

*The*  
*Concordia*  *Lutheran*

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“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105.


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the assembling  
of ourselves  
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—Hebrews 10:25

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**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:**

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture,** what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are *"perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

# The God-Ordained Participation of Christians in the Local Congregation\*

*“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” —Acts 2:42*

[\*This was the title of the doctrinal essay recently delivered by Pastor David T. Mensing and unanimously received by the delegates at the **55<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention** of the Concordia Lutheran Conference, June 23-25, 2006, at St. John’s Lutheran Church, Lebanon, Oregon. For the spiritual benefit and profit of our readers, we will, for this *Concordia Lutheran* article, summarize the application of the theme of this convention, “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” (Hebrews 10:25), as



we selectively quote from this doctrinal essay, as well as the two convention sermons (Friday, June 23, by President Robert J. Lietz and Sunday, June 25, by Pastor Edward J. Worley). The full text of the essay itself and of the two sermons will be found in the *2006 Proceedings*.]

**I**n the prophecy of His servant, Amos, the Lord caused to be penned by inspiration of His Holy Spirit the following earnest warning: “*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it*” (Amos 8:11-12). In these latter days of sore distress, as we see all around us the “*signs of the times*” (Matthew 16:3), we are struck particularly with the dearth of faithful Christians **preaching and teaching** on

the part of those who purport to be His mouthpieces!  
(*Doctrinal Essay*, page 1).

This is a shocking reality taking place before our very eyes!

“*He that **hath** My Word,*” says the Lord through Jeremiah, chapter 23, verse 28, “*let him **speak** My Word faithfully.*” It certainly goes without saying that one cannot preach and teach what he does not have at his disposal. Nevertheless, “*false Christs and false prophets*” (Matthew 24:24) cannot rightfully excuse their unfaithful preaching and teaching with the lame claim that the Word of God in its purity was not available to them. “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away*” (v. 35), said our Lord Jesus (Cf. Isaiah 40:8; I Peter 1:23, 25). The sad, yea, the shocking *irony* is that, in this technologically advanced age, the Word of God is *plentifully* “available,” so that virtually everyone is able to “*have*” it. We now have entire Bibles in print on paper, mass produced and marketed so inexpensively, that literally everyone can well afford to “*have*” his own personal copy of the Scriptures for as little as a dollar! Yes, people “*have*” the Word of God in more plentiful supply than at any other time in the world’s history. But that ready availability of the Scriptures — in whatever format— has not resulted in an equally corresponding use of the Word; nor has the mere availability of God’s precious “*Oracles*” produced more wide-spread understanding of the doctrines which shine forth from its pages. And, more often than not, those whose office it is to “*speak*” the Word speak *about* it, as if they were referring to a textbook or reviewing a best-selling novel. They don’t *cite* Scripture passages as God’s own proof for what they teach, neither do they *expound* Scripture in their preaching in order to set forth to their hearers “*the doctrine which is according to Godliness*” (I Timothy 6:3), the doctrine which rests firmly upon “*the foundation of the apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 2:20). When such “preachers” give only lip-service to Holy Scripture, neither knowing nor understanding —perhaps not even *caring*— what the Word of God actually *says*, is it any wonder that they end up “*teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9), “*with good words and fair speeches deceiv[ing] the hearts of the simple*” (Romans

16:18)?? Indeed, those who speak and use God's Word *UN-faithfully* contribute to the dearth or "*famine*" of the hearing of God's Word, inasmuch as perverted and skewed Scripture is of no profit whatsoever but contributes only to the hearers' "*destruction*" (II Peter 3:16b) (*Doctrinal Essay*, pages 1-2).

Let us remember and not forget these Scriptural words of truth from our God, who cannot and will not lie to us (Titus 1:2).

One truth of Scripture never militates against another truth, for there are no contradictions either in God or in His Word (Numbers 28:19; John 10:35). The blessed truth that the Gospel (and the Sacraments which present and seal to us the promises of the Gospel) are the efficacious *means of grace* in whatever form and venue they are faithfully presented does not detract from or militate against or give cause to despise the blessed truth that God has established the assembly of the local congregation as the only divinely-ordained external fellowship, and that He has ordained that those whom He has *called out* [*ἐκκλησίᾳ*] of darkness into His marvelous light (I Peter 2:9) gladly participate in that local church. Neither does the blessed truth that the *means of grace* are efficacious when used privately detract from, militate against, or give cause to despise His command that His local flocks establish in their midst the pastoral office of public preaching, teaching, and spiritual oversight for the edification of the body of Christ in that place and for the welfare of their individual souls and the souls of their children through the *public* ministration of the Means of Grace (*Doctrinal Essay*, page 3).

These proper distinctions, made in God's Word, will produce proper and God-pleasing practice in regard to the local congregation and the pastoral office.

"But what if I do not have a local congregation to attend with a pastor close by to minister to my needs as God ordains?" Do you really need to ask? God has not ordained any other way. If, by some strange providence you find yourself away from the flock, do the right thing and move to the flock so the pastor can be the shepherd you need. God will bless you when you put His Word and your soul's needs first; He promises and cannot lie (Matthew 6:33)! Choose

the one thing needful that shall never be taken away (Luke 10:42)! Do so because you have tasted the sweet, gracious forgiveness of God in the Gospel. True pastors willingly and lovingly do their duty as God ordains to take care of your soul with God's Word; use them as God has so gifted them to the local congregation. *"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever"* (II Peter 3:17-18) (*Sunday Sermon on I Peter 5:2*, E.J.W., pages 5-6).

This Lord and Savior Jesus Christ most certainly *"is gracious"* (I Peter 2:3) and *"precious"* (I Peter 2:6), especially because with His stripes we were and are *"healed"* (Isaiah 53:5; I Peter 2:24). He is our *"Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"* (I John 2:1-2). His perfect obedience and sacrifice as our Substitute before the heavenly Father is what impels us, as His believing children, **to assemble regularly** with an orthodox, faithful, local congregation, under the faithful, careful oversight of the called pastor of that congregation, in gratitude for the undeserved love of our merciful God and Savior (I John 4:19; II Corinthians 5:14-15),

...no matter what the cost might be for us in dollars and cents, no matter how far away this takes us from our blood relatives who are not in Godly fellowship with us, and no matter how uncertain this may make our future job status, at least in our own eyes. Our dear Savior's instruction and promise are never-changing and ever-comforting: *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness [the righteousness of the Lord Jesus], and all these things [these earthly things] shall be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33) (*Friday Sermon on Acts 2:42*, R.J.L., page 3).

In order to determine *what participation* in the local congregation involves, we need to examine, on the basis of Scripture, what particular *functions* are assigned by God Himself to, and are served by the local Christian *'church'* or congregation as an *assembly* of believers —functions which

cannot be performed by an *individual* believer. What are those functions which, by their very nature, assume the existence of a *group* of Christians? What functions, in other words, using a *contemporary* expression to describe what is going on, what functions are ‘interactive’ and therefore are incapable of being carried out by a believer who is isolated from true brethren? We identify from the words of Scripture the following *group* or interactive functions:

1) God intends and had ordained that His Word not only be read in private study, but that it be *heard* with the ear and thus impressed upon the mind and heart, upon the intellect and will (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 15; Mark 4:9 and 23; Luke 8:8; Revelation 2:7; Isaiah 55:3; Luke 11:28; Romans 10:14b, 17; etc. Compare also Deuteronomy 30:10ff, as well as the frequent admonitions of God’s prophets to “*hear the Word of the Lord*” —e.g. Jeremiah 26:1ff.; etc., etc.).

2) God intends and has ordained that His people *gather together or assemble* with their brethren, not only for the hearing of God’s Word, but for mutual exhortation, instruction, and admonition of one another with the wisdom of Holy Writ (Hebrews 10:25; Colossians 3:16; etc.), with “*the doctrine which is according to Godliness*” (I Timothy 6:3), “*the apostles’ doctrine*” (Acts 2:42). See also II Timothy 3:16, etc., concerning the profitability of Scripture for such “interactive” (and not just individual) functions as “*doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.*”

3) God intends and has commanded that His people “*submit*” themselves to spiritual “*overseers*” and “*watchmen*” for their souls (Hebrews 13:17; I Thessalonians 5:12-13) whom He has placed over them (Acts 20:28) for their souls’ nurture, edification, and safety. That office presupposes the existence of a *group* or *assembly*, the “*church of God*” (Acts 20:28), the “*flock of God*” (I Peter 5:2), and assumes that the individual Christian is not to be his own overseer.

4) God intends and has commanded that in the exercise of the Office of the Keys, particularly in *the admonition of mani-*

*fest and impenitent sinners, not only individuals, not only “one or two more,” but “the church” or local congregation of the brethren be involved (Matthew 18:15-17) for the gaining of a brother from his sins for heaven. (See also James 5:19-20.) Note that the “one or two more” are NOT “the church” in Matthew 18:17, but are the assembly of even more brethren to whom they are to go in a last effort to rescue a sinning brother. Moreover, in the last extremity, when a manifest sinner is “excluded from the Christian congregation” (Luther), this is to be done by the assembled brethren, not merely “one or two” (I Corinthians 5:4-5).*

5) God intends and has ordained that the Holy Sacrament of our Savior’s body and blood be celebrated as the exercise of *brotherly communion* and interaction in the context of the *local congregation* (I Corinthians 10:17; 11:17-21, 33). There is no command and not one instance recorded in Scripture of “self-communion” apart from those who “*come together*” (I Corinthians 11:20); and so-called “private communion” is really the *public* administration of the Sacrament by the Pastor *in private* on behalf and in the name of the entire congregation, not as the exercise of his personal authority and privilege (R.C.).

6) God intends and has ordained that *sacrificial worship and the praise of His holy Name*, both with the voice and with offerings of love, be offered up “*in the congregation*,” that is, in the assembly of His people (Psalm 84; Psalm 66:13-14; Psalm 96:8; Psalm 116:12-14; etc.).

7) God intends and has commanded that His people *give testimony to their unity* in His Word and to their fellowship with one another on the basis of that unity by their joint worship, joint prayer, joint communion, joint church work, joint support of His kingdom, and the practice of joint benevolence, all in the context of the local Christian congregation. Note that the passages which prohibit fraternization with the *heterodox infer* fraternization with the *orthodox* (I Corinthians 1:10; Amos 3:3; Ephesians 4:3; Acts 2:42; II Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 6:6-7; Galatians 6:10; I John 3:17; 4:21; etc.).



8) God intends and has ordained that His people, *congregated*, that is, *assembled together*, as a local “flock,” establish in their midst the *Pastoral Office* as instituted by the Lord of the Church for the care, oversight, and edification of His mystical body, the true believers, and that something is “*lacking*” when this office has not been established (Ephesians 4:11-12; Titus 1:5) (*Doctrinal Essay*, pages 9-10).

Now,

...as believers in the Savior, converted and born again by His rich grace and mercy, **a**) let us continue persistently to persevere by this rich grace in Christ (II Corinthians 8:9) in the right teaching of God’s Word in our congregations, and in nothing but that teaching; **b**) let us continue persistently to persevere, by God’s grace in Christ (I Corinthians 15:10), in our fellowship, partnership, and participation with each other in that right teaching of God’s Word in our local congregations, and not neglect or think lightly of such Godly fellowship in our local churches; **c**) let us persistently persevere, by the rich mercies of our God in Christ (Romans 12:1), in our regular and frequent use of the Lord’s Supper in our congregations as we, by God’s grace, remain in the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3; Psalm 133:1) built on His Word, for the preservation of our saving faith in the Savior; and **d**) let us persistently persevere in our congregational prayers to the throne of God’s grace in Christ Jesus (Hebrews 4:14-16). It is this sweet, rich, wonderful, and everlasting grace of our God in Christ which teaches us, the sheep and lambs of the good Shepherd, “*that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and Godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar [special] people, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:12-14) (*Friday Sermon*, page 4).

—R. J. L.

To Thy temple I repair;  
Lord, I love to worship there  
When within the veil I meet  
Christ before the mercy-seat.

I through Him am reconciled,  
I through Him become Thy child.  
Abba, Father, give me grace  
In Thy courts to seek Thy face.

While Thy glorious praise is sung,  
Touch my lips, unloose my tongue,  
That my joyful soul may bless  
Christ the Lord, my Righteousness.

While the prayers of saints ascend,  
God of Love, to mine attend.  
Hear me, for Thy Spirit pleads;  
Hear, for Jesus intercedes.

While I hearken to Thy Law,  
Fill my soul with humble awe  
Till Thy Gospel bring to me  
Life and immortality.

While Thy ministers proclaim  
Peace and pardon in Thy name,  
Through their voice, by faith, may I  
Hear Thee speaking from the sky.

From Thy house when I return,  
May my heart within me burn  
And at evening let me say,  
"I have walked with God today."

(TLH 2)



# Convention Digest

MOTTO:

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”*

—Hebrews 10:25

The tranquil Willamette Valley, nestled between the Cascades and the Pacific coast, was the site of this year’s **Fifty-Fifth Annual Convention** of the *Concordia Lutheran Conference*. Hosting the convention on the last weekend in June was **St. John’s Lutheran**



**Church** in Lebanon, Oregon, the Rev. M. L. Natterer, Pastor. The congregation’s newly-sided church building and fellowship hall provided ample room for the convention services and sessions, and for the delicious meals served by the ladies. Guests from afar

began arriving already the previous weekend; and soon pastoral and lay delegates, some with their families, as well as visitors from as far east as Chicago, Illinois and Jackson, Michigan, from Seattle and Victoria, British Columbia, to the north, and from Tucson to the south, gathered as dear brethren to do the work of the Lord’s kingdom-at-large and to enjoy their God-wrought fellowship in the opening devotions, in the various services, in their joint labors, and in their Christian sociability. The Lord graciously granted warm and sunny weather, and the aroma of strawberries still lingered in the air following the town’s annual Strawberry Festival earlier in the month.

Immediately preceding the convention itself was a two-day **Pastoral Conference** on June 20th and 21st, during which the pastors heard, discussed and adopted two papers, one by Pastor Mensing entitled “The Scriptural Principles of Christian Giving” (reprinted in this issue of the *C. L.*) and another by Pastor Lietz entitled “The Seal of the Confessional.” There was also a discussion about opportunities for continuing Christian education in the congregations following basic instruction preparatory to communicant membership — Sunday morning Bible classes, midweek Bible studies, studies in the Lutheran Confessions, etc. The pastors also discussed other purely practical matters including, in private session, cases of *casuistry*, that is, cases concerning which the brotherly counsel of fellow pastors is sought to confirm the orthodox application of the principles of God’s Word in situations that are fraught with unusual difficulties or special circumstances.

On Thursday, June 22nd, the Conference **Board of Directors** held its annual business meeting to preview the convention agenda, to hear in advance the general content of each standing committee’s report, and to draft, if necessary, recommendations for the special consideration of the delegates in convention assembled.

The convention itself began on Friday, June 23rd, with a service of convocation at 9:30 a.m. The local pastor served as liturgist; and Pastor Robert J. Lietz, as Conference President, preached an edifying keynote sermon. He chose as his text Acts 2:42, taking as his theme: ***Four Visible, Outward Evidences of Invisible, Inward Faith in Jesus, as These Are Revealed in the Local Congregation*** namely, **I. Persistently persevering in teaching, II. Persistently persevering in fellowship, III. Persistently persevering in the Lord’s Supper, and IV. Persistently persevering in prayers.**

Following the service, the first session was called to order with a brief devotion conducted by the President. Thereafter the various *ad hoc* convention committees were appointed, as these had been sketched out in the *Convention Prospectus*, with necessary changes due to unforeseen absences from delegations. The ***Committee on Registration and Excuses*** then reported on the congregations represented at the convention, their respective pastoral and lay delegates to be seated, and the number of votes to which each congregation was entitled.

The convention then heard the *Annual Report of the President*. In it President Lietz first noted that, according to our *Constitution*, Article VI, the Concordia Lutheran Conference is “an advisory or service body,” both to the Lord out of gratitude for all His gracious service to us, but also to our member-congregations and even to those outside our fellowship to defend, protect and preserve our precious heritage of Scriptural doctrine and practice. In the name of the Conference, he specially offered thanks to God for the faithful service of each of the officers and standing committees in carrying out their respective tasks, as well as offering their cooperative efforts in carrying out the various important projects of the Conference during the past year of grace. He then cited various personal as well as e-mail contacts with pastors outside our Conference which permitted us to render Godpleasing, appropriate testimony concerning our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice. He also noted that the increasing average age of our present pastors should cause us to consider the need for future pastors in our congregations, so that we earnestly solicit students, train them now without cutting any corners for the sake of speedy preparation, and commit the outcome to the Lord of the Church for His blessing. The President then briefly referred to the illness of Pastor Dierking, which has caused him to miss our convention this year, and he thanked Pastor Worley for standing in for Pastor Dierking as the preacher on Sunday morning. He also thanked God for His gracious protection of Pastors Mahan and Worley during their visit to our Russian brethren last summer, and he briefly outlined again the purposes and desired outcomes of the trip planned for him and for Pastor Mensing to Nigeria, now scheduled for January, 2007. Finally, he noted with praise to God the excellent financial condition of our Conference as evidence of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in the hearts of our people, and he suggested that they consider, as part of their estate planning, to remember our Conference and its important work when planning bequests in their last will and testament as a final proof and evidence of love for Him who loved them first. In closing, he cited I John 4:9-11 and 19 regarding God’s great love for us and ours for Him as the result.

The official agenda was adopted as printed, and the convention stood in recess for the noon meal.

The afternoon session opened with a brief devotion conducted by Pastor David G. Redlin of Tucson, Arizona.

The ***Treasurer's Report*** concerning the past fiscal year, given by Robert G. Bloedel, was then heard and adopted, as was also his ***Initial Report of the Finance Committee*** with its preliminary proposed budget for fiscal year 2006-2007. The details of this budget as finally adopted on Sunday afternoon will be given later on in this summary and will also be reflected in the first Financial Report of the Treasurer to our congregations in July.

Then followed the ***Report of the Editorial Committee*** concerning the publication of our official organ, *The Concordia Lutheran*, as well as the editing of books and tracts for publishing by *Scriptural Publications*. Pastor Worley, the chairman and Editor of the *C. L.*, reported on the perennial problem of tardy submission of assigned articles and of poorly proofed and formatted copy; and he besought the brethren's improved attention to these matters. He also noted the ongoing writing and editing of tracts on the part of Pastor David Mensing, the Book-and-Tract Editor, and his editing of books prior to printing.

Pastor Ross Mahan, Chairman, then gave the ***Report of the Committee on Missions***. He first reported on the ten-day trip that he and Pastor Worley made to Ekaterinburg, Russia, last August to encourage Pastor Schurganoff and his congregation. He briefly reviewed Pastor Schurganoff's situation and summarized the Conference's efforts during the past year to help him and his congregation financially. The Committee also recommended the continuation of subsidy to the Russian congregation at the same level as last year; and it also recommended our continued subsidy of St. Stephen's congregation in Wilmot, South Dakota, which is unable fully to support its pastor. The previously approved trip of Pastors Lietz and Mensing to Nigeria was postponed this past year due to volatile political conditions there, but it is anticipated that the visit will be made this coming January. Following the report, Pastors Mahan and Worley presented a slide show documenting their trip to Ekaterinburg and visually engaging the delegates and visitors in our Russian effort.

The delegates then heard the ***Report of the Publishing House Board of Control*** in which Pastor Lietz summarized the activities of *Scriptural Publications*, the publishing arm of our Conference. His report included the suggestion that the members of our constituent congre-

gations consider *Scriptural Publications* for bequests from their estates as well as other gifts for this on-going and necessary work of our Conference. The activities of *Scriptural Publications* included this year the printing of the CL, various tracts and confessional documents, and several book-length works including Doerffler's *Treasures of Hope* and A. L. Graebner's *Outlines of Doctrinal Theology*. Proposed for the coming year is the publication of several more book-length works including three books of family devotions, a prayer book, and the now out-of-print *Advanced Bible History*. Also ongoing is the renovation and further development of the Conference Web-site and the encouragement of our congregations to establish their own Web-sites and to attach them to the Conference site. Also heard was the financial report of *Scriptural Publications* Business Manager, David J. Mensing.

In his *Report Concerning the Conference Archives*, Pastor Mensing, the Conference Secretary and custodian of the Conference records (*Constitution*, Art. VIII, 3, b), reported that the process of digitizing the *proceedings* of the Conference as text files for ease of editing, formatting, and restoration is of great importance in preserving the record of our heritage. It was his recommendation that the Conference's financial grant be renewed at this convention to enable this project to continue. He also urged that the pastors in particular, who have extant official correspondence from the past still in their possession, be urged to turn it over to the Secretary for imaging and storage as evidence to "*establish every word*" (II Corinthians 13:1) in lieu of parole testimony for the documentation of our history. — Also heard was a very brief report on the *Seminary Bookstore*, the collection of out-of-print theological books for the purchase of future seminary students so that they can build up their own pastoral libraries.

The Saturday morning sessions were opened with a devotion conducted by Pastor Paul E. Bloedel of Sauk Village, Illinois. Thereupon the Secretary was first requested to read back the minutes of the Friday sessions for review and adoption.

Pastor David T. Mensing then began his *DOCTRINAL ESSAY* based on the motto of our Convention, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*" (Hebrews 10:25). The essay was entitled

***“The God-ordained Participation of Christians in the Local Congregation.”*** The introduction of the essay began with a citation of God’s warning through His prophet Amos that the days would come during which there would be a “*famine...of hearing the words of the Lord,*” that such a dearth of Christian preaching would be extensive, “*from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east,*” and that people searching for that elusive preaching would not be able to find it (Amos 8:11-12). The essayist pointed out that such a famine ALREADY EXISTS to a great extent, simply because most preaching today is not *orthodox* preaching and therefore NOT, properly-speaking, the preaching of “*the words of the Lord*” but preaching which actually contributes to the “*famine.*” In spite of the shortage, however, there are at least eight outposts of faithful Christian preaching where the proclaimed Word of the Lord can still be heard, namely, the local congregations of our precious Conference. The claim that the heard Word is not essential for salvation but that the Word of the Gospel is efficacious in whatever form or venue it is used dare not be allowed to detract from, militate against, or give cause to despise God’s institution of the *office of preaching* and His ordinance that the pastoral office of preaching be established in *local congregations* for the edification and oversight of the body of Christ through the publicly-administered Means of Grace. In Part I the essayist explained how the Lord purposed to communicate to men His will and grace for the salvation of their souls —at first *orally* as He spoke to His people directly, then also *in writing* as His Word, “*the Law and the prophets,*” were penned by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Throughout the Old Testament era we find no record of what we call today “local congregations” as assemblies in which the Word of God was regularly and consistently preached, and the first local assembly and assembling *place* called a “synagogue” was, according to historians, established after the Babylonian Captivity; nevertheless, while the synagogue was not ordained by God, Jesus and His apostles regularly assembled there and participated with the “congregations” that came together for the hearing and learning of God’s Word. However, after Pentecost, God Himself ordained the establishment of local Christian congregations and instituted the Pastoral Office for the *proclamation* of the Gospel, the *nourishment* of His flocks, and their spiritual *oversight*. —The first part of the essay was accompanied with lively discussion and wide participation on the part of the delegates and visitors.



The convention then heard a brief *Report of the Committee on Lutheran Union* through its chairman, Pastor Worley. He reported that the committee had not been involved in any official discussions with any other church bodies or with independent congregations, neither has it been contacted by such for the purpose of discussing doctrine and practice; and the committee's review of the doctrine and practice of other Lutheran groups via the Internet and other sources has not detected any positive changes among others but only a further degradation. He also besought the brethren to be alert to any contact that may yield possible fruit and to inform the Committee through one of its elected members.

The Saturday morning session concluded with the *Report of the Committee to Review the President's Report* and the reception of the *President's Annual Report* into record.

Following the noon meal and an opening devotion conducted by Pastor Natterer, the *Auditing Committee* reported on its examination of the books, both of the Conference Treasurer and of the Business Manager of *Scriptural Publications*. The committee found all the financial records to be in good order and expressed the gratitude of the Conference to its financial officers for their diligence.

Pastor David T. Mensing, chairman of the *Committee on Theological Education*, reported for the committee on its work during the past year and on its proposed theological training program for the coming academic term beginning in September. He briefly reminded the delegates about the changes in the mechanics of our program that were put in place by the action of the last convention and the greater degree of flexibility afforded us in training both single and married men utilizing "local" and not just "peripatetic" instruction. This past year, the peripatetic instructors for all five years were re-qualified and received the permission of their respective congregations to serve in that capacity. Moreover, four first-year instructors for the new system of local study submitted self-assessments regarding their qualifications, and they too were granted the permission of their congregations to teach theological courses in addition to their local church work. Finally, he reported with praise to the Lord of the Church that, as of this convention, we have two applicants for matriculation into our seminary program: Mr. Jason A. Mabe of Park

Forest, Illinois, a member of Peace in Oak Forest, and Mr. John Breinig of Oak Park, Illinois, a member of Trinity. Both will pursue *part-time* study beginning in September. As to the instructor, the C. T. E. settled on Pastor Mensing for the *first year* courses (See the five-year curriculum in the seminary catalog, p. 4ff.), inasmuch as he has already taught these and is thus already prepared to undertake them. Pastor Lietz will then teach the *second year* curriculum. In closing, Pastor Mensing reminded the delegates and visitors of the age of their professors —both are sixty-six— and begged them to remember them in their prayers for good health and strength both for the present and for many years to come; and he urged those pastors who have not yet been tapped as instructors to study and ready themselves even now for the prospect in the future.

The convention then proceeded to the *Election of Officers and Standing Committees* for 2006-2007. The following were elected:

**PRESIDENT:** The Rev. Edward J. Worley

**VICE PRESIDENT:** The Rev. Robert J. Lietz

**SECRETARY:** The Rev. David T. Mensing

**TREASURER:** Mr. Robert G. Bloedel

**BOARD MEMBERS-AT-LARGE:**

**Midwest**—Mr. JC Perry

**Far West**— Mr. Raymond Kusumi

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:** Pastor Mensing, *C. L.* Editor; Pastor Lietz, Book and Tract Editor; and Mr. Jason Mabe, LayMember.

**COMMITTEE ON LUTHERAN UNION:** Pastor Lietz, Chairman; Pastor Mensing; Pastor Natterer; and Mr. Phillip Martin.

**COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:** Pastor Worley, Chairman; Pastor Natterer; Mr. Erik Roe; and Mr. Stephen Bloedel.

**COMMITTEE ON MISSIONS:** Pastor Mahan, Chairman; Pastor Redlin; Mr. Raymond Kusumi; Mr. JC Perry; and Mr. Paul Natterer.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE:** Mr. Robert Bloedel, Chairman; Mr. JC Perry; Mr. David J. Mensing; and Mr. Mark Natterer.

**PUBLISHING HOUSE BOARD OF CONTROL:** Pastor Lietz, Chairman; Mr. David J. Mensing, Business Manager; and Mr. Phillip Martin, Print Shop Manager.

At the Sunday morning service, the *pastor loci*, the Rev. M. L. Natterer, again served as liturgist; and the Rev. Edward J. Worley of



Seattle, Washington, preached the sermon based on **I Peter 5:2**. His theme was: ***The God-ordained Duty of Christians Pastors in the Local Congregation***, divided into three parts: **I. WHAT** must Christian pastors do for their individual flocks — the local congregations to which they are called— as God clearly ordains? **II. HOW** should they do this in a God-pleasing and faithful manner as God enjoins? **III. WHY** should their flock desire and cheerfully receive such faithful shepherding from their pas-

*tors*? Delegates and visitors from the congregations of our fellowship then partook of the Lord's Supper together as guests of St. John's Congregation —for the remission of their sins, for the strengthening of their faith and of their walk in sanctification, and in testimony of their blessed unity in the Word of their Savior.

After a sumptuous steak dinner catered by the congregation at the local Senior Center, sessions reconvened with a devotion conducted by Pastor Mahan of Jackson, Michigan, after which Pastor Mensing presented the remaining portion of the first part of his essay on ***"The God-ordained Participation of Christians in the Local Congregation."*** This portion first set forth a few summary statements concerning the

Doctrine of the Church, including the establishment of the *local Church* or congregation, both as **God** alone can see it—all *true believers* in a certain locality— and as **men** see it, comprised of those who profess the Christian faith and gather regularly in one place with their avowed brethren for the public administration of the Means of Grace. According to the passages cited (and there were *many*), the local congregation is not just one-of-many “options” open to Christians to join or not to join, all of which are “church” with the same duties, rights, and privileges [W.E.L.S./C.o.L.C.]. Therefore to join or not to join is not an *adiaphoron*, neither is the participation of Christians with their brethren in the exercise of discipleship. In Part II, the essayist identified eight God-ordained “interactive” **functions** of the *local congregation* which cannot be carried out by individual Christians apart from an “assembly” (“congregation”) of fellow believers. He then also set forth the seven specific **duties** incumbent upon *Christian pastors* to serve and to enable the functions of the congregation. And finally, he addressed the *excuses* (Cf. Luke 14:18ff.) that people commonly make for their lack of participation in the local congregation, excuses that don’t “wash” with the Lord of the Church, and excuses which clearly demonstrate a person’s lack of appreciation for the treasure of the Gospel and his dismissal of the congregation and its ministry as “unnecessary” for salvation. Moreover, those who refuse (or question the necessity of) participation in the Christian congregation deliberately deprive themselves of the blessings that God earnestly wants to bestow upon them and challenges His right to require that of them (“Do I HAVE to??). Deliberately sinning, after having received the knowledge of the truth, is a damning offense (Hebrews 10:26ff.), and not just a sinful “misdemeanor.” The essay concluded with stanzas 2, 3, and 4 of Hymn 493. —Following spirited and fruitful discussion which was broadly-based throughout a “packed house,” this informative and edifying doctrinal essay was unanimously adopted with thanks to the essayist, pending the usual review by the *praesidium* before publication in our *Proceedings*.

As the sessions neared their close, the **proposed budget** of the *Finance Committee* was adopted: A beginning cash balance of \$60,095.40 and anticipated receipts (including the pledges of our congregations) of \$25,981.45, for total cash available of \$86,076.85 in the General Fund. Projected budgetary expenditures totaled

\$45,050.00 divided among the following items: *Scriptural Publications*—\$3,500.00; Special Printing Grant—\$3,500.00; St. Stephen’s Subsidy—\$8,400.00; Ekaterinburg Subsidy—\$ 7,200.00; Ekaterinburg Facilities Rental Subsidy— \$2,400.00; Archival Subsidy—\$1,500.00; Telephone Expense—\$500.00; Convention Expense—\$1,000.00; General Travel Expense—\$5,000.00; Nigeria Travel Expense—\$6,000.00; Miscellaneous Expense—\$2,000.00; Seminary Instructor’s Salary—\$4,050.00.

—The annual report of the *Conference Statistician*, Mr. Ray Kumi, was then presented for the information of our people. —And finally, the *Resolutions Committee* then presented six resolutions which expressed thanks to all those who contributed to the success of the convention, to our spiritual edification, to our physical well-being, and to our brotherly sociability at this convention, particularly to Pastor and Mrs. Natterer and the members of St. John’s Congregation, our loving hosts.

Following the *Final Report of the Committee on Registration and Excuses*, the convention also unanimously accepted the gracious invitation of **Peace Ev. Lutheran Church** of Oak Forest, Illinois, to host the **56th Annual Convention** (June 22nd, 23rd and 24th, 2007), immediately preceded as usual by the *Plenary Pastoral Conference* on June 19th and 20th, and the *Board of Directors Meeting* on June 21st. Our people are encouraged *NOW ALREADY* to mark these dates on their calendars, so that they can plan ahead to attend.

The convention adjourned at 4:50 p.m. with the customary closing devotion led by the new president, Pastor Edward J. Worley. It had been a most brotherly and constructive meeting; and the delegates and visitors returned to their respective homes renewed in their zeal, by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit of God through the means of His grace, to “*grow in grace and in the knowledge of [their] Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*” (II Peter 3:18), “*continu[ing] steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:42) in their God-ordained local congregations.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. David T. Mensing, Secretary

# The Scriptural Principles of Christian Giving

(Essay delivered at and adopted by the Summer Plenary Pastoral Conference, Lebanon, OR, June, 2006)



The *Scriptural basis* for Christian giving is *the grace of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior*, who in infinite love for us poor miserable sinners became our Substitute under God's Law to fulfill His requirements of us



and to suffer the penalty of our guilt. For it was in view of Jesus' perfect vicarious atonement, which satisfied His Divine justice, that God forgave the sins of the whole world and declared all men righteous in His holy sight (II Corinthians 5:19). It was God's love that moved Him to send His only-begotten Son to redeem us as the payment for our sins (John 3:16; Romans 3:25; I John 2:2; I Corinthians 6:20). It was God's love in Christ that caused Him in eternity to choose us to come to faith in Him and to persevere in faith unto life everlasting (Ephesians 1:3ff.; Romans 8:28-30). It was God's love that caused His Holy Spirit to work saving faith in our hearts through the Means of Grace (II Corinthians 4:6; I Peter 1:23) and thus to make us His children (Galatians 3:26; I John 3:1). It is God's love in Christ Jesus that moves us now to show forth the praises of Him who has done all this for us "out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in us" (Luther: *First Article*; see also I Peter 2:9; Ephesians 1:6; Psalm 116:12). It is the love of Christ that constrains us to love Him, who first loved us (II Corinthians 5:14; I John 4:19), so that we henceforth live not unto ourselves but unto Him which died for us and rose again (II Corinthians 5:15), being fruitful in every good work (Colossians 1:10) as evidence that ours is a living, not a dead, faith (James 2:20).

In order for anyone to be able to give to the Lord in a Godpleasing way, he must be a sincere believer in Jesus as his Savior; for “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:6). And when the believer by faith has received all the blessings of redemption —forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, peace with God, and the assurance of His loving care, keeping and protection— no one will be able to stop him from giving richly from the heart (Luke 7:47; II Corinthians 8:1-5), now that he is no longer spiritually bankrupt.

Therefore out of love to the God of love for His boundless love toward us in Christ Jesus, we should daily remind ourselves of the following reasons why every Christian should be “*a cheerful giver*” (II Corinthians 9:7):

- ~ God expressly commands us to give what is rightfully due unto Him (Haggai 2:8; Psalm 96:8; Malachi 3:10a; I Corinthians 16:2).
- ~ God graciously promises His blessing to those who seek His kingdom first and generously give to His glory (Malachi 3:10b; Matthew 6:33; Luke 6:38; II Corinthians 9:8; Galatians 6:8b).
- ~ God bids us consider the priceless spiritual heritage that is ours as His children (Genesis 32:10; Psalm 116:12; II Corinthians 8:9; I Peter 2:9).
- ~ God reminds us of the wealth of spiritual and material blessings He has graciously bestowed upon us (Psalm 103:2-5; Psalm 145:15-16; II Corinthians 9:8).
- ~ God expects us to be grateful for His blessings and to show our thankfulness in visible and tangible ways (Psalm 100:4; Psalm 116:12; Psalm 118:1; Luke 17:15-18).
- ~ God tests the sincerity of our love for Him by soliciting our freewill offerings motivated by His grace (II Corinthians 5:14; II Corinthians 8:8-9).


God has revealed in His Word the following specific principles according to which His people should give to Him:

- < It is God's will that His Kingdom be supported NOT by merchandising schemes, commercial ventures, and money-making activities such as sales, fairs, bazaars, car washes, raffles, etc. (John 2:16), but by the freewill gifts and offerings of His people (Matthew 10:8; Psalm 96:8).



- < ALL Christians, not just wage earners, are to share in the financial support of the Lord's Kingdom, so that some are not burdened by the neglect of others (Galatians 6:6; I Corinthians 16:2; II Corinthians 8:13-14; Mark 12:41).
- < Our offerings are part of our worship, tangible expressions of loving gratitude to Him who first loved us and gave Himself for us (II Corinthians 5:14-15; 8:8-9; I John 4:19). Thus we give ordinarily (but not exclusively) in connection with the services of God's House, as we there also offer up our prayers and praises (Psalm 96:8; 116:12-14).
- < We are to give cheerfully, not "*grudgingly*," just because we have to, not "*of necessity*," merely because of some pressing budgetary need (II Corinthians 9:7), but "*to prove the sincerity of [our] love*" (II Corinthians 8:8).
- < God wants us to give regularly, setting aside our offerings ahead of time out of forethought for His kingdom (I Corinthians 16:2a), as He regularly gives unto us, richly and daily providing [us] with all that we need to support this body and life (Luther: *First Article*).
- < Our offerings should be a matter of first priority in our spending, before the consideration of our temporal needs (Proverbs 3:9; Matthew 6:33), indeed before spending what He has given us on ourselves (Haggai 1:3-7).



- ‹ The Lord expects us to give as richly as we can, not as little as we can “get by with” — considering how richly He has given to us (Matthew 10:8; II Corinthians 8:9; 9:6). It is really God who decides the amount we give by the way He blesses us. Note that even the poor widow gave richly “*of her want*” (Mark 12:44), and the poverty of the Macedonians “*abounded unto the riches of their liberality*” (II Corinthians 8:2).
 
- ‹ God wants us to give proportionately according to the amount that the Lord has given to us (I Corinthians 16:2b; II Corinthians 8:12; Mark 12:41-44), and He promises us His gracious blessings proportionately according to the sacrifices we make out of love to Him (Malachi 3:10; II Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:7-9).
- ‹ God enables us to give confidently, so that we never need fear that generosity in our giving may result in our “coming up short” of what we need for our body and life (Matthew 6:33; II Corinthians 9:8). When we willingly and cheerfully give out of what we have (II Corinthians 8:12), which is considerable, we should remember that it ALL is the Lord’s in the first place, and we are only stewards of His gifts to us (I Peter 4:10).

God has not demanded of New Testament Christians a set percentage of their income. In the Old Testament, when His people were under the “*schoolmaster*” of the Law (Galatians 3:24), God deemed it just (Deuteronomy 32:4), as part of His training regimen, to claim one-tenth (10%) of their substance as the minimal fair share return that He expected out of what He had given them (Malachi 3:10), not including special free-will offerings and other sacrifices. Considering the rich blessings we New Testament Christians have as the result of the fulfillment in Christ of all of God’s gracious promises, could we not, would

we not, voluntarily, out of gratitude for our liberation from the ceremonial laws of old and for the riches of God's grace bestowed upon us, use that proportion or percentage as a starting point upon which to build our standard of what is God's "fair share" today?

Yet, says St. Paul, "*I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others* {according to the Godpleasing example of the Macedonians in this case}, *and to prove* [that is, *test*] *the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich*" (II Corinthians 8:8-9). Thus the Christian chooses the percentage as the result of Jesus' grace and love bestowed upon himself and his family.

If everyone consistently "*laid by him in store*" (I Corinthians 16:2) God's proportionate share of his material blessings for the support of the Lord's Kingdom of Grace here in this world, seeking as his first priority to express his gratitude and that of his family for the temporal but, above all, the spiritual blessings with which the Lord had "*prospered him*" each and every day, month, and year, the work of Christ's Church would never lack sufficient funding to fulfill its mission. There would be "*meat in [His] House*" for every eventuality, and His work would never have to wait to see whether enough pledges would be received to proceed.

Is God's Kingdom "*first*" on your household budget? If it is, and if your giving is motivated by "*the love of Christ*" (II Corinthians 5:14) for you and your family, you will gladly "*honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase*" (Proverbs 3:9). Then you will also have the sure promise of your God that all the temporal needs of life "*shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33), so that "*ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work*" (II Corinthians 9:8) to the praise of His grace! In what other venue of life is there such a bountiful return on a nominal investment? "*He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully*" (II Corinthians 9:6). "*Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it!*" (Malachi 3:10). "*Now therefore, perform the doing of it* (II Corinthians 8:11)... *to prove the sincerity of your love*" (v. 8).

—D. T. M.

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**E-mail:** rmahan@acd.net

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