in our text of “the partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.” And it extends beyond our Synod to our fellow redeemed around the world, some of whom are in partner churches and some not.

Since Lutheran Reformation times, as differing beliefs led to the establishment of different church denominations, the choice of a church body for membership and the question of fellowship between groups of Christians in differing church bodies have become and remain significant issues among Christians, questions of no less importance for those who call themselves Lutherans. To which church bodies can and should a Lutheran Christian draw close in mutual demonstration of fellowship. The Lutheran Confessions provided the answer, a description by which a true “assembly of saints” may be known—even by Luther’s “seven-year-old child.”

A true church on earth can be known, say the Lutheran Confessions, by the “marks of the church”:

The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in

³ Augsburg Confession, VII. *The Book of Concord*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert *et al.* (Philadelphia, 1959).

⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII.

⁵ Smalcald Articles, VII (Tappert).

men's hearts. To make it recognizable, this association has outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ.⁶

Reference to these “marks of the church,” that is, “the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ,” are already referred to in the Augsburg Confession, though not in so many words:

It is taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.⁷

These marks of the church describe the church of the pure Word and unadulterated sacraments. They are not meant to deny that the church can exist where the Gospel is partly obscured by error. They have served throughout the history of orthodox Lutheranism, however, to establish the limits of pulpit and altar fellowship and to distinguish a true Lutheran Church from other churches. It wasn't long after Augsburg that the Reformed Church, an outgrowth of the efforts of another reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, came into being with confessions of its own. A little later the Roman Catholic Church acquired a confession of its own in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Also during this time, the so-called “left wing” of the Reformation produced a number of sects who refused to identify themselves with any of the three major divisions of western Christendom developing at the time.

In response, the orthodox Lutherans who followed Luther made clear who they were and would continue to be and how they would relate to Christians in other church bodies. In the Preface to the *Book of Concord* they first of all affirmed their continued adherence to the Augsburg Confession as a presentation of the pure teaching of the orthodox Christian church and the content of the ancient ecumenical creeds:

They [the Lutherans] have held fast and loyally to the doctrine that is contained in it [the Augsburg Confession], that is based solidly on the divine Scriptures, and that is also briefly summarized in the approved ancient symbols, recognizing the doctrine as the ancient consensus which the universal and orthodox church of Christ believed, fought for against many heresies and errors, and repeatedly affirmed.⁸

⁶ Apology to the Augsburg Confession, VII–VIII, 5.

⁷ Augsburg Confession, VII.

⁸ Tappert Edition of the *Book of Concord*, Preface, p. 3.

In the same Preface to the *Book of Concord* the Lutheran confessors also defined their attitude toward other churches and toward heresy and heretics. They did not hereticize whole churches in which error was taught—only their false doctrines and the proponents of such doctrines:

With reference to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of false and adulterated doctrine, especially in the article of the Lord's Supper, these have to be set forth expressly and distinctly in this explanation and thorough settlement of the controverted articles in order that everybody may know that he must guard himself against them. There are also many other reasons why condemnations cannot by any means be avoided. However, it is not our purpose and intention to mean thereby those persons who err ingenuously and who do not blaspheme the truth of the divine Word, and far less do we mean entire churches inside or outside the Holy Empire of the German Nation. On the contrary, we mean specifically to condemn only false and seductive doctrines and their stiff-necked proponents and blasphemers...inasmuch as such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it...But we have no doubt at all that one can find many pious, innocent people even in those churches which have up to now admittedly not come to agreement with us. These people go their way in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the issues, and take no pleasure in blasphemies against the Holy Supper as it is celebrated in our churches...Consequently the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another.⁹

Also in the Preface to the *Book of Concord*, the Lutheran confessors expressed their warm love and concern for the Reformed Christians, who were at the time undergoing persecution: “For just as Christian charity causes us to have special sympathy with them, so we entertain a corresponding loathing for and a cordial disapproval of the raging of their persecutors.”¹⁰ The confessors thus not only distinguished between heretics outside the fellowship and erring Christians who were and by God's grace remained children of God. They also reaffirmed their understanding of the church: “Properly speaking, the church is the assembly of saints and true believers.”¹¹

While, therefore, the subject of pulpit and altar fellowship is not discussed *per se* in the Lutheran Confessions, its basis as understood in the Lutheran Church was set forth in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: “And for the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.” But “the doctrine of the Gospel” was never understood as one doctrine among many, or as a bare recital of John 3:16. It was a

⁹ Ibid., p. 11f.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

¹¹ Augsburg Confession, VIII

doctrine composed of a number of articles of faith, not to be understood or preached without the Article of God, the Article of Original Sin, and the Article of the Son of God, as correctly set forth by Herbert J. A. Bouman in his 1955 *Concordia Theological Monthly* article, “The Doctrine of Justification in the Lutheran Confessions”:

This does not mean that the specific *locus* “*de justificatione*” considered by itself is all that the Lutherans consider indispensable. Rather, they regard the entire *corpus doctrinae* as bound up inextricably with justification. All doctrines have their place in this doctrine. All doctrines stand or fall with the doctrine of justification.”¹²

This was also the meaning of Article X of the Epitome to the Formula of Concord when it spoke of “doctrine” in the singular but consisting of a number of articles: “We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in [the] doctrine and in all its articles...”¹³ Those who subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions as the Lutheran definition of “the same Gospel or teaching”¹⁴ were in pulpit and altar fellowship with one another. Those who did not subscribe to them, but adhered to other confessions were, according to the Preface to the *Book of Concord* not condemned as heretics—the Lutherans could even “have a special sympathy with them.” Church fellowship with them, however, was not possible, this according to the doctrine of the church contained in the Lutheran Confessions which required true unity in the church for such fellowship, namely, “that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.”¹⁵

While pulpit and altar fellowship was not possible with erring Christians, however, the Preface to the *Book of Concord* nonetheless recognized a responsibility toward them: “...the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person be misled by another.”¹⁶

During the centuries following the doctrinal agreement established by the Formula of Concord, church fellowship in Europe was determined and established by subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. Although European nations in which the Lutheran church was located, particularly

¹² Herbert J.A. Bouman, “The Doctrine of Justification in the Lutheran Confessions,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXVI, 11 (Nov., 1955), 804.

¹³ Formula of Concord, Epitome, X 7.

¹⁴ Apology, VII—VIII, 8.

¹⁵ Augsburg Confession, VII.

¹⁶ *Book of Concord*, Preface, p. 12.

Germany, were divided into relatively small principalities, each with its own territorial church, subscription to the Lutheran Confessions assured full church fellowship, both pastors and laymen moving freely from one Lutheran territory to another, enjoying pulpit and altar fellowship with Lutherans wherever they found them.

In America, where Lutheran territorial churches were nonexistent, new units of fellowship came into existence, the so-called “ministeria” and “synods.” The ministerium began as an organization of ministers who generally worked in the same area and who practiced pulpit and altar fellowship with one another. Synods, organized somewhat later, were not, as had been the case before the Reformation, councils of clergymen called together to deal with doctrinal or practical problems. They were more-or-less permanent organizations of congregations with their pastors, formed for the purpose of fellowship and working together.

In America, synods proliferated during the 19th century. The country was still relatively new. Distances were great, and means of communication and transportation were primitive. Differences in language and customs further complicated the formation of a single Lutheran Church in America. More importantly, difference in doctrine presented a persistent obstacle, some Lutherans in America having come out of circles in Europe that had been greatly influenced by rationalism. Other Lutherans bore the stamp of pietistic influence. Others were so-called Old Lutherans, who remained very loyal to the Lutheran Confessions. Still another group tried to hold mediating positions. The question which these various Lutheran synods had to face was whether they could be in church fellowship with one another given their doctrinal differences.

The efforts of the various synods to achieve church union, whether by merger or at least by the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship, were long and arduous. The nature and extent of the requirement for subscription to the Lutheran Confessions were not understood in the same way by all and became a matter of debate. Individual synods often changed their attitudes in this regard with the passage of time, making matters even more difficult. One of the synods actively engaging in these struggles was the *Evangelische Lutherische Kirche von Missouri, Ohio, und anderen Staaten*, our Missouri Synod today.

The Missouri Synod had come into existence as a strictly confessional Lutheran church body. Its pastors subscribed to the entire *Book of Concord*, not “insofar as” (*quatenus*) but “because” (*quia*) it was a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. Not that the

Missouri Synod was separatistic. Its leaders, Dr. C.F.W. Walther and his co-workers, were fully cognizant of the difference between erring Christians and erring churches. They sought to draw all Lutherans in America together into one church that was based solely and squarely on the Lutheran Confessions, as advocated in the Preface to the *Book of Concord*.

To accomplish this, “free conferences” for the discussion of doctrine by representatives from all Lutheran groups who “subscribed to the Augsburg Confession without reservation” were held in Columbus, Ohio, in 1856; in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1857; in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1858; and in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1859.¹⁷ In additions, “colloquies” were held with members of the Buffalo Synod in 1866 and with representatives of the Iowa Synod in 1867.

While these efforts were not successful in uniting all Lutheran synods, they were instrumental in bringing about the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1872. The Missouri Synod, strictly loyal to the Lutheran Confessions, continued to advocate that an unqualified *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions was necessary for congregations to have assurance that their pastors were truly Lutheran pastors who would preach the doctrine of the Scriptures. The Synod and its partners also believed that a *quatenus* subscription would open the floodgates to arbitrariness in doctrine.

The Missouri Synod also insisted that subscription to the Confessions must be implemented by corresponding public teaching in the pulpit, instruction room, seminary, and church publications, a stance wholly in accord with the Augsburg Confession, which stressed public teaching when it stated: “...it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it.”¹⁸

The writings of the fathers of the Missouri Synod also stressed a third principle of church fellowship: churchly practice must also be in harmony with the confessions. This principle was laid down in the “Eighteen Theses,” the first 16 of which were discussed at meetings of the Synodical Conference from 1873 to 1879. Speaking of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the fifth thesis reads: “Also he who denies the deductions which properly follow from the words of this confession is not a true member of the Lutheran Church, even though contrary to all right, he clings to the name Lutheran.” The sixth thesis applies such “deductions” to matters of churchly

¹⁷ Cf. Erwin Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (Saint Louis, 1954), s. v., “Free Conferences,” p. 390.

¹⁸ Augsburg Confession, VII, 2f.

practice: “From the character and nature of this orthodox confession it follows of necessity that churchly practice must be conformed to it. For every churchly action is either an immediate expression and actual carrying out of the confession, or at least such an activity which, even though it may lie in the area of Christian liberty, nevertheless dare not actually contradict the confession.” It was therefore concluded that churchly practice could become a criterion for the granting or denial of church fellowship. So read the seventh thesis: “From this necessary connection between the confession and the church’s practice it follows logically that a Lutheran Synod, in which the reigning practice is in accord with the confession, dare not unite with another synod which calls itself Lutheran, but in which the reigning practice is contrary to the confession.

Consequently, included among the practices regarded as contrary to the confession and therefore a bar to church fellowship were the following: toleration on the part of Lutheran pastors of pulpit and altar fellowship with non-Lutherans; lack of firm testimony against membership in secret societies; the serving of union (of Reformed and Lutheran) congregations by Lutheran pastors; the toleration of temporary calls for pastors; lack of earnestness in the establishing of parochial schools; lack of proper care in seeing to it that only orthodox books were used in the church, school, and home; and the absence of doctrinal and church discipline. It may be that the fathers of the Synodical Conference demanded more than warranted by the Confessions or the Scriptures, but they were determined to be and remain loyal, something which they believed could only be achieved if churchly practice flowed from and was regulated by the church’s confession.

Although the Synodical Conference was dissolved nearly 100 years after its organization, the principles for fellowship it developed continue to be held and practiced by confessional Lutheran groups today. Article II of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states the Synod’s acceptance “without reservation” of the “Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice” and “[a]ll the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.”¹⁹ The first of Article III’s listed objectives requires that the Synod “shall...[c]onserve and promote the unity of the true faith..., work through its official structure toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism..., and heresy.”²⁰ Article VI provides as a condition “for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod” not only the acceptance of the Synod’s scriptural and

¹⁹ LCMS *Handbook*, Constitution Art. II, p. 11.

²⁰ *Handbook*, Constitution Art. III 1, p. 11.

confessional basis, but also “2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as: a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church; b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession; c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.”²¹ The President of the Synod, according to Article XI, “has the supervision regarding the doctrine and administration” of the Synod’s officers, employees, districts, and district presidents.²² District presidents are charged with the responsibility “especially [to] exercise supervision over the doctrine, life, and administration of office” of church workers, to visit congregations, and to discipline church workers “for persistently adhering to false doctrine.”²³ The Bylaws of the Synod pick up where the Constitution leaves off, perhaps most notably with their charge to the president of the Synod as the chief ecclesiastical officer to “supervise the doctrine taught and practiced in the Synod, including all synodwide corporate entities.”²⁴

Perhaps, given this entire discussion over the past four centuries, it is no wonder that any mention of “fellowship” in our circles immediately takes us to thoughts of “pulpit and altar fellowship.” That this continues to be an important subject we will see again as this essay continues. But your convention theme reminds us that there is another more immediate and personal application that must also come to mind in any discussion of fellowship. Even as St. Paul was writing and applying this concept to a particular group of Christian people, our goal is to apply this scriptural fact to ourselves personally and to life in our own faith community, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod—most especially the Synod in this place, our Synod’s South Dakota District.

The very fellowship described for us in the Scriptures is ours in each of our lives. Adam and Eve were our own first parents. Their fall out of fellowship with God resulted in our own separation from Him. His promises of a Savior are His promises to each of us. His delivery on those promises *while we were yet sinners* (Rom. 5:8) is His Good News for us no more or less than any other human beings. Through the Word of this Gospel the Holy Spirit has touched each of our hearts and has brought us to faith, restoring us to fellowship with God. And with fellowship with God comes fellowship with each other. All of the differences God has created among us and all of the barriers that we may set up can and should be surmounted by the oneness that is ours in Christ Jesus.

²¹ *Handbook*, Constitution Art. VI, 1 and 2, p. 13.

²² *Handbook*, Constitution Art. XI B 1, p. 15.

²³ *Handbook*, Constitution Art. XII 7 and 8, p. 17.

²⁴ *Handbook*, Bylaw 3.3.1.1, p. 101.

Now He comes to us again, this time via St. Paul's words in our convention theme, reminding us again that we enjoy a partnership unlike any other on this earth. It is through His direction in our lives that we find ourselves on the same street as it were, and it is He who has introduced us to each other as we are all headed in the same direction toward the same destination. He comes to each of us to say (you fill in the blanks), _____, here is your brother _____. _____, here is your brother _____. _____, here is your brother _____. _____, here is your sister _____. He links our arms together and encourages us to celebrate and demonstrate our partnership in the Gospel, offering us direction all along the way so that we may make the most of this partnership we enjoy, for our own sakes and for the sake of His Gospel.

Actually, what we have covered in this rather lengthy portion of this four-part essay is the first essential element of successfully walking together. When Tamara and I took to the streets of St. Petersburg, the first step always was critical. We needed to decide whether it would be the left foot or the right foot. It was hard to get into step when we didn't get the first step right.

With our searching of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions we have "gotten off on the right foot," as we like to say, by recalling the great unifying factor that makes us partners, whether slave or free, Jew or Greek, male or female, pastor or teacher, delegate or officer, from Ipswich or Tripp, from West River or East River, from large congregation or small. One of the songs young people liked to sing when I was a parish pastor here was one that was not extremely deep theologically and was probably most suited for a campfire, but it also spoke truth when we sang:

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

It wouldn't do much for the meter of the song, but it would accurately reflect the subject of our essay time together if we were to substitute "partnership in the Gospel" or even "κοινωνία" for "love." After all, we are one in the Spirit and one in the Lord, a unity that is ours only by God's grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, a unity that we must constantly work to preserve and must sometimes restore, a partnership, a fellowship, a κοινωνία that will demonstrate itself and identify us as Christians.

Some of the more important aspects of this partnership will be the subjects of the remaining portions of this essay. Now that we have established the source and nature of our partnership, we will want to consider how best to guard it, extend it, and apply it to our daily walk together.

PART II: WHAT WE MUST DO WITH THIS FELLOWSHIP

A Christian's fellowship with God in Christ and his or her fellowship with other Christians are exceedingly great and precious possessions that must be safeguarded and protected in every way. I hope to illustrate this important statement with a memory from the streets of St. Petersburg in 1995.

The fall and winter of that year, when Tamara and I lived in St. Petersburg while I taught daily at the seminary in Koltyshe, were extremely hard times for the Russian people. With the disintegration of the Soviet system, there were shortages of nearly everything and inflation ran rampant. Elderly Russian people who had saved some of their meager earnings over the years now saw the value of their savings evaporate to little or nothing. Churches could be easily identified by crowded sidewalks lined with people trying to sell their belongings for a pittance. Banks were easily identified by long lines of people, kept in order by armed guards with automatic weapons, waiting to see if there would be any money at that bank on that particular day. Bands of young men and Gypsies roamed the back streets seeking whom they might relieve of their possessions. People were desperate to survive.

The Russian people also supposed that foreigners—westerners, especially any Americans they saw—were rich. They had watched enough American reruns of *Dallas* and other such shows on government television to know that to be the case. All of which made life on the streets an adventure, especially in the center of the city where bands of Gypsies were known to roam. Tamara and I lived in an apartment just off of Nevskii Prospect, the main street of downtown St. Petersburg. Every time we went out to find food or other necessities of life was an adventure, and every return home, as we made our way up the dark uneven steps to our apartment, unlocked the three locks on our door, closed the door safely behind us, and dropped the iron bar over the door was concluded with my saying: "Safe at home, one more time."

One day early in our stay, a day that I had off because the seminary was not in session, Tamara and I decided to use the day to see some of the sights of St. Petersburg, of which there were many. With camera around neck, map in pocket, and enough cash to handle expenses and any emergencies, we headed out to marvel at the city's canals, Russian Orthodox churches, museums, and government buildings. Passing by the Hermitage and the naval training academy, we had just

crossed a bridge in the direction of the St. Peter and St. Paul fortress, used by the Soviets for a gulag for government high officials, when we noticed, too late, that we had been surrounded by a band of Gypsy young men determined to take our valuables, this despite the presence of policemen a short distance away.

One of them grabbed Tamara by the hair and pulled her off to the side. Another five or so were intent on taking whatever valuables I was carrying. She began screaming for help. I resisted when they assaulted me. In the scuffle that followed, my glasses were knocked off and fell to the pavement. Fearing that they would be trampled on, I resisted efforts to hold me and pulled the whole pile of them to the ground. I thought Tamara was being harmed and struggled to free myself, while she thought all these men were on top of me and doing me great harm. They clearly did not anticipate such resistance, hurriedly went through a pocket or two, and ran off. We picked ourselves up, nursed our bruises, noted that they did not get our camera, important papers, or money other than a few rubles, and walked on.

Offering a sarcastic *σπασίβα*, “thank you,” to the police officers as we walked by, since they did nothing to help us, we gave thanks to God for only minor injuries—and realized that we had learned an important lesson. We learned that we were indeed rich compared to the people among whom we were living and that there could always be situations when attempts would be made to part us from our treasures. We learned that we would need to be more careful, avoiding situations that would leave us vulnerable, learning to recognize such situations and to move quickly to places of safety. On one such occasion, when we found ourselves on a quiet street and again surrounded, we created quite the commotion by breaking their circle, making it back to Nevskii Prospect, crashing through tables of street vendors, and safely reaching a book store.

We also learned a lesson about walking. Americans already look different than Russians because of the way we dress, the glasses we wear, the way we wear our hair. But we also walk differently. Russians, at least at that time, walked arm in arm, stride for stride, in determined fashion, heads down, in a brisk, no-nonsense manner. Americans stroll, greet people on the street, meander from window to window, stop to gaze at sights—all evident from a block away. Tamara and I learned, in order to protect the valuables we possessed as well as our personal welfare, that we would need to change our walking ways to look more like that of the Russians—arm in arm, step to step.

I offer this little vignette from Tamara's and my life nearly 15 years ago because it seems to me to offer insight into our life together as we make our way along the path we are privileged to share as brothers and sisters in Christ—in fellowship with God because of His amazing grace, and in partnership with one another because we share in that grace through faith. As we make our way down this path, it is important for us to recognize that these possessions, as mentioned at the start of this second presentation, are indeed exceedingly great and precious possessions. They are also possessions that are constantly in danger of being taken from us. Again, I rely heavily on the CTCR Report: *Theology of Fellowship*,²⁵ received for study, reference, and guidance by the 1965 and 1967 conventions of our Synod.

Scriptural Fact: A Christian's fellowship with God in Christ as well as his partnership with other Christians are exceedingly great and precious possessions not unnoticed by the world in which we live.

- John writes in his first general epistle: *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death* (1 John 3:13–14).
- Or at least it should not be unnoticed, given its amazing consequences in our lives, as St. Paul describes to the church at Ephesus: *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* (Eph. 4:1–6). But because we have such an exceedingly great and precious possession, even the world around us is not our greatest concern.
- Even as Satan was determined to destroy the fellowship that existed in the garden of Eden, so he constantly strives to disrupt our fellowship newly created by God's grace by every means at his disposal. Here C.F.W. Walther waxed eloquent under Thesis V of his

²⁵ *Theology of Fellowship*. A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, unique among CTCR documents in that it was adopted specifically “for reference and guidance” by the Synod's 1967 convention in New York.

essay to the First Iowa District Convention in 1879, “Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod”²⁶:

My dear brothers, let us be on our guard! Satan is sly. Right now we are brothers, living together in peace and love. But Satan will most certainly lay for us snares by which he hopes to destroy the sweet, brotherly love we now have in our hearts. We dare never think that it is enough if we just remain united in our faith and doctrine. No, once love has been destroyed, it won’t be long before one person believes what the other person rejects, and the other teaches what the first considers an error. As the Apology testifies, quarrels and divisions because of personal sins can easily produce heresy.

For example, one person takes a stand [on a given issue] and another person takes the opposite stand. Perhaps the one person dislikes the other; he simply can’t stand him, and for that reason he inflexibly maintains his position. It is frightening (*schrecklich*) what harm can result when members of a church organization do not vigilantly guard their fraternal love. *Be on your guard, be on your guard, for also here Satan will try to destroy this sweet, loving relationship.* Once he has divided your hearts, he will think, “Now I will also divide them with regard to faith and doctrine.”²⁷

Walther goes on to quote from Luther in his commentary of the words “Abide in My love” from John 15:9:

...Therefore we Christians must constantly be on our guard against the devil’s skill and trickery. We must so conduct ourselves that we do not allow such poison to grow up in our hearts. Even though we are tempted to become bitter and hateful, we must suppress such feelings and remind ourselves not to let our mutual love die, but firmly cling to it. And even if resentment or disunity does arise, we must re-establish and strengthen our mutual love. For, to begin to love is not very difficult, but as Christ says in this passage [John 15:9], abiding in love is truly an art and a virtue. Even though when they are first married, many couples are so madly in love that they virtually eat each other up, later on they become mortal enemies. Now, the same thing also happens among Christian brethren. Some trivial incident destroys their mutual love, and those who should cling to one another in love with all their might allow themselves to be torn apart and become the most bitter enemies. This is what happened in Christendom after the time of the apostles, when the devil raised up troublemakers (*Rottengeister*) and heretics, so that bishops and pastors burned with hatred against one another and consequently the people, too, were divided into all kinds of sects and parties. As a result of that, Christianity suffered mortal harm, for where there is no love, there doctrine cannot remain pure.²⁸

²⁶ *Essays for the Church: C.F.W. Walther*, Vol II. (Concordia Publishing House, 1992).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.

More on this later. Suffice for now this Scriptural Fact: Satan constantly strives to disrupt our fellowship with God in Christ as well as our partnership in the Gospel with one another. The church must safeguard this fellowship in every way.

- This we can (and must) do, first of all, by remaining steadfastly under the power of the Gospel in Word and sacrament, as did the early Christians in the days following Pentecost. St. Luke records in Acts 2:42: *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* The New Testament scriptures are replete with encouragements to devote ourselves to the use of the means of grace in order to remain under the power of the Gospel:
- And we do require constant reminders of our baptisms—Romans 6:3–5: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.*
- We also need reminding of the extraordinary nature of this new life, which breaks down any and all barriers between us—Galatians 3:26–28: *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
- This was a regular theme for St. Paul in his letters, since he was addressing Christians at a time when potential barriers were commonplace—1 Corinthians 12:12–13: *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of the one Spirit.*
- The Lord's Supper in particular was a regular, personal, and mutual Gospel nourishment for the early Christians—1 Corinthians 10:16–17: *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation [i.e., "fellowship"] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation [i.e., "fellowship"] in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*
- And this partaking of the one bread was an act of proclamation to one another of that which has broken down all barriers to partnership in the Gospel—1 Corinthians 11:26: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

Such remaining steadfastly under the power of the Gospel in Word and sacrament is extremely important, making today's steady drop in church attendance a matter of serious concern. It is a Scriptural Fact that Christian fellowship, first with God and then with men, can only be nourished and sustained by the Gospel that created it. Here again Scripture speaks loudly and repeatedly:

- It is all about continuing in the Word—John 8:31–32: *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, “If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and truth will set you free.”*
- This is true for all nations, as Jesus also said—Matthew 28:19–20: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
- St. Paul said something similar about the nourishing and sustaining power of the Word to the elders at Ephesus—Acts 20:20: *“...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house...”*
- St. Paul encourages the elders at Ephesus to do the same, for the sake of the fellowship—Acts 20:27–28: *“...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock to which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God.*
- In that whole counsel of God is true nourishment, as Jesus reminds a woman who marveled at His teaching—Luke 11:27–28: *As He said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed!” But He said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.”*
- When Jesus says “keep it” He intends to say, “abide in it,” like branches receiving all of their nourishment from their vine—John 15:7–9: *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Abide in My love.”*
- St. John in his first general epistle to the church uses the same kind of “abide” language in his encouragement to the early church, reminding that the stakes are high—1 John 2:24–25: *Let what you heard in the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He made to us—eternal life.*

- Regular contact with the Word is St. Paul’s prescription for fellowship life for the Colossian Christians—Colossians 3:14–16. Having reminded them that they are God’s chosen ones, he encourages an appropriate Christian life, bearing with one another and forgiving each other. Then he continues: *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Teaching and admonishing was also the subject of These IV of Walther’s essay to the first Iowa District Convention, as he recalled the duties of an evangelical Lutheran synod:

A fourth major duty is that [the synod] promote the growth of its members in the knowledge of the truth in every way possible, and therefore

- a. give priority to doctrinal discussions in arranging its conventions/conferences;
- b. arrange for both pastoral and teacher conferences, review their minutes, and evaluate them;
- c. make every effort to disseminate good literature.²⁹

Walther has much to say on the subject, including these words:

A synod worthy of the name must above all else be formed so that the gifts which are distributed to the various servants of Christ may be best utilized for the benefit of all. And here again the number one priority must be the promotion of a better understanding of God’s Word. And even if a synod proceeds in a free and easy manner, with no particular organized procedure, it is still a glorious synod so long as there is an intensive study of God’s Word. Then the Lord is in the midst of His synodical members. For there we are gathered in His name, and there His Word is taught in childlike faith.

That is exactly what happened in the very first “synod” of all times, the council of Jerusalem. There, above all else, the Word of God was taught. In Acts 15 we read how the holy apostles met. They proved everything from the Old Testament. They could have said, “We are the mighty apostles of the Lord, therefore you must believe what we say,” and they could have been right. But that is not what they did. As an example for all times, even the apostles quoted the holy prophets, and from them they provided the answer to the questions under discussion....³⁰

In the same portion of his essay, Walther recalls the words of a so-called “renowned man” from the synods of the General Council who was present for the Missouri Synod’s convention in New York two years earlier. Walther quotes what this man wrote in the publication *Lutheran Missionary*:

²⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

Now I understand why the Missourians are so unified. The reason is that they always spend a great deal of time in the thorough study of doctrine. They don't merely discuss it thoroughly, but they always try to get down to the basic principles and prove everything on the basis of Scripture. That is the secret of the Missourians. With that kind of approach they cannot help being unified."³¹

Walther then continues on with lengthy encouragements for regular study of the Scriptures at conventions and pastors' conferences, and for the dissemination of good literature. He understood, as we must also understand that fellowship with God in Christ as well as partnership with other Christians is an exceedingly great and precious possession that must be safeguarded in every way, beginning with placing ourselves regularly and faithfully under the power of the Gospel in Word and sacrament. But we must do more.

When thieves sought to relieve Tamara and me of the wealth we were carrying, we took it to them, Tamara with her extremely unsettling calls for help, I by taking them to the ground. It was the natural thing to do, and it saved our possessions.

Scriptural Fact: There are those who would separate us from our gracious God and each other and thereby take from us the treasures of God's grace that we carry by faith. We must therefore resolutely confront, expose, and fight off all from the outside who would destroy this fellowship we enjoy. But first we must learn how and be careful to identify them.

- Often these enemies of the Gospel hide their true identity, as Jesus warns in Matthew 7:15–16: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles?”*
- Put another way, Matthew 16:11–12: *“How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* St. Paul speaks a similar language, Galatians 5:9: *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*
- If we are not on our guard, we can lose what we are carrying almost without knowing it, says St. Paul to the Galatians, 1:6–9: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting*

³¹ Ibid., p. 46.

Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ. 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.

- Sometimes these are confrontations that we cannot win, in which case we must separate ourselves from evil, as was the case even for St. Paul at times during his ministry, as in Acts 19:8–10: *And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*
- The apostle John says much the same thing in verses 8–11 of his second epistle, advocating that this is no time to be overly concerned about being “pc,” that is, “politically correct”: *Watch yourself, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*
- And we may argue and even disagree somewhat regarding the application of St. Paul’s words in his letter to the Christians at Rome, but there is no mistaking the seriousness with which he offers his closing exhortation in Romans 16:16–20: *Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve. For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*
- With his co-worker Timothy, St. Paul bemoans the fact that there have been casualties, writing in his first letter to Timothy, 1:18–20, as follows: *This charge I entrust to you,*

Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

- This can get personal. There will be times when we will need to do the utmost to help a brother or sister teetering on the precipice of eternal separation from God and His grace. At such times, Jesus wants us to mind each others' business, Matthew 18:15–18: *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*
- St. Paul speaks of such church discipline in no uncertain terms in his letter to the Christians at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 5:3–6, where he speaks of a man in their congregation who is guilty of sexual immorality. The apostle is not happy: *For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*

Whether they speak of doctrinal error or living in sin, how “over the top” these passages can sound to us in our day! We suffer from what Christian philosopher Elton Trueblood once called (though I have never been able to find the exact reference again) the “disease of contemporaneity,” which he called an “absolutely intolerable conceit.” This is an attitudinal disease that afflicts every generation in this world’s history, each believing that it is most important, the apex of all history. Henry Ford, suffering from this disease of contemporaneity, is said to have argued against the continuation of the United States Patent Office, believing that there was little if anything more to be invented. No time in history has been more susceptible to this disease than the present. We really think that the contemporary “we” are really something, that we have arrived at the pinnacle of human history, that there is nothing that we cannot or should not do, that we can solve every problem (if not today, then certainly tomorrow), that the past is horribly

outdated, that Christianity out of that past is for the weak, and that concern about correct Christian doctrine and life is naïve and out of touch with today's anything-goes progressive reality.

As a result and to a very great extent, Christianity today is no longer interested in advocating for the truth and for the way of life that the New Testament writers speak so strongly about. And there is no question who is behind it all, whether it be an intrusion of false notions from outside the church or the perversion of the truth from within. The serpent from the garden, foiled in his attempt to ruin everything once and for all, is determined to ruin everything for as many as he can, setting his sights particularly on those who already are in fellowship with God and enjoy the riches of His grace. Here again, Scriptural Facts that mince no words:

- Jesus surely didn't when he addressed the Jews in John 8:44: *You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*
- St. Paul recalls his exhortations in his earlier letter to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 2:8–11 and explains why he said what he did: *So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*
- The apostle does not underestimate the persuasive power of Satan and his human minions, and fears for the safety of his Christian friends, 2 Corinthians 11:2–4: *I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.*
- Although we fear the devil's power over our physical lives and safety, as though that is most to be feared, there are greater fears in these latter times, as St. Paul writes to Timothy of the danger of false teaching and accompanying way of life, 1 Timothy 4:1–2: *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by*

devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.

- Jesus Himself spoke of our latter days and of the great danger of deception, Matthew 24:24: *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*

In short, errors in teaching and preaching, corruption of morals, and schismatic and separatistic intrusions impede Christian fellowship, too often regarded as “business as usual” in our world and perhaps even secondary to other concerns and interests. We may be tempted to think that we can overlook a falsehood or frailty here and there, so long as we get most of it right. We are tempted to think that minimum knowledge, so long as it contains the core of our faith, should suffice to see us through to the glorious end. Not so, according to Holy Scripture.

Scriptural Fact: We must at times also safeguard the fellowship we enjoy with God and our fellow Christians by confronting all efforts to destroy this fellowship with false notions and teachings. Corrective measures of the Law and the healing powers of the Gospel are essential whenever the church is being invaded by errors in teaching and preaching.

- Speaking of such errors, St. Paul directs Titus to appoint elders in every town. One of the primary duties of such an overseer—Titus 1:9: *He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*
- He also has strong advice for Titus regarding how these elders should minister to and encourage God’s people when approached by false teachers—Titus 1:13–14: *Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.*
- In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul reminds him of his instructions when they were separated at Ephesus—1 Timothy 1:3–4: *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the good order from God that is by faith.*
- Preserving unity of conviction within the fellowship is of greatest importance, says St. Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:10–11: *I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For*

it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

- The Corinthians hadn't quite achieved the outward unity that should accompany Christian fellowship, as St. Paul bemoans and warns against later in 3:3–4: *For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?*
- St. Paul encourages the Christians at Ephesus to not be "merely human," but to live out the oneness that is theirs in Christ, Ephesians 4:1–6: *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.*
- Always one to connect doctrine with practice, faith with everyday life, St. Paul admonishes the Christians at Colossae to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with and being ready to forgive each other in true Christian fellowship. To this he adds Colossians 3:14–16: *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. But this is love properly grounded, as he continues: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*
- Finally, St. Paul counsels the Thessalonian Christians how to respond to those who do not listen, doing so firmly but graciously—2 Thessalonians 3:14–15: *If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

Scriptural Fact: Moral misbehavior and schismatic and separatistic tendencies also are tools of the evil one to impede Christian fellowship.

- As the famous St. Louis frozen custard entrepreneur Ted Drews likes to say, "It really is good, boys and girls," good, that is, to resolve issues among ourselves that would otherwise drive a wedge between us for a long time to come, even personal issues as

- spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 18:15: *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”*
- This exchange of repentance and forgiveness is crucial for brothers and sisters in Christ. I remember preaching a sermon once where I tried to demonstrate what it would be like realistically to forgive even seven times. Yet it is so important that we forgive one another as often as necessary, as Christ Himself encouraged in Luke 17:3–4: *“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”*
 - This may require the stronger among us to serve the weaker, as St. Paul encourages in Galatians 6:1–2: *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
 - And do so on the basis of the Word of God, 2 Timothy 4:1–3: *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.*
 - Nothing does greater harm to the fellowship than divisions within the fellowship, a regular concern for St. Paul, as in 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 11: *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.*
 - St. Paul nails the reason for concern in 1 Corinthians 3:3: *For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? Once again, none of that “merely human” behavior.*
 - People who are constantly stirring up discord and division are to be put in their place, says St. Paul to Titus, 3:10: *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.*
 - After all, correcting error is a matter of tantamount importance, says James in 5:19–20: *My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

Clearly, so much of Christian life is about preserving our fellowship in Christ, for it is an exceedingly great and precious possession, lest it be taken from us through evil design. Needless to say, our church fathers had much to say on this subject as well, especially regarding the importance of maintaining peace and unity in the truth. This requires each member of the fellowship to bear the other's burden in brotherly love, says C.F.W. Walther in his essay referenced earlier:

There is no escaping the fact that, if you want to be a Christian, you must bear the burden which your brother imposes on you whenever you have contact with him. There will be many things about him that you do not like. Sometimes he will do something that hurts and offends you. You must always remember, however, that you do the same to him. He, too, must bear your burden. And therefore it is a true characteristic of any group of Christians that each one bears the other's burden....

You see, the devil's great craftiness is that if he cannot plunge a church group into false doctrine, nor destroy their unity in confession, he then tries [to destroy it] through their lives. He creates divisions among the members. One person offends another, perhaps without wishing to do so. The second person then becomes angry and imputes malice to him. And if the offense was great enough, perhaps even intentional, then true brotherly fellowship has been destroyed, and the result is that there is no longer any real joy of standing in confessional fellowship with the offender. And that is precisely what the devil wants!

Especially when those at the top do something that makes another person feel hurt or angry, then it is easy for Satan to suggest the thought to a member of Synod: "Who knows whether he is even doctrinally sound? If you could uncover a bit of false doctrine, then you would be thoroughly avenged!" That is why our Confessions state beautifully that in the church we should by all means have patience with one another.³²

Walther goes on to quote from the Apology to the Augsburg Confession on this same subject, turning to its treatment of two key passages that he believed essential to demonstrate that a church cannot exist if its members have no patience with one another:

He [Paul] says (Col. 3:14), "Love is the bond of perfection," *i.e.*, it binds, reconciles, and holds together the many limbs of the church under itself. For just as in a city or in a house, unity is achieved by each holding the other in a good light. And peace and rest cannot remain where one does not overlook many things the other does, where we do not bear [with] one another.

So Paul would admonish us to [practice] Christian love so that we should bear and endure the faults and shortcomings of others and forgive one another. In this way unity is preserved in the church, so that the company of Christians is not torn apart, disrupted, and

³² Ibid., p.55.

is not split into all sorts of divisions and sects. For even greater filth, hatred and jealousy, all sorts of bitterness and evil, poison, and finally public heresies may follow from this....

Divisions (*Rotten*) will also easily develop if the people immediately want to master and nitpick everything in the life and conduct of the bishops or pastors. And when they get tired of the pastors, [they will do this] perhaps because of some minor fault. From this follows much great evil (*Unrath*). Then the same bitterness will soon cause one to look for different teachers and different pastors.

On the other hand, perfection and unity is preserved, *i.e.*, the church remains united and whole, when the strong bear and endure the weak, when the people also have patience with their pastors, when the bishops and preachers in return can (when the opportunity arises) see in a good light (*zu gute halten*) all sorts of weaknesses and shortcomings on the part of the people.

And here is the key point: “Many heresies have arisen simply because pastors became embittered with one another.” There is nothing like a heresy to destroy the unity of the church. The Apology then moves on to its second key passage, 1 Peter 4:8:

So now, Peter’s statement is to be understood thus: “Love covers a multitude of sins,” *i.e.*, love covers the sin of our neighbor. That is, even when resentment occurs among Christians, love still bears all, willingly overlooks things, yields to the neighbor, endures and bears his faults as a brother, and does not look sharply at all [faults].

So Peter does not at all mean that love merits the forgiveness of sins before God, that love reconciles us to God with Christ the Mediator, or that we can be pleasing to God on account of love without Christ the Mediator. Rather, Peter means that a person in whom Christian love dwells is not obstinate, not harsh or unfriendly. On the contrary, he sees the neighbor’s mistakes and faults in a good light, forgives him as a brother, appeases him, and shows himself to be willing to yield for the sake of peace, as the proverb says: “Know, but do not hate, the ways of a friend”....

If the people, then, are to be or remain united with one another—whether in the church or in secular government—they must not carefully count up (*auf der Goldwage abrechnen*) every fault against one another. They must allow many things to flow by [without noticing them], always seeing them in a good light and having patience with one another in brotherly love.³³

For this reason, Walther’s third and final point under his Thesis V regarding duty of a synod to strive for peace and unity in the truth was “that no unnecessary disputes arise and are continued, whether they have to do with doctrine or practice.”³⁴ Walther writes some fairly startling words: “As important as it is to be concerned with purity of doctrine, we dare not become irrational about it.”³⁵ But he goes on to explain:

³³ *Concordia Triglotta*, pp. 185 – 189.

³⁴ *Essays*, p. 52.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58

As important as it is to be concerned with purity of doctrine, we dare not become irrational about it. If a member of a communion says something that is not correct, we must avoid attacking him immediately as a heretic. It is not right if members of a congregation, so to speak, go on a hunt for false doctrine which a pastor is presumed to be teaching; if their reason for attending church is to find something that's wrong; if they find their greatest delight in constantly fomenting arguments about doctrine in the congregation; if the poor pastor is treated like a slaughter-lamb, just so they have something to do; and if they even go so far as to come into the grocery store with the *Book of Concord* under their arm and argue with each other there. No, that is "zeal without knowledge" [Rom. 10:2]. Whenever a dispute threatens to arise, we must use great care in dealing with the situation.³⁶

Needless to say, Walther has much more to say on this subject. Suffice to quote him one time more, a quote that the South Dakota District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and any other association of congregations will do well to take to heart. Says Walther:

Everyone should therefore remember: That this district (*Synode*) now enjoys true doctrinal unity is a gift so precious that "the Turkish Empire" is as nothing by comparison. Therefore we should not trifle with [this gift] and should avoid doing anything that might disturb this unity. Only when God's glory or the salvation of souls are clearly at stake, then we must engage in battle, even if it means the destruction of a synod that previously enjoyed God's blessing. What does God care about a synod, when the saving truth hangs in the balance.

When it comes to insignificant matters that have nothing to do with the salvation of immortal souls, we should never get involved in a serious dispute. But if someone who is always itching for a fight starts one, we must firmly put such a fellow in his place. Appropriate is 2 Timothy 2:14: "...warn them before God against quarreling about words." A person may express an idea in a way that is completely wrong, even though he intended to say the right thing.³⁷

Enough said. But as with Walther, as with the Lutheran Confessions, and as with a plethora of passages from Holy Scriptures, we cannot make too much of this brotherly love and this bearing of one another's burdens when considering our partnership in the Gospel. Whether we see the Synod as top down or bottom up, whether we see issues among us as extremely important for our Synod or not, one thing remains of utmost importance, that we do indeed bear one another's burdens, almost at any cost, for our fellowship with our God and our partnership as His people is a precious thing. We should nurture it by regular reception of Word and Sacrament as regularly as possible. We should take on and ward off the false notions introduced by the devil on every

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Essays*, p. 59

occasion. But we must also nurture and protect our partnership with one another. Nothing brings us closer to losing it and all of its blessings than does strife among us.

PART III: OH, THE PLACES WE CAN GO WITH THIS Κοινωνία...

As Tamara and I learned to walk together Russian-style in St. Petersburg, we couldn't help but notice its advantages. The streets were nearly always slippery from the wintry mist that often blanketed the city. Countless were the times that we provided the needed arm to each other to keep from slipping and falling. We have already discussed how our κοινωνία can serve that very purpose in our life together in Christ.

In addition, the streets were nearly always dark, with winter dawn breaking after ten o'clock in the morning and dusk falling by two o'clock in the afternoon, leaving dark corners and alleys lining the streets to and from our apartment. I often noticed the pressure of her grip on my arm well before I myself recognized potential danger coming up behind us or lurking in one of those dark places. So also the support and assistance and sometimes the warning that our fellowship, surely with God but also with our neighbor, provide us along our way are essential for our walk in this world, for, as the hymnist reminds us, we truly “walk in danger all the way.”³⁸

The dangers to our faith and that of our children, especially from the outside world, seem almost overwhelming at this present time. Recently I made copies of four e-mail news items that I received on a single day:

- The government released its preliminary data for 2007 births, finding that “all measures of childbearing by unmarried women increased in the United States to historic levels.” Overall, 39.7 percent of all births now occur out of wedlock in the United States. Included in that overall average are 27.8 non-Hispanic whites, 71.6 percent blacks, 65.2 percent American Indians and Alaska natives, 51.3 percent Hispanics; and 16.9 percent Asians/Pacific Islanders. The question is, what does this do to the church that promotes marriage?—and to the church of the next generation?
- Our U.S. Secretary of State announced that she is “really in awe” of Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, going on to state: “The 20th-century reproductive-rights movement, really embodied in the life and leadership of Margaret Sanger, was one of the most transformational in the entire history of the human race.” Sanger once said, “We want fewer and better children...and we cannot make the social life and the world-peace we are determined to make, with the ill-bred, ill-trained, swarms of inferior citizens that

³⁸ *Lutheran Service Book*, Hymn 716, st. 1.

you inflict on us.” According to its just-released annual report for 2007–2008, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America was responsible for conducting 305,310 abortions in the United States alone in 2007, up some 16,000 over the previous year, coinciding with an increase in government funding from \$337 million to \$350 million. Again the question is, what does this do to the church that advocates the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death?—and to the church of the next generation?

- After removing the restriction that would not allow the use of federal funds to finance abortions, the President of the United States has threatened to rescind the “conscience clause” regulations that protect a health-care professional’s right to abstain from participation in morally objectionable medical practices such as abortion. While this was a frontal attack on the Roman Catholic Church, this and other developments aim at the religious liberty of all Christians. Hailed by the media as a new age of progress and hope, what will this mean for the church in years to come?—for the church of the next generation?
- “Sexting” is the growing phenomenon of people using cell phones and computers to share sexually explicit photos and videos of themselves with others, especially popular among teens and young adults. Results of a 2008 survey by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com showed that 20 percent of teens and 33 percent of young adults have sent/posted nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of themselves; 39 percent of teens and 59 percent of young adults are sending or posting sexually suggestive messages; 44 percent of young adult women and 50 percent of young adult men say it is common for sexually suggestive text messages to get shared with people other than the intended recipient; and yet, 75 percent of teens and 71 percent of young adults say sending sexually suggestive content “can have serious negative consequences.” What will this mean for the church and its message of the chaste and decent life? What will this mean for our children?

The street on which we live and walk together is very slippery and fraught with danger, calling into question every day the basic tenets of our Christian faith. We can’t isolate ourselves or our children from these influences and temptations, but we can link arms and make our way together. Perhaps there has never been a time when the community of saints and the fellowship we enjoy were more important. Our thoughts go to the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:22: *“And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”*

But there were also other very positive benefits to walking together arm in arm, stride for stride. The city blocks of St. Petersburg were very long and distances to the next metro station often great. But we soon noticed that walking together Russian-style had a kind of momentum of its own that enabled us to cover long distances in short times and, often, seemingly without great effort.

A. ...The Distance We Can Cover When We Walk Together

So also is the fellowship that we enjoy as Christian people walking together, arm in arm, as it were, and stride for stride. We do have a goodly distance to cover if we are to carry out our Lord's instructions for us, the very purpose for which He has left us here on this earth. Surprisingly, He really doesn't tell us very often about this great purpose. The few such instructions in the Holy Scriptures we already know by heart:

- We call it "the Great Commission," but it literally isn't a direct command. It is more of a participle than an imperative, reminding us how we are to go about our daily lives. Scriptural Fact: We are to be "*making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us (Matthew 28:18–20)*. I hear this is more as description than deputation, as though this is something altogether natural for us to do as we take our walk through this world. As it will naturally be when we truly recognize the significance of the Gospel in our hearts and its importance for other people's lives.
- The second of such passages is like unto the first, not so much an order as a statement of fact. The fact of the matter is that this is a long block before us. We have a goodly amount of territory to cover before we arrive at our final and eternal destination. And all the while, because we know what we have and its significance for others, this Scriptural Fact: "*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

Our Lord shouldn't have to tell us this very often. This is a natural part of our being and of our walk through this world, part and parcel of our fellowship with God and with one another. The talk about being witnesses to the end of the earth is preceded by this promise, another Scriptural Fact: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts. 1:8)*. Our walk with

God incorporates a powerful motivation to share our blessings of fellowship as far around our world as we can reach before our short lives on earth are ended.

It always goes back to recognizing by faith what exactly we have as Christians. What we have is really something! As we sing in one of our liturgies, “we have the gift of eternal life!” That “really something” is the Scriptural Fact that Isaiah tried to put into the words of the Old Testament lesson for this year’s Sunday after Easter:

- *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that He might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Is. 25:6-9).* Isaiah was using imagery that was descriptive to the utmost: a menu that included the best of foods—“well-aged wine” and “food full of marrow”; a veil of sin and death that is “swallowed up”—all to describe what God has done and what we have to rejoice about.
- Nothing stopped Peter from sharing this good news: *For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard* (Acts 4:20). Fellowship with God carries with it its own forward progress and momentum.

Stewardship counselor John Hermann got it so right years ago, when he talked about effective motivation for Christians to do the right thing. He used the examples of the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb to describe how people often try to motivate other people, perhaps especially when it comes to sharing the Gospel of Christ with others.

- How tempting, he would say, it is to use the “flint method.” You get something from a flint by striking that flint hard. And so there is a temptation to motivate people regarding the Gospel by hitting them hard. I recall using this method years ago when we were strongly encouraged to use an evangelism method to confront people with two striking questions, questions that went something like this: “If you were to die tonight, do you know that you would go to heaven?” and “Suppose you were to die tonight and you were asked why you should be let into His heaven, what would you say?” This was the flint method. Hit them hard. Get their attention. And we are tempted to use this method not

only to motivate people regarding the Gospel but also to motivate Christians to share the Gospel. I heard it used recently when a speaker confronted an audience to motivate them regarding the mission of the church. He reminded them that everyone is going to spend eternity somewhere—the only question is where: “Smoking or non-smoking?” The flint method does work. It does get people’s attention. But is it the best way to motivate? What do you get when you strike a flint hard? Yet get sparks and a little smoke, perhaps even a little blaze if you are able to fan it into flame. But I think we will all agree that there is an even better way.

- The “sponge method” is also very tempting and can be effective when used to promote the mission of the church. How do you get something out of a sponge? You wring it out, squeezing and applying pressure to such an extent that it produces a response from what it has to give. I remember hearing this method used already years ago when our family would attend the annual mission festivals of congregations in our area of North Wisconsin. To my way of thinking as a child, we had to pay for the noon dinner with an afternoon service, where the speaker reminded us of the great need for the Gospel all over the world. And how he would go on and on, reminding us that if we didn’t do something, an awful lot of people would be going to hell. If the preacher was really good, you could almost smell the smoke, which would, in turn, be reflected in the offering plate that was passed around immediately after. I still hear the sponge method used today, as we press people hard to reach out to the four-out-of-five people who haven’t yet had the opportunity to hear the Gospel in a meaningful manner. And the sponge method works. It does produce a response. We have all been pressed to participate in something we would not otherwise have participated in for the sake of the Gospel. But being wrung out isn’t a pleasant experience. Again, there is a better way.
- That better way is the way John Hermann described as the “honeycomb” method. How do you motivate a honeycomb to produce a response? You merely warm it slowly, and soon it will ooze what it has to offer in abundance. I have been motivated like that, and so have you. It is part and parcel of our *κοινωνία*, our fellowship with God, spoken of at length in the first hour of this convention essay. I particularly recognized this motivation clearly in action when I prepared sermons, perhaps especially funeral sermons, during my ministry here in South Dakota and had the opportunity to speak again of God’s amazing grace in Christ Jesus. I recognize the Gospel’s warmth also today when I approach the communion rail on Sunday mornings and truly listen to the words, “Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.” I personally particularly notice the oozing going on when

singing our good Lutheran hymns, when a particular phrase and its significance for my family catches me up short and make it difficult to finish the line or the stanza. Whose heart does not melt when we sing together God's message to us His redeemed?—such as sung by Tamara and me at daughter Amy's wedding in Kazakhstan:

Go, My children, with My blessing, never alone.
Waking, sleeping, I am with you, you are My own.
In my love's baptismal river, I have made you Mine forever.
Go, My children, with My blessing. You are my own."³⁹

It that doesn't melt one's heart, what will? Fellowship with God and with one another carries its own heat source and works in a most pleasant manner to accomplish amazing things among us.

Scriptural Fact: Fellowship with God certainly worked that way for St. Paul following his Damascus Road experience. We recognize the oozing behind so many of his words in his letters to his partners in the Gospel:

- He writes to his fellow Christians at Corinth of the effect of the Gospel in his life as an evangelist: *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings* (1 Cor. 9:19–23).
- Later St. Paul again writes to the Corinthians of that which moves him to do all of this, and what it is that will move them also: *Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God* (2 Cor. 4:13–15).

³⁹ *Lutheran Service Book*, 922, st. 1.

- He reminds us that it is the Gospel that brings about change and motivates us: *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:14–21).*
- At the beginning of his first general epistle, St. John also writes at length of the creative power of the Gospel as the source of fellowship with God and each other, so as to suggest that everything that follows flows from this fellowship: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:1–7).*

This fellowship that we enjoy with God and each other carries its own warmth and motivation, not only bringing us together but also moving us forward to accomplish great things. We may be surprised to discover the distance that we will be able to cover.

B. ...The Things We Can Accomplish When We Walk Together

The word *κοινωνία* occurs 20 times in the New Testament. Derivatives of the word occur many times more. As already noted, *κοινωνία* and related words often refer to the “fellowship” Christians enjoy with one another in the Gospel. Even more often they refer to the “fellowship” that is ours with God in Christ Jesus, most particularly in the Sacrament of the Altar. But a closer look at the 20 occurrences of the word reveals another Scriptural Fact, that there are two additional but related applications by St. Paul that are also interesting and helpful, evidenced in our English translations:

- In his letter to Philemon, St. Paul writes: *And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ* (Philemon 6). Here *κοινωνία* is translated “sharing,” that is, Philemon’s sharing of the love and faith that he has *toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints* (v. 5). The same idea of “sharing” what one has with others also occurs in Hebrews 13:16: *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*
- In Romans 15:26 St. Paul writes, *For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.* Here *κοινωνία* is translated “contribution,” referring to the offering that St. Paul was gathering for the church in Jerusalem.

These two uses of this word by St. Paul serve to underscore the motivation behind the two primary sharing activities of the church: sharing on a personal level the love and faith that is ours in Christ and sharing our earthly blessings with one another in Christ.

(1) Sharing Our Love and Faith Within the Fellowship

First of all, the sharing of love and faith, such as Philemon was known for. Paul here is doing a little “buttering up” of Philemon because he has a special request to make. He intends to appeal to Philemon to be gracious to Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave, whom Paul is sending back to his master. He wishes Philemon to treat Onesimus in the same manner as he treats others in his life, sharing the love and faith that is his in Christ. He appeals to Philemon as a “partner” in the Gospel, and reminds him that Onesimus is a partner also. As Paul does so, he helps to color our understanding of *κοινωνία* and causes us to inspect our own lives in Christ Jesus and the “sharing” that we have opportunity to do.

We like to speak often of sharing the Gospel. As we do, we talk a lot about sharing the Gospel with the lost, which is of course very important, but we may tend to forget the importance of sharing the Gospel with a fellow Christian, such as Paul was encouraging Philemon to do. To do so involves, first of all, listening, that is, being willing to take into consideration a fellow Christian's need. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis in 1945, provided some helpful instruction about what he called the "ministry of proclaiming" in his writings about *Life Together*: "What we are concerned about here," he writes, "is the free communication of the Word from person to person, not by the ordained ministry which is bound to a particular office, time, and place. We are thinking of that unique situation in which one person bears witness in human words to another,"⁴⁰ something we don't do as often as we should within the fellowship. Writes Bonhoeffer:

The first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God involves listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God's Word, but also lends us God's ear. We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to "offer" something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among [fellow] Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening. But Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either; they will always be talking even in the presence of God. The death of the spiritual life starts here, and in the end there is nothing left but empty spiritual chatter and clerical condescension which chokes on pious words. Those who cannot listen long and patiently will always be talking past others, and finally no longer will even notice it. Those who think that their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and for their own words and plans.⁴¹

Bonhoeffer continues to talk about speaking the Word of God by, first and foremost, listening:

For Christians, pastoral care differs essentially from preaching in that here the task of listening is joined to the task of speaking the Word. There is also a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. This impatient, inattentive listening really despises the other Christian and finally is only waiting to get a chance to speak and thus to get rid of the other. This sort of listening is no fulfillment of our task. And it is simply that here, too, in our attitude toward other Christians we simply see reflected our own relationship to God. It should be no surprise that we are no longer able to perform the greatest service of listening that God has

⁴⁰ *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, translated by John W. Doberstein (Harper, San Francisco), p. 103.

⁴¹ *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, trans. by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 98.

entrusted to us—hearing the confession of another Christian—if we refuse to lend our ear to another person on lesser subjects. The pagan world [*heidnische Welt*] today knows something about persons who often can be helped only by having someone who will seriously listen to them. On this insight it has built its own secular form of pastoral care, . . . which has become popular with many people, including Christians. But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been entrusted to them by the one who is indeed the great listener and in whose work they are to participate. We should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God.⁴²

And if listening is so important and effective within the Christian fellowship, how much so also when reaching outside the fellowship to share the Word of God with the lost. They, too, are people who first want to and often need to be listened to before they are ready to be told. This is why I personally believe in our Synod's ministry via radio, even FM radio, even classical music radio. Radio listens in that it finds people where they are, in places where clergy or evangelism callers will never be able to go. And then radio communicates in a manner that reflects the goodness of God in a manner that is not always preachy. How can radio listen, you say? By its broadcasting that which will keep it on the air, it has already listened to what interests people and addresses their needs. It opens doors (or shall we say ears) for the Gospel in cars while listeners are driving to work on an interstate highway or at desks as listeners stare at a spreadsheet on their computer screens. Having listened, radio enjoys unique opportunities such as classical music, offering the Word of God in kind, in a manner that relates, whether via Bach's *Jesu Joy* or Handel's *Messiah*.

This, essentially, is Paul's encouragement to Philemon, who was known for his sharing of his faith. First be ready to listen. When Onesimus returns, listen to his need, even before he says a word. If he wants to speak, listen to his plight, and then share the love and faith that you do with others in the community of faith. This is an essential part of the "ministry of proclaiming" in the Christian community, and an important reminder for us in our own community, whether it be a congregation, the district, or the national Synod. First we must listen to the plight of people from where they are, and then meaningful opportunities will be provided to share what we enjoy in Christ.

⁴² Ibid., p. 99.

(2) Sharing Our Earthly Blessings with One Another

The second rather outstanding, even surprising use of the word *κοινωνία* is its use in Romans 15 and 2 Corinthians 9:13, where it is translated “contribution” in reference to the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem: *By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the Gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others.*

A little review may be in order. *Κοινωνία*, the fellowship of the church, is first and foremost a term used to express the intimate relationship both of believers with Christ and of believers with each other in Christ. This theological understanding is always behind its use, no matter how else the word or its derivatives may be used. The most determinative use of the term for St. Paul is in the context of the Lord’s Supper, where it expresses the relationship of believers with Christ and with each other, “significantly welded together in the momentous liturgical expression of the Christian fellowship.”⁴³

As already noted, the uses of the term go from there to many others, including the Christians’ call to participation in and with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), sharing in the blessings of the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:23), and participating in the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13). Because fellowship with Christ equals fellowship with other Christians, Paul also uses *κοινωνία* to underscore mutual fellowship between Christians in specific situations within the life of the early church, applying it to the ceremonial handclasp which formally certified an agreement made. No matter what the situation, function, or relationship within the life of the church, this term was always directly associated with the fellowship of Christ.

So also, therefore, its use with reference to this collection for the Christians in Jerusalem. *Κοινωνία* does not literally mean “contribution,” but it is used here in that sense to make clear that the collection project was an expression of *κοινωνία*, the unity with Christ and one another that was the heart and center of church life. It was an expression of the Christian character of the Gentiles’ sharing, demonstrating the validity of their participation in the fellowship of Christ and

⁴³ *The Collection*. Keith F. Nickle (London: SCM Press LTD, 1966), p. 123.

exemplifying their Christian love and concern for the Jerusalem Christians motivated by the love of Christ for them.⁴⁴

It should be noted that Macedonia was at this time also suffering from severe poverty that was further aggravated by persecution. Paul wanted the people of Corinth to note this also: *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints*” (2 Cor. 8:1–4). It could be that the amount that they were able to contribute was not great. That was beside the point. To a large extent, so also was the good that the offering could do to relieve the financial plight of the Jerusalem Christians. More important was the Christian concern shown by the Gentiles for their Jewish partners in the faith. And equally important was the response of appreciation that it would evoke from the Jewish Christians for the love and faith shared with them by their Gentile brothers and sisters. That was and always is the important thing.

Bonhoeffer had something to say about this “other service” also, in addition to what he had already said about the service of listening to others for the sake of the Gospel:

The *other* service one should perform for another person in a Christian community is active helpfulness. To begin with, we have in mind simple assistance in minor, external matters. There are many such things wherever people live together. Nobody is too good for the lowest service. Those who worry about the loss of time entailed by such small, external acts of helpfulness are usually taking their own work too seriously. We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God, who will thwart our plans and frustrate our ways time and again, even daily, by sending people across our path with their demands and requests. We can, then, pass them by, preoccupied with our more important daily tasks, just as the priest—perhaps reading the Bible—passed by the man who had fallen among robbers. When we do that, we pass by the visible sign of the cross raised in our lives to show us that God’s way, and not our own, is what counts. It is a strange fact that, of all people, Christians and theologians often consider their work so important and urgent that they do not want to let anything interrupt it. They think they are doing God a favor, but actually they are despising God’s “crooked yet straight path” (Gottfried Arnold).⁴⁵ They want to know nothing about how human plans are thwarted. But it is part of the school of humility that we must not spare our hand where it can perform a service. We do not manage our time ourselves, but allow it to be occupied by God. In the

⁴⁴ *The Collection*, p. 125.

⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer here inserts his own footnote, quoting from the hymn “*So Fuhrst du doch recht selig, Herr, die Deinen*,” written by Gottfried Arnold in 1697: “Your ways are often crooked, yet still are they straight / whereby you lead your children to come unto you.”

monastery, the monk's vow of obedience to the abbot takes away his right to do what he likes with his time. In Protestant community life, voluntary service to one another takes the place of the vow. One can joyfully and authentically proclaim the Word of God's love and mercy with one's mouth only where one's hands are not considered too good for deeds of love and mercy in everyday helpfulness.⁴⁶

It is interesting how Bonhoeffer always ultimately gets to the subject of the proclamation of the Word of God's love, but he means to underscore that such proclamation does not occur in a vacuum. It occurs only after time is first spent preparing the way for the proclamation by listening and helping, first and foremost within the fellowship, the partnership in the Gospel, a fellowship that we enjoy with God and each other, a partnership that carries within itself its own warmth and motivation to accomplish great things, greater things than we would have been able to accomplish had we walked alone.

C. Oh, the Places We Have Gone with Our Fellowship

It was a desire for *κοινωνία* that brought a number of confessional Lutheran pastors and congregations together at St. Paul's Church in Chicago in 1847. They not only believed that like-minded Scripture-faithful, confessions-confessing Lutheran Christians should come together in fellowship. They also believed that walking and working together would provide advantages and benefits that could not be equaled were they to remain separate. This is still clearly reflected in the Synod's constitution today, which states in its "Reason for the Forming of a Synodical Union":

1. The example of the apostolic church (Acts 15:1–31). Even as the early church came together in Jerusalem to work out some doctrinal differences, they were coming together in the interest of maintaining doctrinal and confessional oneness.
2. Our Lord's will that the diversities of gifts should be for the common profit (1Cor. 12:4–31). They intended to pool their gifts under the same Lord, empowered by one and the same Spirit, a body consisting of many members working together to accomplish certain things together that they would not be able to accomplish separately.

Our forefathers' confession and objectives were many, many of which have been discussed in this essay: to conserve and promote the unity of the true faith; strengthen one another in giving bold witness to the love and work of God; and recruit and train church workers. But they also understood that fellowship included such things as listening and sharing, and so our Synod's constitution provides opportunities to express human concern and compassion; aid one another in

⁴⁶ *Life Together*, pp. 99–100.

developing processes for thorough Christian education; advocate confessional unity and responsible practice; and provide protection, counsel and care for church workers and congregations.

In return, God has blessed this *κοινωνία*, this fellowship, this partnership, this synod, this walk together arm in arm. Together we have not only kept the faith. Together our Synod has gone places and accomplished things far beyond the expectations of that handful of pastors and congregations that met in Chicago more than 160 years ago.

To paraphrase another great “theologian,” Dr. Seuss, and his book that enjoys particular popularity at this time of year, “oh, the places we have gone” in our walk together. I have had the opportunity to work closely with Concordia Historical Institute on the relocation and construction of a major new museum of our Synod’s history, to be located in our Synod’s International Center. Before this time, I knew a little about the history of our Synod. Now I know a lot more, and what I have learned is this: “Oh, the places we have gone” in our Synod’s 160 years, from a handful of congregations and pastors to more than 6,000 congregations, nearly 20,000 church workers, 3,000 parochial schools, 10 colleges and universities, 2 seminaries, many mission fields—and so much history in the process, all demonstrating not only God’s gracious hand but the *κοινωνία* that He has created with and among us.

This fellowship that we enjoy with God and each other has not only brought us together, but it has also enabled us to move forward and to accomplish great things for Christ’s sake. All thanks and praise be to God! And it still can and must continue to do so, but that will be the subject of Part IV of this essay.

PART IV: WALKING TOGETHER IN Κοινωνία: ADJUSTING OUR STRIDE

You might want to try walking Russian-style sometime. It is really quite pleasant. Tamara and I do so sometimes in St. Louis, though it is rather noticeable and people do tend to take a second look, wondering what you are doing. But if you do try it, you will quickly learn that there is one more thing about walking together arm in arm that is important—the one more thing that must be there if it is going to work.

My stride is longer. Tamara’s is not short, but not as long as mine, depending also on what she happens to be wearing. I could insist that she match my stride. Or she could insist that I match hers. In either case, it would be pretty unpleasant and perhaps even impossible for one of us. And so we adjust. We make an allowance for the other, and then our walk together is possible and successful. How true this also is of our walk together as a Synod—our walk together in κοινωνία, in fellowship, in partnership in the Gospel.

A. When Adjusting Our Stride Is Not An Option

Of course, this cannot be true in every area of our walk together. Some Christians today see the need to adjust their stride at all times and are willing to compromise anything and everything for the sake of outward unity. But we understand otherwise. Holy Scripture and the Confessions make clear that there are areas of our walk together for which God has already determined our stride. This is most certainly true of the content of His verbally inspired and infallible Word and of the Lutheran Confessions as a true and correct exposition of that Word. There is no *quatenus* here, “insofar as.” There is only *quia*, “because.” God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions determine our stride as we walk together *because* they are a correct exposition of His Word, as we as a Synod stated clearly in our *Brief Statement* adopted in 1932:

Of the Holy Scriptures: 1. We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21. We teach also that...since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35. 2. We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from

which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged.

Of the Symbols of the Lutheran Church: 45. We accept as our confessions all the symbols contained in *The Book of Concord* of the year 1580.—The symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these documents. 46. Since the Christian Church cannot make doctrines, but can and should simply profess the doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because our Church has made them nor because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself.⁴⁷

C.F.W. Walther in his essay to the Iowa convention explained why both the Scriptures and the Confessions are important:

By virtue of the fact that a synod confesses God's Word, it indicates that it intends to be a Christian synod. But if it wants to indicate that it is a *Lutheran* synod, it must indicate that the confession of the Lutheran Church is its confession. And in that case, of course, it will also wholeheartedly confess God's Word. For, you see, our confession demands above all else a wholehearted confession of God's Word.⁴⁸

He goes on to explain why the Lutheran Confessions in particular are so important:

After Luther's death serious controversies arose also in the Lutheran Church. Everyone wanted to be a Luther. So, in 1577 those pastors and professors (*Gottesgelehrten*) who had remained orthodox drew up our beloved Formula of Concord,...the last of the general Confessions of our church....

[T]he Confessions are so necessary, not because Holy Scripture is insufficient, but on the contrary because so many people appeal to Holy Scripture and claim it, but in a distorted sense. That is why it became necessary for orthodox Lutherans to say to anyone who claimed to be Lutheran, "It's true that you claim to believe what the Bible says. But very many make that claim, even though they do not believe what it says and actually distort the Scriptures terribly. Do you truly believe thus and so, namely the doctrines contained in our Confessions?"⁴⁹

And Walther goes on to support what he has said from the Formula of Concord:

Since for thorough, permanent unity in the Church it is, above all things, necessary that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form wherein is brought together from God's Word the common doctrine, reduced to a brief compass, which the churches that are of the true Christian religion confess, just as the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols; moreover, since this should not be based on private writings, but on such books as have been composed, approved, and received in the name

⁴⁷ *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, a doctrinal statement adopted by the Synod in 1932 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), pp. 3, 31.

⁴⁸ *Essays*, vol. II, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

of the churches which pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion, we have declared to one another with heart and mouth that we will not make or receive a separate or new confession of our faith, but confess the public common writings which always and everywhere were held and used as such symbols or common confessions in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession before the dissensions arose among those who accept the Augsburg Confession, as long as *in all articles* there was on all sides a unanimous adherence to and maintenance and use of the pure doctrine of the divine Word, as the sainted Dr. Luther explained it.⁵⁰

This was a walk together for which the early Lutherans were unwilling to adjust their stride, nor should we. Quoting now from the Preface to *The Book of Concord*:

Therefore we also have determined not to depart even a finger's breath either from the subjects themselves, or from the phrases which are found in them, but, the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement, and we intend to examine all controversies according to this true norm and declaration of the pure doctrine.⁵¹

Another major area for which there are certain absolutes is that of inter-Christian relationships—more specifically, altar and pulpit fellowship. True fellowship at the altar and from the pulpit requires that there be no allowance for adjustment where the marks of the church, the Word and Sacraments, are concerned. Some of the absolutes that are determinative are these:

1. Holy Scripture is the only judge, rule, and norm according to which the faith and life of the church are judged as good or evil, right or wrong.⁵²
2. Questions about church relations principles and practices, like all other questions in the church, are to be answered from Holy Scriptures as the verbally inspired and infallible Word of God.
3. The church in the proper sense is the “assembly of believers,”⁵³...”mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit” and not merely an “association of outward ties and rites.”⁵⁴ It is constituted by faith in Christ and not by membership in external organizations.
4. The church is called and recognized by the use of the Gospel and sacraments, a creation of God’s Holy Spirit because we cannot “by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him.”⁵⁵
5. To find and recognize the church, we look for the pure and right use of the Gospel and sacraments, knowing that God is the author and creator of the church and that He has promised that His Word will not return to Him void but will accomplish His purpose (Is. 55:11).

⁵⁰ *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 849–851.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵² See Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm 7.

⁵³ Augsburg Confession VII.

⁵⁴ Apology, Augsburg Confession VII, 5.

⁵⁵ Small Catechism, Explanation to Third Article.

6. The church is united spiritually, for its unity is given with faith in the Gospel, a spiritual bond that unites all believers to their Lord Jesus Christ and thereby to each other.
7. The church of true believers exists within a larger assembly that includes hypocrites and unbelievers, called by our Lutheran confessions the “association of outward ties and rites.”⁵⁶
8. The primary mission of the church is to make disciples of all nations, by proclaiming, confessing, and defending the truth of Jesus Christ and His Gospel on the basis of Holy Scripture.
9. Christians are to manifest the oneness they have with each other through Jesus Christ. Because it is through the Gospel and Sacraments that the Holy Spirit brings people into the church, outward unity is dependent upon agreement in the confession of the Gospel and Sacraments.
10. Sometimes it is necessary to remain individually and denominationally separate from other Christians whose doctrine is persistently contrary to Holy Scripture, but Christian love is to be manifested toward all believers nonetheless.
11. When practical choices must be made and tension exists between expressing Christian unity or proclaiming the truth of the Gospel, unity must yield to truth. For it is better to be divided for the sake of the truth than to be united in error.
12. The present is always “an opportune time for the world to hear a clear confessional Lutheran voice, proclaiming on the basis of Scripture the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith: justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁷

To these core absolutes of our faith and practice we have also added fellowship issues, *i.e.*, pulpit and altar issues, as carried out on the local congregational level. Our Synod has repeatedly expressed itself on this subject, especially in reference to practice at the altar, doing so repeatedly through convention resolutions as recent as 1998, when Res. 3-05, in its Preamble, rehearses some of that history:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has stated and reaffirmed on the basis of Scripture (1 Cor. 11:26; 1 Cor. 10:21; 1 Cor. 11:17ff; 1 Cor 4:1–2) that the Lord’s Supper is an expression of the oneness of the congregation in Christ and in His Gospel; that one who eats and drinks at an altar confesses what is taught from that altar; that each communicant is called on to avoid creating divisions within the assembly; and that pastors are called by God through the congregation faithfully to administer the Sacrament according to the Lord’s institution; and, as part of this practice, the pastor will seek to prevent a profession of confessional unity in the faith where there is, in fact, disunity and disagreement.

The Synod affirmed in 1986 Res. 3-08, and reaffirmed in 1995 Res. 3-08, “that the pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continue to abide by the practice of close Communion, which includes the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care in extraordinary situations and circumstances,” and beseeched the Synod in love to remember that “situations of emergency, and special cases of

⁵⁶ Apology, VII, 5.

⁵⁷ From paper presented by Ralph A. Bohlmann to a committee of the Lutheran World Federation, Dec. 4, 1987.

pastoral care, or extraordinary situations and circumstances” are, by their nature, relatively rare.

The Synod affirmed in 1995 Res. 3-08, “that because we are ‘eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3), any members of the Synod who advocate a different practice of Holy Communion be fraternally reminded of the commitment all the members of the Synod make to one another by subscribing to the Constitution of the Synod to honor and uphold its doctrine and practice and, if there is disagreement, to follow the channels of dissent as outlined in synodical Bylaw 2.39 c.”⁵⁸

Walking together on this issue may be our greatest challenge to walking together today, even more difficult and significant than much-discussed worship-style issues. The issue of close Communion is steeped in doctrine and practice concerns, and it is particularly divisive when defined and practiced differently by members of our fellowship. To make matters more difficult, differences regarding communion practice may be found to exist among those whose responsibility it is to supervise the doctrine and practice of our Synod. This is hardly conducive to walking together. Until we figure out how to come together on this difficult issue, our walk together will be clumsy and our partnership in the Gospel will not be as productive as it could otherwise be.

I remember how challenging this was for some of your congregations while I served this district as its president. It is hard to get back in step when we lose our stride for stride. Pastors and congregations I talked with assured me that they were working on this, but that it would take some time. Perhaps time has borne fruit and this important area of our walk together is back in sync. But suffice to say, this is one of those areas where the length of our stride together has been established for us, not only by Synod resolutions but by the principles of fellowship contained in the Holy Scriptures. It is a very disjointed walk when we are not walking together according to the principles of fellowship God has given us in His Word.

But these areas, matters of doctrine and practice regarding which we do not adjust our stride, are not what this Part IV of this essay is about. This part is about those areas of our Christian life that beg adjustment of our steps for the sake of our walk together. These fit under the general Scriptural principle of “forbearing one another in love,” mention of which has already been made earlier in this essay. A great deal of this forbearing will be required among us.

⁵⁸ 1998 Res. 3-05.

B. When Adjusting Our Stride is Essential

I have been repeatedly amazed during these past 10 years in St. Louis at how fragile relationships can be. Close friendships can be threatened by a single conversation, a word misspoken, a disagreement over a relatively minor matter in the big picture of things. And, of course, it is no different in districts and local communities and congregations.

We all figured out a long time ago that the church on earth has some less than perfect people in it, persons with shortcomings that are sometimes offensive to others and also to us. So long as this world remains, sin will continue to manifest itself in the church and threaten the fellowship that God has provided. This is why Galatians 6:2 was written for our instruction and encouragement and is so important: *Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.* C.F.W. Walther put it this way: "Perfection and unity is preserved, *i.e.*, the church remains united and whole, when the strong bear and endure the weak."⁵⁹ Hartwig would put it this way: "We walk a whole lot better together when the strong reduce their stride a bit to accommodate the weak and the weak work to increase their stride to walk together with the strong."

As might be expected, Dietrich Bonhoeffer has some interesting thoughts on this subject, which he calls "The Ministry of Bearing." Referring to the Galatians passage, *Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ* (6:2), he wrote in his collection of writings, *Life Together*:

Thus the law of Christ is a law of bearing. Bearing means forbearing and sustaining. The brother is a burden to the Christian, precisely because he is a Christian. For the pagan, the other person never becomes a burden at all. [The pagan] simply sidesteps every burden that others may impose upon him.

The Christian, however, must bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be manipulated...

The Bible speaks with remarkable frequency of "bearing." It is capable of expressing the whole work of Jesus Christ in this one word. *Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...the chastisement of our peace was upon him* (Is. 53:4–5). Therefore, the Bible can also characterize the whole life of a Christian as bearing the cross. It is the fellowship of the cross to experience the burden of the other. If one does not experience it, the fellowship he belongs to is not Christian.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Essays*, vol. II, pp. 55–56.

⁶⁰ *Life Together*, pp. 100–101.

We do experience it. Luther describes life in this Christian fellowship in his commentary of John 15:9:

You cannot avoid offending another person at times, just as little as you can keep one foot or toe from touching the other or hurting yourself. You cannot avoid such bumps and bruises to another's ego, especially in view of the fact that here on earth we live in the kingdom of Satan who is constantly tempting us, and on top of that, because our flesh is still weak and full of sin. No doubt that is why the most saintly and dearest of friends will occasionally disagree and prick up their ears at one another, why the devil occasionally fills our hearts with suspicion and bitterness because of one statement or one glance, so that these former friends are filled with antagonism toward each other. He is a master at that trick, works hard at perfecting it, and often succeeds with it before we are even aware of what he is up to. That is what happened between Paul and Barnabas. Acts 15:39 tells us that "they had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company."⁶¹

But this is an area of Christian life where we have some freedom, freedom to adjust our steps in our walk together. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession speaks of this need on the part of laymen toward their pastors with its commentary of Colossians 3:14—*Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony:*

Unity is achieved by each holding the other in a good light. And peace and rest cannot remain where one does not overlook many things the other does, where we do not bear [with] one another. So Paul would admonish us to [practice] Christian love so that we should bear and endure the faults and shortcomings of others and forgive one another. In this way unity is preserved in the church, so that the company of Christians is not torn apart, disrupted, and is not split into all sorts of divisions and sects. For even greater filth, hatred and jealousy, all sorts of bitterness and evil, poison, and finally public heresies may follow from this....

Divisions will easily develop if the people immediately want to master and nitpick everything in the life and conduct of the bishops or pastors. When they get tired of their pastors, [they will do this] perhaps for some minor fault. From this follows such great evil. Then the same bitterness will soon cause one to look for different teachers and different pastors. On the other hand, perfection and unity is preserved, *i.e.*, the church remains united and whole, when the strong bear and endure the weak, when the people also have patience with their pastors.⁶²

One of the most important lessons I believe I learned during my seminary education was one I learned as a vicar from a very experienced pastor. It was the German proverb: "*Mann muss nicht nach jeder Fliege schlagen,*" that is "One should not swat at every fly." How true for the sake of *κοινωνία* among us. Walther also had something proverbial to say on the subject:

⁶¹ *Luther's Works* 24, p. 244.

⁶² *Triglotta*, p. 187.

Our dear congregations should note this carefully. When a pastor makes an occasional mistake, they should not be too harsh in their judgment but should consider, “Did he do that out of weakness? Is it really serious enough to sound the alarm or not?” And if you determine that it was done in weakness and is [a matter] of little importance, then you should either ignore it or tell him in a friendly way, “You did not handle that correctly.” Otherwise, if the congregation insists on nitpicking about every little thing, then the beautiful relationship of the spiritual father and his spiritual children will come to an end. Then the devil laughs up his sleeve, when the people no longer heed the pastor’s word; then he has torn the members from their orthodox pastor. *We must support one another!* The pastor should not expect the members of his congregation to be nothing but angels, and the members should not demand that their pastor be an angel either, for that he cannot be.⁶³

I remember seeing some really good examples of this forbearing of pastors during my years in South Dakota, starting with personal experience when members of congregations I served were willing to smile and accept my shortcomings. The particular example that still comes often to mind is one that I wrote about in another essay some years ago on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of our Synod:

In one of the rural parishes I was privileged to serve as pastor, my predecessor retired from the ministry and remained in the parish to serve as master of the beautiful organ that adorned the congregation’s worship. He was neither a quiet man nor very personable. He wasn’t even a very good preacher or teacher by most standards. But he was unique, and among other less-than-agreeable things, he was a master of outrageous comments that today would prompt a call to the district president within two weeks of a pastor’s arrival in a parish. And yet this parish loved and respected him because of the office he held among them. They loved him for 28 years and then gave him their parsonage when he retired.⁶⁴

For me as a young pastor succeeding that pastor in that parish, it was encouraging to learn that I would be serving such a community of saints, congregations that were able to be patient with their pastor, congregations able to adjust their steps to walk with their pastor and assist him with his shortcomings. But even in such a parish, the members are human also, requiring some adjustment by their pastor as well. Walther’s advice to pastors was short and sweet:

See to it that you don’t expect too much from your people, as our quotation reminded us. You can’t turn every (piece of wood) into a dowel. It simply can’t be done; not all wood is suitable for dowels.⁶⁵

⁶³ C.F.W. Walther’s quotation from Ap IV, in *Essays for the Church*, vol 2, p. 56.

⁶⁴ *Church and Ministry*, The Collected Papers of The 150th Anniversary Theological Convocation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1998, p. 191.

⁶⁵ C.F.W. Walther’s *Essays for the Church*, vol 2, p. 56.

As district president, one of my duties was to participate in the placement of seminary candidates, aligning them with the calls that had come in from congregations, which was President Sattgast's privilege just last week. It was always a wonderful moment to be present for the placement service and for the distribution of these first calls, to witness the excitement and happiness of candidates anticipating finally being able to put all of their education to use, of families rejoicing at the prospect of being able finally to settle down after years of schooling. But it was always a sobering moment also, knowing that in just a few weeks these soon-to-be pastors would be facing the reality of service in the pastoral ministry, serving a congregation that would not match any they met up with in their textbooks, often being challenged immediately by conditions that would require pastoral judgment and poise that cannot be learned in classrooms from textbooks.

During my years as district president, we received dozens of new candidates in South Dakota, called by congregations represented at this convention, some of which pastors are present at this convention. Many understood quickly that you can't turn every block of wood into a dowel. Others, initially anyway, did try to make the perfect dowels, expecting their congregations to match them and their seminary education stride for stride, resulting in unhappy beginnings to ministries and unpleasant, even damaging trials for their congregations. Eventually, most came to understand the need to walk with their congregations, and their congregations made some adjustments as well, perhaps shortening a little or perhaps lengthening a little their strides to make possible their walk together. Pastors came to love their people, including those whom they could mostly only love for Jesus' sake. They recognized that they were only one in a long line of pastors who would walk with their particular flocks, hopefully to help them along their particular stretch of pasture to eternal life. They never lost that which Dr. Walther described in his twentieth evening lecture on Law and Gospel as he prepared young candidates for the pastoral ministry:

When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the Office of a Lutheran Minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful, and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is in a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourish settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise.⁶⁶

But, of course, this "bearing one another's burdens" reaches beyond pastor-congregation relationships into the larger community of believers in the circuit, district, Synod, and our partner

⁶⁶ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 207.

churches around the world. Burdens are borne, to be sure, when a pastor covers for another who is on vacation or a congregation allows its pastor to serve a neighboring congregation's pastoral vacancy. But burdens are particularly borne when pastors and congregations walk together by bearing in mind the interests and needs of those in their association, walking together according to practices determined by membership in the Synod as determined by its conventions, being considerate with worship practices, avoiding doing pastoral acts for persons under the pastoral care of another pastor, coordinating pastoral care for those who are cohabiting outside of wedlock, honoring together the practice of close Communion, being sensitive regarding the service of women in the church, and much more. Our walk together must anticipate, at times, the need to curtail our freedom and measure our steps, recognizing that while things may be lawful, they are not always helpful in our walk together, which is the greater good. At the same time we must also take care not to use our walk together to curtail needlessly the ministry of another pastor or congregation because "they are supposed to walk together with us and this is the way we have always walked and are going to walk, no matter what."

A document published several years ago by the task force assigned the responsibility for introducing our Synod's broader approach to the service of women in congregations captures this spirit nicely, whatever we may think of the Synod's decision. It reminds pastors and congregations always to remember and take into consideration the interests of brother pastors and sister congregations when initiating a practice that could do harm or create consternation in the fellowship:

2004 Resolution 3-08A includes a final resolve which states: "That the members of the Synod considering changes regarding the service of women in congregational offices consult with neighboring congregations, recognizing that in matters of Christian liberty, Christians are called, above all, to do what edifies the church, respecting the consciences of others"...

'The consciences of others' must be a primary concern when congregations consider changes that may impact the life of fellow Christians in neighboring congregations. The service of women in leadership positions is one such change. Particularly on the circuit level, members of congregations may be aware of what is happening in neighboring congregations, and officers of congregations may have occasion to meet and work together....

2004 Res. 3-08A encourages the members of the Synod who are contemplating change, and those who will be affected by such changes, to consult with neighboring congregations (congregations in their own circuit, in neighboring circuits, etc.) lest unnecessary offense be given. Likewise, when congregations choose to change their constitutions in conformity with this resolution of the Synod, these decisions should be

respected and honored by those congregations which decide not to implement the conclusions of the CTCR report.⁶⁷

C. The Greater Purpose for Our Walk Together

There is, of course, a reason to do all of this beyond merely facilitating our walk together. Walther reminds of this “above all” reason in the final thesis of his essay to the Iowa District Convention:

As zealous as we should be to improve our district/Synod in every respect, yet the well-being and growth of the district/Synod is not to be our primary goal. Our primary goal should be to spread *God's glory*, to rescue souls and bring them salvation. This means that we should avoid anything [which would have as its sole purpose] to make our district/Synod big [*grosz*] but which would not benefit our Lord Christ in His kingdom, which would not promote the glory of God and the salvation of immortal souls. This must be our purpose.⁶⁸

In short, working at our walk together, important as it is, is not the end but a means to a much greater end. Everything we do has a far greater purpose than the well-being of congregations, circuits, districts, Synod, or partner church bodies around the world. We aren't trying for size and numbers, except only to expand the number of souls who walk with us on our way home. To quote Walther yet again:

We are assembled here not for our own sake. We are in the faith, and by this faith we hope to be saved. But there are still many millions who have no faith! That is why we are here and have established a district/Synod, so that we might bring salvation to as many people as we possibly can, so that the sad situation in Christendom and the corruption of the poor, blind heathen world might be remedied. And if we don't do that, if we don't seek the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls, then, says Luther, he fears that our loving God [*der liebe Gott*] might assemble a council of angels to execute judgment on us....The plight and misery of our day is great everywhere. Not only unbelief and false belief, but sin and all vices have broken in across our land like a flood, and therefore we Lutherans must do whatever we can to stem this floodtide.⁶⁹

This was Walther speaking 130 years ago. For a more contemporary description of what the Christian church faces, especially from within, these words:

Doctrinal indifference and religious unionism are two prominent traits of the church of our day. Pure doctrine is viewed by many as a matter of small indifference, while error in

⁶⁷ Report

⁶⁸ *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 60.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

doctrine is deemed an innocent trifle. We are told that the Christian who differs with us in doctrine merely sees truth from a different point of view and that we should not deny him fellowship because he does not agree with us regarding the teachings of Scripture. This sentiment threatens to deluge the church. It is preached from thousands of pulpits, published in numberless papers, and proclaimed in many radio broadcasts. Pastors of different denominations form ministerial associations, exchange pulpits, officiate at church functions, and unite in joint religious endeavors. Such practice is praised as proof of true Christian charity and is held to be characteristic of American Christianity. Those Christians, however, who insist on pure doctrine and who warn against error and errorists are unpopular. They are reproached, derided, and sometimes persecuted. They are called sticklers for orthodoxy and narrow sectarians. They are told that their conduct is inconsistent with the spirit of the meek and gentle Galilean who said: *Judge not; condemn not*. Thus the champions of doctrinal indifferentism would make it appear that our Master was tolerant toward error, as if He who said: *The Scripture cannot be broken*, and: *If you continue in My Word, then you are My disciples indeed* could have countenanced or condoned even the least error!⁷⁰

Interestingly, this was a paragraph written in 1947, on the occasion of our Synod's 100th anniversary. Today, another 60-plus years later, we could add our own descriptive paragraph. It would indicate that things haven't become any more friendly—rather, have probably become even more difficult. The erosion from within and the assaults from without, little different from those that have been experienced by the church of all ages (to the point of spilling Christian blood) make it additionally important that the true church on earth walk and work together in harmony, forbearing one another when necessary, cooperating however possible, supporting one another's efforts whenever and however we can, demonstrating the *κοινωνία* that is ours solely by the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Savior. As Walther put it:

It is a primary duty of a confessionally faithful synod that it...take an enthusiastic and, as much as possible, active part in all God-pleasing organizations dedicated to the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world. That is the duty of every synod, including our own. It is to join the ranks of that great army of laborers in the harvest field of Christ.⁷¹

Some of you may know that I have for some time been advocating a new Christian holiday, "Command Day," to be observed on March 4th. (If you say that date repeatedly with gusto, and then sing a stanza of "Onward Christian Soldiers," you will understand how that date could be useful for us as Christians.) The date hasn't caught on quite yet, but the idea of joining the ranks of the great army of laborers in the harvest field of Christ must. Even as today's technology is able to take a picture of two people walking together and create from it an army, we must take our

⁷⁰ W.A. Baepler, "Doctrine, True and False" from *The Abiding Word*, vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 493.

⁷¹ *Essays*, vol II, p. 62.

picture of two people walking arm in arm, stride for stride, and multiply it a million-fold. Our Synod as an association of confessionally minded congregations and ordained and commissioned ministers enjoys a spot right in the middle of that army. As former President Ralph Bohlmann said, “This is an opportune time for the world to hear a clear confessional Lutheran voice, proclaiming on the basis of Scripture the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith: justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁷² Or, as even more former president C.F.W. Walther said:

For the harvest has long been “dead ripe”; it is only a matter of reaping that harvest. In other words, [the Synod] should cooperate with every organization of both home and foreign missions for the spreading of the holy Scriptures. That also applies to the establishment and preservation of institutions for the preparation of pastors. In short, a synod is to be a living member of the body of Christ, and together with every other living member of that most sacred body in the whole world, it must do what it possibly can to spread Christ’s kingdom and, wherever possible, to win for Christ and to lead into His sheepfold all those whom Christ has bought with His precious blood, and ultimately lead them into the salvation of everlasting life.⁷³

Luther seemed to anticipate this portion of this essay when he expanded its call not only to all parts of the world but also across generational lines, with words from his commentary on Psalm 101:4:

Help, whoever is able! Take pity on the poor youth, on our dear descendants, and on all the chosen children of God who are yet to come, are not yet born, who must also be baptized and brought to Christ through our labors and contributions, for which we have been called and is the reason why we are alive. Otherwise, so far as we ourselves are concerned, our faith would be sufficient for us, and it would make no difference when we die. But woe upon woe to us, if we disregard that call and service!...Therefore I repeat, Whoever can, be a David and imitate his example as much as possible, especially you who are princes and lords, you whom God has put into positions of power and wealth. God will repay an hundredfold and more, and in addition to that, He will give you eternal life, as He so richly promises in Matthew 19:29. And even if nothing more can be accomplished, [let us see to it] that at least the schools and pulpits—which are not all that expensive—will be maintained.⁷⁴

To which we are always inclined to think, “Fine, I’ll help support my local pulpit and my congregation’s Christian education program. Not too much, mind you, lest I provide opportunity for others not to do their part. But as far as pulpits and schools elsewhere, let them worry about their own pulpits and schools.” Walther thought otherwise:

⁷² Address to the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation,

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Luther’s Works*, vol. 13, p. 192.

No, God demands that we assist others in getting churches and schools. A Christian and also a congregation are plants that have grown from the seed sown by other Christians and congregations. Therefore this congregation and every individual Christian is to be a seed from which new Christians and congregations can ever again grow. That is why the apostle says so emphatically [that] the church is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26). Just as surely as we are now members of the church, so surely we should also be fruitful mothers.”⁷⁵

I used to like to repeat a quote from Douglas McArthur when speaking at anniversaries here in the district: “The fathers plant the tree; their children live in its shade.” How true that is of us all, of you in the South Dakota District. We live in the shade of the hard work and accomplishments of others before us with names like Ptothenauer and Oberheu, Mueller and Wendling, Crosmer and Koosman, Bierwagen and Schamber. Every congregation in this district has its list of fathers who planted the tree. And ours is the opportunity to live in its shade. But we live also to plant trees of our own, near and far, to provide the shade of eternal life for the generations still to come. Says Walther:

It is just as our Luther says: Only for this reason does our gracious God allow Christians to live on earth, that they might bring others to the saving faith. Otherwise God would immediately take a Christian to heaven as soon as he is converted. For everyone who has faith is ready to enter heaven. But God says, “You must finish your earthly task of leading others to eternal life.”

We might respectfully differ a little with Walther’s closing words of that paragraph: “You must finish your earthly task of leading others to eternal life.” It is a task, to be sure, but mostly it is a privilege, the privilege of taking another person’s arm and inviting them along, taking along as many with us as we can. We do this best when we walk together in fellowship, and not only adjusting our steps, but adjusting our pocketbooks also.

It is easier to quote someone else on the subject of pocketbooks, and I will in a moment. But first I will say this: we need to give this serious attention. We are the wealthiest nation on earth. We individually are the wealthiest individuals on earth. This remains true even now in a time of financial recession or even depression. We enjoy luxuries that boggle the mind. But we have failed to reflect this very well in our walk together, first of all in our congregations. We are not first-fruits givers as we should be. If we were, most of our congregations would need to look for ways to expand their ministries, after better supporting their pastors and other church workers. We tend to look to the pocketbooks of others rather than our own. It is as though we fail to

⁷⁵ *Essays*, vol. II, p. 62.

understand this κοινωνία, this fellowship that we enjoy with our God and the blessings He has provided to us, and this fellowship that we enjoy with our fellow Christians, which should be our main interest as we walk our way through this world.

And this failure on our part individually only leads to failure beyond our immediate circles, as our congregations participate in the work of the Synod in its South Dakota District and beyond. The result is decreasing commitment to fund work done together on the district level and on the Synod level. The support you provide to Amy Kashenov and the work she does in Kazakhstan causes me to want to be careful not to overstate my case, but I expect, as I saw when I was with you in the South Dakota District, that district and Synod mission endeavors, one of the main reasons for forming the Synod, are often viewed with a lower priority than local building projects and self-devised mission projects. The result is a regular cutting back on our mutual efforts, leaving the district to struggle to make its ends meet while still funding the national Synod for the important work of missions and mercy and education done there.

Next month the Board of Directors of the Synod will meet to determine the budget for its coming fiscal year beginning July 1. This will be a more-difficult-than-usual struggle due to current economic conditions and our Synod's dependence on major gifts. Already it has been decided that there will be no raises or bonuses on the Synod level, which is OK for overpaid officers like myself but a hardship for many. In addition, with a workforce already reduced by more than 100 employees over recent years, every department is now being asked to plan to reduce expenditures by another 15 percent. I note the same kind of reducing of costs going on in this district's office.

If this is the best we can do, so be it, and God will bless our best efforts. But if it is not, then your convention theme offers an important reminder. This is our walk together, our Synod, our fellowship, our partnership. No great matter if we do not always agree on everything associated with it; no great matter if we find some difficulties with latest efforts, even such as *Ablaze!* or *Fan Into Flame*; no great matter if we would do mission work a little differently if it were up to us; no great matter if we would prefer different leadership than what we now have; no great matter if we disagree with some of the decision-making that takes place from time to time—this is still our Synod, and we must be about the business of adjusting our steps where we can in order to walk together in response to God's walk with us. I will let Walther speak for me one more time:

Luther writes: “Therefore I repeat: Whoever can, be a David and imitate his example as much as possible, especially you who are princes and lords, you whom “God has put into positions of power and wealth.” We say the same thing. Even if you are not a prince, but just a well-to-do farmer, you too should make an appropriate sacrificial gift, so that good schools may be established, not merely parochial schools but also in situations where pastors and teachers can be prepared for the holy office [of the ministry]. And that is what the “princes and lords” of Luther’s day did. They were the first to make sacrificial gifts. But that didn’t bring any credit to the other people, who never lent a helping hand. Oh, how blessed a person is if he has wealth and uses it wisely! When he does something for the kingdom of God, he has the promise that he will be repaid a hundredfold and will receive eternal life to boot. If that doesn’t make a person happy, I don’t know what will....”⁷⁶

Walther gets a bit more personal as he concludes his essay, directing his final words toward the Iowa District that was meeting in convention and listening to his essay:

The Iowa District has contributed very little to the establishment of [the Synod’s institutions]. That is to be expected, of course, since it has just recently come into existence. But now, help in seeing to it that more and more armies of evangelists march out of our seminaries, [men who] ultimately will bring thousands upon thousands to the Lord as they cast the net of the Gospel into the sea of this world. Then, when that Day arrives in which God will inspect that net and sort out its contents [Matt. 13:47 – 50], we will also be there, rejoicing in unspeakable joy as the Lord says: “My dear one, whom I have dearly purchased with My divine blood, out of love to Me you have done your share in helping others find eternal life. Come now, come and be with Me eternally, and you shall see how your works have followed you.”⁷⁷

D. We Part Our Ways, But Not Our Walk Together

I can think of no better words to conclude my words to you, delegates and guests of this 58th convention of the South Dakota District. I hope that my efforts to pull together some thoughts and words on the wonderful subject of *κοινωνία* will have been helpful to you, creating a picture in your mind of the walk we enjoy together, a walk that walks best when:

- I. We recognize who has made possible our fellowship in the first place.
- II. We start off on the right foot, on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.
- III. We guard this fellowship every step of the way, for it is a precious thing and there will always be those who will try to take it away.
- IV. We marvel at the progress we can make when we combine our resources and walk together.
- V. Where we can, we adjust our strides to accommodate and support each other.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

In so doing, we will be able to appreciate better the theme of this convention, “Called Into Partnership,” and even more importantly, the text from which it is taken, Philippians 1:3-6:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.

But before we go, one last consideration in connection with this κοινοβία, a subject in itself for another time, alluded to in the last quote from Walther, beautifully said by the final verse of your convention text, that to which we all look forward, when we will have an eternity to think back to our days in South Dakota where the proverbial “buffalo roam and the deer and antelope play,” when our memories, enhanced by the passage of time and our new surroundings, will recall a κοινοβία where “seldom [was] heard a discouraging word and the skies [were] not cloudy all day.” Or, as St. Paul put it:

And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Raymond L. Hartwig
April, 2009