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The Faithful Remnant and the Reformation

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O Lord, look down from heav'n behold
And let Thy pity waken;
How few are we within Thy fold,
Thy saints by men forsaken!
True faith seems quenched on ev'ry hand,
Men suffer not Thy Word to stand;
Dark times have us o'ertaken. (TLH #260)

These words from Martin Luther's hymn *Ach Gott von Himmel* (1523) speak to the plight of the Church in our generation. One of the hardest parts of being a confessional Lutheran in our age is living with the realization that if one actually strives to faithfully teach and do all that we Lutherans actually *claim* to teach and practice, according to the Book of Concord, such a one will find himself opposed ten-to-one by those who *claim* to be Lutheran but have no intention of actually *being* Lutheran.

There were some people who expected a great deal of 'action' after the LCMS convention this past Summer. "Surely," they said, "people will *finally* do something!" I held my tongue, and hoped they were right.

The truth of it is that although there are many who are 'troubled' about what has been taught and done in the synods over the past few generations, most people will 'get over' their troubled consciences and accommodate themselves to whatever is easiest for their fleshly concerns. 'Fighting from within' can be an easy gloss for 'only a few years to retirement' or even more basically, 'how will I support myself?' The LCMS essentially ignored the "state of confession" documents of several congregations which followed that synod's own 'dissent' guidelines—and now the LCMS has apparently ignored the departure of one of those congregations. There will be a great deal of *talk* about faithfulness, but few who

risk their calls in the process. Others will continue to labor faithfully, seeking to lead their congregations out of unfaithful affiliations, and will suffer greatly in the process.

This is the way it has always been for the faithful remnant within the Church: read John 6:60–71 and John 15:18–21 and understand that this is the way it will *continue* to be in Christ's Church. There will always be many who will 'turn back and walk no more' with Jesus because of the offense of the 'hard' words of Holy Scripture. Elijah's lament still strikes close to home, and 7,000 is still a pretty small number compared to all those who call themselves "Israel." St. Paul lamented at the end of his life, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me..." (2 Tim. 1:15).

The majority remain caught up in a "theology of glory," looking for numbers, wealth and power to show them where to find the Church—a theology which leads, in its 'purest' form, to Rome or Eastern Orthodoxy. Those who worship the relative 'bigness' of their synodical fellowship are offended by the wretched little remnant and will, by and large, 'stay put' because of what matters most to them.

There is little point to being disappointed when the world is exactly the way Jesus said it would be; especially when we remember that they are often the ones who determine who may remain 'in the synagogue.' (John 16:1–3)

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Celebrating the Reformation

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The month of October is remembered in many different ways. Some people see this month as merely the time in which the season of Fall is well underway as leaves are falling from the trees; parents and children are settling into the daily and weekly routines of going to school for nine months; and for others, it's halfway into the football season. For Lutherans, the month of October has a much deeper meaning than merely a season, school, or sports. It's the month when we sing those great hymns "Thy Strong Word," "A Mighty Fortress is our God" and "Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word." We look forward to singing these great hymns because we appreciate and are eager to remember and celebrate the re-formation of the teachings of Jesus Christ, known as the Reformation.

Celebrating the Reformation today, involves remembering how and why the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses (arguments) on door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31st, 1517. As an instrument of God Almighty to restore the truth of His Word in the Church of that time to its rightful place, Luther was enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to expose the Roman Catholic Church's error of abandoning the Apostles' teachings (doctrine) granted to them by Christ Himself. His argument was based on that which had become evident in the Roman Catholic Church's false doctrine and practices that had progressed over 1500 years since Christ's Ascension.

This abomination of error involved both no longer following the Word of God taught in its truth and purity, nor administering the sacraments according to Christ's institution by faithful Bishops, presbyters, elders, who had been granted the Office of the Keys. Because the Word of God, Jesus Christ,

the Solid Rock, was no longer their sole source of doctrine and practice, Sabbath after Sabbath, people throughout the world were accustomed to hearing about paying money for the forgiveness of sins; to paying money to get their dead relatives sprung out of that imaginary place called purgatory (a place between heaven and hell where people were taught they would remain at death until their sins had been atoned by their families charities and good works,). In addition, the people were instructed to methodically pray the Lord's Prayer, and the Rosary over and over again to make up for past sins.

These two heresies are only but a fraction of the false doctrine that was being taught and confessed as 'truth.' No longer were people hearing about the amazing grace of God the Father, who sacrificed His only begotten Son to atone for the sins of the world. As a result, people were threatened daily with guilty hearts, and were seduced into submitting to the power of Rome and the Office of the Papacy for their hope, which is why Luther himself called the office of the pope, the "antichrist."

One may ask, how could such a terrible falling away from the truth of the Apostles' teaching happen in an established church? How could so many people be led away from the good news of Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection granting the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life? How could that which God had established to remain until the end of time, disappear as a precious treasure? The answer is no great mystery, but simply another truth which comes in one word: Satan!

Since from the completion of creation, Satan has always and will always attempt to hide, mutate, corrupt, and pervert the Word of God to deceive mankind into being committed to his evil ways verses the Triune God. That is truth! We see evidence of

this truth when Jesus identifies Satan working through God's chosen people, the children of Israel, who like the leaders in the Roman Catholic Church, were deceived into believing they could belong to God the Father, yet abandoned His Word, Jesus Christ and His teachings. Adamantly, the Jews continually argued they were still children of Abraham, even while rejecting the very person of Jesus Christ, who was the promised Messiah. As a result, they never heeded Jesus teachings. In verses 42 through 44 in the Gospel of John, chapter 8, we read, Jesus responds to their rejection, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Just as Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan into believing they could be God's children, and abandon His Word, so were the Jews of Galatia. Here we see the results of that initial deception recorded in Genesis as sin was passed on from one generation to the next. Recalling when sin entered the world, with the curse of death, and the rule of Satan, leaving mankind spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God, the children of Israel, as well as the Roman Catholic Church were left with their own resources to battle Satan's deceiving questions "Did God really say?"

That's how it happened. That's how the terrible falling away from the truth of the Apostles' teaching happen in an established church. The Word of Truth was abandoned for a lie, leaving man to his own sinful heart and mind to determine what is truth. However, God is more powerful than Satan.

In the midst of this darkness of sin, death, and shame that plagues mankind, there was also a promised Word of life, a life involving hope and salvation. This promised Word of life first came to Adam and Eve, erasing their guilt and shame, and

restoring them in a right relationship with their Creator for all eternity in the words spoken to Satan as recorded in Genesis 3:15 which read, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Yes, the promise of a Gospel-Savior to come, would destroy the rule Satan ushered in. That was and always is man's Word of Hope. That Word of Hope is the Light of the world; the Light to which John the Baptist bore witness. That Light is Jesus Christ, who came to bring life and salvation that all through Him might believe and be saved from sin, death, and the power of the devil forever. That promise is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, die and was buried. Yet on the third day He rose from the dead victorious, and now sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead, as Scriptures teach, and Lutherans confess,

That same Gospel message of a promise-fulfilled in, with, and through the person of Jesus Christ, found its way into the heart of one lonely, guilt ridden monk, by the name of Martin Luther, who was trying to satisfy God with his works and appease His wrath as he was taught to do. While reading and studying the Holy Scriptures Luther in the early 1500s, he came upon the passages from Romans 1:23-26 which reads, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be

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just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

That message of the Gospel created saving faith into Luther’s heart in the same way as saving faith is worked into the heart of every one of the Christ’s followers; namely, through the creative power of the Word of God. That gift of faith worked into the heart of Luther through the Word of God, worked the same reforming action as it did in the one-time destroyer of the Christian faith whose name was Saul, whom we know today as the Apostle Paul. Look at the reformation which took place as Saint Paul was inspired to write, in Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *‘The just shall live by faith.’*” We also can read of this reforming action in Galatians 2:16: “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

Saint Paul was inspired to write those words in a letter to the Church at Galatia, warning the faithful against falling to the temptation of the Jews who still believed they could be God’s people and abandon the truth of the person Jesus and His teachings (doctrine) that man is justified apart from the law by faith. Exposing this heresy, you could say Saint Paul “posted his theses” in Galatians 1:6–9, saying, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

Like St. Paul, Dr. Martin Luther was only witnessing to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and warning the people for the sake of their souls in the posting of the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Like St. Paul, Luther was convinced by the power of the Holy Spirit that false teachings regarding God’s Word and the beautiful gift of grace were being stolen out from under the people’s noses of Germany via the Roman Catholic Church and the Office of the Papacy.

The rest is history. Those Living by faith, through the power of God’s creative Word, like St. Paul and Luther, boldly continued to speak out against the false teachings and practices within the established church. Did Dr. Luther wish to establish a new church? No! Only restore it to the truth and practice that which had been given by Christ to the Apostles, the Truth of God’s Word, so all men might be saved, and come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Reformation history tells us that Satan did not lie idle to this Word of God proclaimed. Luther, like Saint Paul, suffered persecution after persecution through the establish church of their times as was prophesied by Jesus Himself in John 15:20: “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” Yes, Luther, like Paul, was forced out of the established church of his day and labeled a heretic, along with anyone who followed his teachings. Sarcastically those followers were labeled “Lutherans.”

Oh, yes, “keep the Word” they did. And soon others followed, as faithful servants do, serving their Lord and Master at all costs. As a result, they studied and studied the Word of God, and over the course of some 50 years, a confession of all times, which we know today as the Lutheran Confessions, or the Book of Concord, came into existence, and declared a clear explication of God’s Holy Word. That means being labeled a “Lutheran,” or receiving threats of persecution did not scare them away from the truth of God’s Holy Word. Instead, it made them even more bold to write publicly for all to read as we can

see in the very last paragraph of the Book of Concord (FC SD, XII, 40), a statement that describes their assurance and their doctrinal certainty:

“Therefore, it is our intent to give witness before God and all Christendom, among those who are alive today and those who will come after us, that the explanation here set forth regarding all the controversial articles of faith which we have addressed and explained—and no other explanation—is our teaching, faith, and confession. In it we shall appear before the judgment throne of Jesus Christ, by God’s grace, with fearless hearts and thus give account of our faith, and we will neither secretly nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it. Instead, on the strength of God’s grace we intend to abide by this confession.”

Here we observe that those who wrote and signed the Lutheran Confessions were not merely settling debates or controversies, or expressing mere opinions, or devising new and clever doctrinal formulations. They were confessing the saving faith worked in them by the powerful creating Word of God; the same Word which enabled them to express their determination never to depart from that confession.

We can be so thankful that these early Reformation believers took their stand as in the presence of God and boldly professed their very salvation on the doctrine they confessed. In fact, so confident were they of their position, so certain of their doctrine, that they showed their willingness to submit themselves not only to the content but to the very phrases of their confession by saying, “We have determined not to depart even a finger’s breadth either from the subjects themselves, or from the phrases which are found in [the Confessions]” (Preface of the Book of Concord, quoted from *Concordia Triglotta* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1921], p. 23). Why such a response? Because they did not rely on their own hearts or minds for their confession of truth, but that which was based solely on the Word of God alone—Jesus Christ.

As we celebrate another Reformation, may each of us not only thank God for being called

Lutherans and for our rich heritage; but for that same creative powerful Word of God, in Christ Jesus which is at work still today through the faithful men in the Office of the Ministry, preaching God’s Holy Word in all its truth and purity, and administering the Sacraments according to Christ’s institution. Rejoice! To God be the glory.

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Describing the Church as a ‘remnant’ isn’t an affectation, it is a realization that the Church remains what she always must in this fallen world. Therefore, we celebrate Reformation Day not with a worldly triumphalism—as if, somehow, the Reformation was a work of man, and victory by our own hands—but with joy in the Lord, who graciously preserves His little flock in the midst of the temptations and threats of the world.

This is why only a handful of faithful congregations and pastors can be found in nations such as Finland, Ukraine, Sweden, Russia, Denmark, Norway, and Germany. There are many who call themselves “Christian”—or even “Lutheran”—but there remain very, very few who actually uphold the historic faith, purely confessed, on the basis of God’s holy Word.

The Church is the Lord’s work, not ours, and so we can’t be disappointed with what He is doing. I give thanks to the Lord for the brethren whom the Lord has added to our fellowship, for the contacts which we have had thus far with others who desire to remain faithful throughout our land and in other nations.

As I have opportunity to visit the congregations served by members of our diocese, I rejoice that the Lord has preserved His Church. I marvel that even as our pastors suffer slander and insults, still there are those who even now make application to join their ranks. This is God’s work—not ours—just as what is taught is His Word, not ours.

Defend Thy truth, O God, and stay

This evil generation;

And from the error of its way

Keep Thine own congregation.

The wicked everywhere abound

And would Thy little flock confound;

But Thou art our Salvation. (TLH 260:6)

“Remarkable!”

A Sermon for the Festival of the Reformation

Rev. Jeffrey A. Ahonen
Deacon, Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, Texas
Mission Pastor, Saint Henry Lutheran Mission, Montreal, Wisconsin

1 Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. 2 The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD. 3 Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. (2 Kings 23:1-3)

All the elders, priests, and prophets. All the men of Judah. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem. All the people, both small and great. “All the people took a stand for the covenant.” That really is remarkable: “All the people took a stand for the covenant.”

It is remarkable, because there was no earthly reason to expect such a thing.

The leader of this stand is a rather young man, a young pup of only twenty-six years old. How does he garner the respect of all of the much older—and much more life-experienced—men and women? That is remarkable.

This leader also has not been in a position of influence for very long. He inherited the royal throne at the age of eight when his father, the king, died, but his royal advisors ruled over the kingdom for him until recently, when he became old enough to reign on his own. How, then, does a rather new ruler garner the support of all of the subjects of the kingdom, from the great and powerful to the meek and lowly? That is remarkable.

And this leader is setting on its head the entire religious establishment of the empire. Two generations earlier, during the reign of his

grandfather as king, the teaching of the Christian faith was corrupted. Worship of idols—which is nothing less than devil worship—was allowed and encouraged in the temple of God in Jerusalem. The very First Commandment of God—“You shall have no other gods before me, in my presence”—was violated in God’s very own house. And this blasphemous worship was continued during the next generation, and the reign of the next king of Judah. How is it, then, that the hearts of all the people were turned back to true Christian faith and worship under the leadership of the grandson and the son of the previous two kings, both of whom were antichrists? Yes, that is remarkable!

And yet it did happen. Remarkably! Against all human expectations—under the leadership of a youth, under the reign of young king, running against the well-entrenched religious establishment! All the elders, priests, and prophets; all the men of Judah; all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; all the people, both small and great; all the people took a stand for the covenant!

It is remarkable, because there was no earthly reason to expect such a thing. Only by divine intervention, the gracious intervention of God, can such a thing happen.

That is the story of the Reformation of the Church in every generation.

Move forward in history twenty one centuries from the days of young King Josiah. Move North from the City of Jerusalem to the City of Wittenberg, Germany. Then and there, we again encounter a most remarkable thing, remarkable because there was no earthly reason to expect such a thing to happen, to expect to hear the bold words: “Here I stand.”

“Here I stand,” spoken collectively by a group

of men and women under the leadership of a young man who was a relatively young 34 years old when he nailed his Ninety Five Theses to the door of Castle Church and unwittingly launched a reformation of the Church, the State, society, and the world. How does he garner the respect of so many older—and more life-experienced—men and women? That is remarkable.

“Here I stand,” spoken collectively not only by paupers but by princes, under the influence of a man who had been ordained into the priesthood a mere ten years earlier and had spent his nine-year-long academic career as a professor of theology at a university of little prestige in a small town in Germany. How, then, does he garner the support of unschooled men in the lower strata of society as well as well-educated men who risked their royal titles and political positions and all of their worldly possessions? That is remarkable.

“Here I stand,” spoken first by himself, all alone, against the entire religious establishment of the empire. During earlier generations, the teaching of the Christian faith had become corrupted. Slowly, subtly, and with “good intentions,” false doctrine took a place alongside true doctrine. The central teaching of the Holy Scriptures—that we sinners are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ’s atonement alone—was perverted to say that sinners are saved on account of Christ’s good work plus man’s good works. The very Gospel, the Good News of salvation by grace alone through faith alone was condemned as false doctrine by the Church of Rome. How is it that the heart of a priest who pledged his allegiance to the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, was turned back to true Christian faith and worship in spite of the threats of excommunication and death under the orders of the Antichrist? Yes, that is remarkable!

And yet it did happen. Remarkably! Against all human expectations—under the leadership of a young man who was reluctant to lead, under the guidance of a relatively green doctor of theology at an obscure German university, against the only

church in town, The Church of the Holy Roman Empire! Remarkably, what began in Wittenberg on October 31, A.D. 1517, very quickly spread throughout the whole world. The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther’s rediscovery of the Good News of salvation by grace alone through faith alone on account of Christ alone, and his bold confession of this truth to the Church and the future pastors of the Church, theology students from every European country, made Luther seem to be like the very angel described in Revelation 14:6, “flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” Soon, Luther’s solitary voice was joined by men and women and children from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, giving thanks to God for His free gifts of forgiveness and salvation and new life, a new life marked by the bold Lutheran confession, “Here I stand.”

And, again, only by divine intervention, the gracious intervention of God, could such a thing have happened.

That is the story of the Reformation of the Church in every generation.

Move forward in history to the Twenty-First Century—our own. Move West from the Northern Europe to North America. Here and now, we again encounter a most remarkable thing, remarkable because there is no earthly reason to expect such a thing to happen.

Or will we?

For there are good earthly reasons that speak against such a thing happening. The devil remains as crafty as ever, quietly and subtly sneaking errors into the Church, leading us to change the eternal Word that God has written for us in His Scriptures. The unbelieving world urges us to follow their ways of choosing our theological leaders, telling us that such leadership has nothing to do with faithfulness

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Deacon, Missionary Installed at Salem Lutheran

There was cause for much celebration at Salem Lutheran Church as Rev. Jeffrey A. Ahonen was installed as deacon of Salem Lutheran Church of Malone on Sunday, June 24. The installation was conducted by Bishop Heiser.

Rev. Ahonen will serve in a part-time capacity at Salem, with his primary responsibility being planting mission congregations.

A 2001 graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Ahonen was ordained on August 5, 2001, and served as pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Garland, Texas and St. John's Lutheran Church in Ladysmith, Wisconsin prior to his call to serve at Salem.

Rev. Ahonen is now serving a three-point mission, with services and Bible studies in Winter and Tony, Wisconsin and Ironwood, Michigan. (Please see page 16 for service and study times and locations, as well as contact information.) Beginning October 21, weekly Matins services will begin tak-



Deacon Jeffrey and Mrs. Mariann Ahonen

ing place in Tony, with the Divine Service in Ironwood every Sunday evening.

In addition to his responsibilities as deacon and missionary, Rev. Ahonen continues his work as a paralegal.

For more information on the St. Henry Lutheran Mission, please contact Rev. Ahonen at (715) 403-1433, or SaintHenry@mac.com. Finan-

cial support for the mission may be sent care of Salem Lutheran Church.



Service location for Tony, Wisconsin



Luncheon at Salem following Installation Service



Bible Class in Winter, Wisconsin

Bishop Visits Christ our Redeemer Lutheran Church

On October 7, Bishop Heiser conducted his first Visitation of Christ our Redeemer Lutheran Church (Trenton, MI), preaching during the 9:30 A.M. Divine Service, and leading a “Questions and Answers” session following lunch which addressed a wide variety of topics, including mission opportunities within the diocese, plans for a seminary, issues confronting the local parish. Pastor Raitz and his family—together with all the members of Christ our Redeemer—were very welcoming, and the visit was quite enjoyable, and gave an opportunity for the bonds of our fellowship to be strengthened.

This was the third Visitation which Bishop Heiser has conducted this year, the other two taking place at St. Boniface (Niles, MI) in January, and Christ (Richmond, MO) in April.

‘Visitations’ are an important part of the oversight responsibility of the office of bishop. The first Lutheran Visitation took place in Elec-



toral Saxony in Germany in 1528 under the supervision of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon—a year before Luther wrote the catechisms, and two years before the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession! Visitations have been a regular part of the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church ever since, although they have suffered neglect in modern times. In some synods, Visitations are conducted by a ‘circuit counselor’ or ‘circuit visitor’ on behalf of the district president or bishop. Within the ELDoNA, we stress the importance of such Visitation as a key element of our “walking together” in fellowship, and the Visitations are part of the responsibility of the bishop.

Visitations offer an opportunity: (a) to examine the practices of the parishes of the diocese, (b) to confer with the pastor and other leaders within the congregation regarding the life of the parish, (c) to meet with the congregation as a whole, addressing any questions they have regarding the diocese, and (d) for the bishop to offer counsel to the pastors of the diocese.



Ahonen from Page 7

to the Word of God and to the Confessions of the Church, but measures such “leadership qualities” in terms appropriate perhaps for business and industry and government but not for the Church. And even our own sinful flesh works against us, leading us to follow blindly our religious leaders without looking to see whether they are taking their stand on Christ alone and His grace alone and faith alone and all of the articles of the everlasting Gospel.

So then, will we encounter on this day in this place a people, all of whom are willing to take a stand? Will we find here today Christians who are willing to take a stand for the covenant—the new covenant—the New Testament—of Christ Jesus? Will we find here today Lutherans who will, with Luther and the other confessors of the one true catholic and apostolic Church, stand upon the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and boldly profess: “Here I stand!”

Of course we will! For God graciously continues His remarkable work among us!

This was His good intention from the very moment in eternity that God by His grace chose to give His Only-Begotten Son, Christ Jesus, for the sins of all, that whoever believes in Him through faith has everlasting life. That God so loves us sinners unconditionally that He would place upon His Son our sins and punish Him with death in our place is remarkable indeed—as remarkable as Jesus’ resurrection from the dead on the third day!

And the ways in which God surely and certainly delivers the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection to us—even this very day—is, again, remarkable. Your Baptism was not only a washing with water but also with the Word that God has attached to that water, so that in your Baptism, the Holy Spirit has poured upon you the flood of His grace and has created within you the faith that trusts in Christ alone for the forgiveness and salvation and new life. Your confession this morning was the work

of God’s own Holy Spirit, remarkably moving your mouth not only in your contrite profession of your sins but also in your bold profession of your faith in the pronouncement of the grace of God upon you and in the forgiveness of all of your sins for the sake of the bitter, innocent, suffering death of God’s beloved Son, Jesus Christ. And your communion this morning is with Christ Jesus Himself, Who comes to us and into us in His very Body and Blood, remarkably hidden under the bread and the wine, delivering the forgiveness that He alone earned for us, strengthening our faith in Him, and granting us grace to take our stand on Him and His covenant—a one-party contract in which God has pledged His grace—His unconditional love—encouraging us to believe it by faith.

“All the people took a stand for the covenant.” On this 490th anniversary of the Reformation of the Church, let us give thanks to God for enabling us all to make such a remarkable confession of faith in Him. Let us pray that Christ Jesus makes us ever willing to take a stand for him over against all antichrists. Let us continue to strive to make the good confession before God and before men, that we may ever carry, without shame, the name of Lutheran on our churches, knowing that it is here where is found the marks of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church—Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone.

“Here I stand! I can do no other. God help me.” Amen.



***Luther burning the Papal Bull
of Excommunication***

Hudson from Page 15

an un-changed Holy Scripture, that we can only find the “true visible aspect of the Bride of the Christ” where these particular “marks” are found. If the word has been changed, such that homosexuality is simply a personal choice and not a most grievous sin; that women can enter a pulpit and speak for God the Holy Trinity; that most of the Bible is myth; that evolution is the way the earth was made; and that anything may be used in the Sacraments of Baptism of the Holy Lord’s Supper other than what He established, then that congregation, and that church body is not part of the true visible Church! And remember, the doctrine of the church body to which the congregation holds membership in, is by the individual remaining in that fellowship, the doctrine of each individual as well!

The festival of the Reformation should remind us not only about a man named Martin Luther, but also the truth that the struggle for the maintenance of pure doctrine and practice has never ceased, nor can it, for what is at stake is nothing less than the glory rightly due the only Lord and Savior of the world, the Resurrected Jesus of Nazareth. We are so blessed, and so privilege to be both aware of this fact as part of the true Christian life, and also to be a part of it. Out of thankfulness and love not to Luther, for he would have no part of that, but to Jesus, we want to and are determined to keep His word pure, and unchanged, just as He has entrusted it into our care. We want to and are determined to keep His Holy Sacraments as He has entrusted them into our care, that they might continue to do their salvific work in our lives! This is what the Most High has promised to do, if, if we remain faithful.

And so dear saints, we do indeed have so much to be thankful for. We are indeed thankful to Martin Luther, and for those who supported and agreed with him as well. But more importantly, we are thankful to the Holy Trinity for He has consistently, through the passing of the ages, in spite of the best efforts of Satan and sin-blinded men and women, provided what is needful for the salvation

of the faithful remnant of this New Testament age as well. This is what the Reformation is really all about — being faithful, not to the ideas and whims of sin-afflicted mankind, but to the will and word of the only true God, the Holy Trinity! Thank God the eternal Father, the *Incarnated and Resurrected* only-begotten Son and the Holy Ghost, that together, as three Persons and yet one true and eternal God, He will continue to provide all that is necessary so that we are enabled to continue to remain faithful not to Luther, or the other reformers, or the multitudes of other saints who have preceded us, but to the God that they all *believed, taught and confessed*, and obtained salvation from, the Holy Trinity. Amen.



NEWS FROM CHRIST LUTHERAN (RICHMOND, MO)—Alvina Janssen, a member of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church (Richmond, MO) recently celebrated her 95th birthday. By the grace of the Lord she continues to live on her own and is very faithful in attending the Divine Services.

Editorial Policy: the views and opinions expressed in all articles are those of their authors, and not necessarily those of the *Lutheran Herald* or its editors and are subject to revision by the editors. Please direct all correspondence and submissions to LutheranHerald@aol.com

Salem Hosts Diocesan Synod and Theological Colloquium

On August 28 and 29, Salem Lutheran Church hosted the second annual synod of the ELDoNA and the theological colloquium. The synod is the annual conference of our diocese, during which the pastors have an opportunity to confer on matters which concern the entire diocese.

There were several significant issues for discussion at this year's synod: preliminary plans for a seminary, contacts with overseas confessional Lutheran churches, and discussions with the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLIC). In addition, parish reports were offered for each of the congregations served by the pastors of the diocese, and the bishop offered a report on his official duties of the past year, including oversight of colloquies.

The brethren were pleased to welcome two new members of the diocese at this year's synod: **Rev. Mark Raitz** and **Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen**.

Rev. Raitz serves as Pastor of Christ our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Trenton, Michigan, and Rev. Ahonen serves as Deacon of Salem Lutheran Church (Malone, TX) and home missionary for St.



Pastors conferring during the Colloquium



Some of the wonderful members of Salem who took care of the pastors during the conference



Rev. Michael Henson (Ind.) spoke to the Colloquium at the troubles in the LCMS

Närhi of the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland (STLK) and from Pres. Hans Asha of the India National Lutheran Church (INLC). It is anticipated that Bishop Heiser may travel to Finland and India within the next year for fellow-

Henry Lutheran Mission (Wisconsin and Michigan). Rev. Raitz had been serving as an Independent Lutheran pastor (although formerly he served in the LCMS), and Rev. Ahonen colloquized into the ELDoNA from the LCMS. Several more colloquies are pending at this time, and more will be reported at a later date.

Bishop Heiser read letters of greetings from President Kimmo



Dr. Heimbigner (LCMS) addressing the Colloquium.

ship discussions, and the need for funds for such trips was discussed.

The most extended discussion of the synod concerned the seminary proposal and the response to questions from the ACLC. The proposal for a three-year seminary program—utilizing a resident headmaster and a rotation of pastors of the diocese—met with general acclamation from the attending pastors and visitors. Much more work remains to be done in terms of refining the course descriptions and required readings. There is also a need to begin raising funds prior to starting the seminary.

Rev. Robert Lawson (St. Paul-Escondido, CA) was present on behalf of the ACLC. The diocese presented and discussed an official response to questions from the ACLC on matters of nomenclature and polity. It is anticipated that the ELDoNA will have representatives at the next free conference sponsored by the ACLC and OLCCIC.

Attendance at the synod and colloquium was approximately twice that of last year's meeting. All the attendees were quite grateful to the members of Salem for the generosity and care which they extended to our guests.

SYNODS, DIOCESES, AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH: Sometimes people are confused by the various terms which are used to describe the structure and meetings of a church. There are several church bodies in North America which currently call themselves “synods.” **However, properly speaking, a “synod” is a meeting, not an organization.** The term “diocese” describes an territory which is overseen by a bishop. And therefore the term diocese has been retained by Lutheran churches in Europe and elsewhere which retain the historic grades of ministry—bishop, pastor, deacon—within the Church. Therefore, strictly speaking, “dioceses have synods,” or, “synods are meetings of dioceses.” To talk about a “synod” having a “convention” gives a new meaning to the term “synod”.



Rev. Robert Lawson (Escondido, CA) was present at the Synod on behalf of the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches (ACLC). The diocese gave an official reply to a series of questions from the ACLC regarding various issues of practices. The full text of questions and answers are available on the ELDoNA website. An on-going dialog has been established between the diocese and the ACLC, with Bishop Heiser and Deacon Ahonen attending the last ACLC free conference, Rev. Lawson attending our synod, and Bishop Heiser planning to attend and speak at the next ACLC free conference.



On behalf of the members of St. Boniface, Pr. Rutowicz presented Bp. Heiser with the generous gift of a mitre.



At dinner following the Colloquium

The Enduring Reformation

Rev. C. D. Hudson
Pastor, Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church
Richmond, MO

At the end of this month, the Lord willing, we will commemorate once again the festival of the Reformation. There are many reasons why this particular church festival is of importance—not the least of which is the fact that we are the direct spiritual descendents of the man who, out of love for the Holy Trinity and a consuming concern for the salvation of souls, began it. Moved by a conviction of faith which was stronger than his fear of the church authorities, he began to dare to question and then openly challenged many of the doctrines and practices of the church of Rome, which at that time held absolute control over the spiritual life of all the Christians in Western Europe. His name, of course, was Martin Luther. We thank God the Holy Trinity for the conviction of faith He gave to Luther, for he had become thoroughly convinced, on the basis of the clear teaching of Holy Scripture that we are “saved” from the consequences of all our sins and thereby “justified” before God only by grace through faith in the Passion of Jesus, not by our own works—the latter being what the Roman church has been teaching for centuries, and continues to do so!

Unfortunately, what has happened through the passing of time since the Reformation is the loss of an understanding that what Luther did was not unique in the life of the Bride of the Christ. Yes, we have every reason to be most thankful that he had the courage to do and say what he did, but I suggest it is just as important to recognize that his was not a unique act. This is not in any way to take away any credit from Luther, for both his conviction and courage were indeed exceptional. It is important, however, to put his struggle into its proper historical context, for his struggle was in fact that of the faithful of each generation of the saints.

Way back at the very beginning of the New Testament aspect of the Bride of the Christ, another

man of great faith and conviction—a man named Paul—was moved by God the Holy Ghost to write these words: “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from **the** (emphasis mine) faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and the doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, ..” (1 Timothy 4:1–2). The intrusion of teachers who taught false doctrine and practice into the Church began almost as soon as the Apostles began their first various missionary journeys. And so it has continued up until and most certainly including our time.

And so, in a very real way, the struggle of Martin Luther is your struggle and mine as well. The struggle to maintain pure doctrine and practice within the life of the Church didn’t end with the “conclusion” of the Reformation, for it can’t, because the ultimate source of all false doctrine and practice is always Satan. His attack on the Church Catholic has not only *not subsided* through the passing of the millennia, but it also has in fact *greatly increased*—especially in the last hundred years or so. When we read some of the words which Paul was divinely moved by the Holy Trinity to write in his second epistle to Timothy, we tend to think all too quickly, “yes, that’s the way it is”: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1–5). Indeed, this is the way it is not only in much of American society today, but also in most of Western Europe as well!

As we celebrate and commemorate the Reformation we are commemorating and celebrating a very long long list of faithful saints who did, in their own time, the same thing as did Martin Luther, and for the same reason. Over the past two millennia multitudes of the faithful have, often at great peril to themselves, put a stylus to parchment or pen to paper to contend for the true teaching of Holy Scripture. What is most amazing is the fact that the basis of their actions was the same: a love for the *Incar-nated* only-begotten Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, and what He had done, having made *Atonement* for the sins of the world through His own suffering, death and resurrection three days later. The forgiveness which Jesus won not for Himself (for He never sinned), but for sinners everywhere for all time, is what has moved the faithful of every passing generation of sin-afflicted and dying mankind to contend for the faith “once given to the saints,” the faith with which each one of you have been so richly blessed! So many of the faithful who sacrificed so much, even limb or life, in a struggle to keep the doctrine of the Church pure are known but to God. But dear saints, make no mistake about it, we owe a great debt to each one of them. The Lutheran reformers knew this so well and quite properly accepted this as an important part of the worship and faith life of the saints. That’s why they put a specific article in the Augsburg Confession dealing with this topic. No, we are not to pray to these saints, that they might intercede for us (as is taught by the church of Rome), but we are to remember them and their sacrifices and learn from their faithfulness. Their faith-life can indeed be used as a model or pattern for our own spiritual lives in many ways.

The Lutheran Reformers were not “Roman” but “Catholic” — that is “universal”—Christians. They were not “Lutherans” because they chose to follow the teaching, the doctrine of Martin Luther. They were “Lutherans” because that was where the ancient, Catholic and Apostolic faith, in both doctrine and practice, was to be found! And so it is with us. We are not “American Lutherans,” we are Lutherans who live in America! The Christian doc-

trine that marks our spiritual life and of necessity our worship life as well is not that created or dreamed up by Luther nor any of the other Lutheran Reformers, no matter how prominent they might be! Ours is the doctrine and practice of the ancient, Catholic and Apostolic Church herself for this is what “historic” Lutheranism is. This is why I have over the years struggled to consistently specify the “type” or “kind” of Lutheranism I was referring to. The sad truth is that what has happened in the life of so much of the visible aspect of the Church has, as most of you know so well, certainly happened within most of Lutheranism as well.

It is of great importance to remember that the “Lutheran Reformation” occurred because of necessity! Pureness of doctrine in relation to the most fundamental tenants of the true Christian faith had been cast aside, buried under the laws and rules of sinful men by the time the Reformation began! The Bible had long ceased being the “rule and norm” for all issues of doctrine and life. The Reformers were determined to let Holy Scripture serve the purpose for which it had been divinely given, to be that “rule and norm” for all issues of doctrine and life. Tragically, Holy Scripture is once again being “set aside,” only this time through the process of denying much of its “authenticity,” and thereby emptying it, from a human point of view, of most of its “authority!” We see the tragic consequences of this sinful act all around us, not only in the pagan culture but also in the lives of so many who contend they are Christian.

The “Festival of the Reformation” might in our time very well be called the “festival of thankfulness.” This festival should bring to our mind the reality that we still have in our midst, by divine grace, that which so many Christians no longer have, “*The word preached in its purity and the Sacraments distributed according to the Christ’s institution.*” This is no trivial matter, for that confession which we have made our own, the *Book of Concord*, asserts most clearly, and that on the basis of what is revealed in the pages of

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NEWS FROM CHRIST LUTHERAN (RICHMOND, MO)—Logan Thomas Panasiewicz was baptized by God the Holy Trinity on July 22, 2007.

In the picture are dad and mom, Jon-Thomas and Stacey, with Logan's sister Payton. Also Pastor Hudson and Elder Bobby Chowning.

NEWS FROM SALEM LUTHERAN (MALONE, TX)—Salem had its annual Vacation Bible School August 5 through 9. This is the third year that the congregation has used the programs produced by *Pax Domini* Press, and the materials continue to be consistently biblical, and enjoyed by the teachers and youth.



The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

“What’s in a Name?”

There are a number of names which have been used by American Lutheran Church bodies to identify themselves, including, at present:

Evangelical Lutheran *Church* in America
Evangelical Lutheran *Synod*
Concordia Lutheran *Conference*
Fellowship of Lutheran Congregations
Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
Orthodox Lutheran *Alliance*

The pastors who make up our diocese elected to use the name “Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America” rather than a name similar to those above for several reasons. We trust that the “Evangelical Lutheran” part is self-explanatory, as being in keeping with our *quia* subscription to the Book of Concord (1580). Also, the territorial description—“of North America”—designates the location of our parishes, as they are rather widely dispersed throughout the United States, and may be more so, in the years to come. But most question we receive are regarding the word “diocese,” and so we offer the following explanation:

1. The self-designation of “church” for such an organization is grandiose, and takes away from the primary biblical sense of the term “church” is applied to the assembly of pastor and congregation, in which the Word is preached, and Sacraments administered.

2. The term “synod” is not, properly speaking, the name of an *organization*, but of a *meeting* of pastors. Thus all the old “synods”—e.g., Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, Iowa Synod, Texas Synod—were named for where the meetings took place (at least at first).

Church bodies hold “synods” (meetings)—they are not themselves “synods.”

3. Terms such as “association,” “fellowship,” “alliance,” and “conference” are terms which carry more secular association than ecclesiastical and are not descriptive of the polity of the body. (This doesn’t mean such names are ‘wrong’—just not essentially ecclesiastical terminology.)

4. The term “diocese” has been retained by Lutherans in Europe and elsewhere who have retained the historic polity of the Church: bishops, pastors, and deacons. It is also a term readily recognizable to Christians of other denominations, such as Methodists, Epis-

copalians, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics, which share variations of this same polity.

The term “diocese” is an ancient one, going back to Greek and Roman usage. As Dr. Totten (St. Laurence Lutheran Church) has observed:

“Diocese” is an alteration of the Greek word *dioikésis*, literally “housekeeping” or “administration,” which was used as the name of an administrative district or province in the Roman Empire. It is derived from the verb *dioikeó*, “to keep house” or “to administer,” which appears in Greek translations of the Old Testament in 1 Kings 20:27. There it describes the provisions an army of Israel made before it successfully defeated the arrogant, numerically superior army of the Arameans under Ben-hadad. The mocking of the Lord as “a god of the mountains but not of the valleys” in 20:28 parallels the slander of historic Christian theology and worship as an idealistic dream world which has no practical benefits. In 20:29, God’s true power is vindicated through His people “on the seventh day.” According to the Wisdom of Solomon (15:1), God governs the entire universe as a diocese: “You, our God, are kind and true, patient, and administering all things in mercy.”

Wherever there are bishops, there are dioceses. This polity was adopted early in the history of the Church that it is found in the generation after the apostles, and remained essentially universally the polity of the Church. Certainly, the definition of the office of bishop has varied widely in usage in the history of the Church; we adhere to the description of that office set forth in the various documents of the Book of Concord: a particular grade of the one, divinely-established office of the holy ministry. All such ‘grades’ of human designation—especially the grades of bishop, pastor, and deacon—are all within this one office, and the call and labors of the bishop are fundamentally the same as other grades, with such distinctions of responsibility as are afforded to this grade for purposes of good order in the Church.



The Seal of The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America:

As Evangelical Lutherans, we retain the “rose” of Dr. Martin Luther, which the Reformer created to summarize the central teaching of Justification by grace through faith. The Jerusalem Cross in the center of the rose signifies the five wounds of Christ (His hands, His feet, and His side). The words “Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum” (“The Word of God endures Forever”) have been emblazoned on Lutheran banners, shields and standards since the time of John the Steadfast (1468–1532), the Elector of Saxony, who stood with the Reformers at the time of the Augsburg Confession. “Concordia A.D. 1580” confesses that our teaching is that of all true Evangelical Lutherans across the generations, the doctrine of the Book of Concord (1580).

Congregations served by Pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America (ELDoNA)

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church
4H Building
Ray County Fairgrounds
Richmond, Missouri 64085
Pastor C. D. Hudson
Phone: (660) 259-2728
Sunday: Divine Service 9:30 a.m.; Christian Ed. 10:45 a.m.

Christ our Redeemer Lutheran Church
2619 Superior (“Superior Place”)
Trenton, Michigan 48183
Pastor Mark Raitz
Phone: (313) 278-4091
Sunday: Divine Service 9:30 a.m.; Bible Study 10:30 a.m.

Saint Boniface Evangelical Lutheran Church
meeting at:
104 N. 3rd Street
Niles, Michigan
Pastor John Rutowicz
Phone: (269) 683-5169

Saint Henry Lutheran Mission
meeting at:
Winter, Wisconsin—Large Catechism Study, 6:30-8 p.m.
(Alternating Wednesday Evenings)
Town of Winter Hall—Study of Gospel of Luke,
N4680 Co. W (Winter, WI) 6:30–7:30 p.m., Saturday
Tony, WI— 9:30 a.m. Sunday Service, 10:30 a.m. Study
‘Paradise’ Building, Intersection of North & Maple
Streets, Tony, WI
Ironwood, MI—Divine Service 9 p.m.
Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen
Phone: (715) 403-1433

Saint Laurence Evangelical Lutheran Church
meeting at:
16079 Via Harriet
San Lorenzo, California 94580-1919
Pastor Michael Totten, Ph.D.
Phone: (510) 481-7018
Sunday: Bible Study 9:00 a.m.; Divine Service 10:15 a.m.

Saint Paul Lutheran Church, UAC
323 First Avenue SW
P.O. Box 535 (mailing address)
Taylorsville, North Carolina 28681
Pastor Donald R. Hunter
Phone: (828) 632-2695
Sunday: Sunday School 9:45 a.m.; Divine Service 11 a.m.

Salem Lutheran Church
718 HCR 3424 E
Malone, Texas 76660
Pastor James D. Heiser
Phone: (254) 533-2330
Sunday: Sunday School 9:30 a.m.; Divine Service 10:30 a.m.