

In Washington, Missouri, Too – It's a Time for Confessing

Colleagues,

For over a decade Robin Morgan has regularly jumped in (when I'm somewhere else) to keep ThTh postings appearing. Summer 2008 she did four in a row when I was in absentia. Now and then she comes up with eminently postable stuff even when I'm not far away. And Robin is only an hour away from our place. She continues serving these days as pastor at Peace Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Washington, Missouri—right on the Mighty Missouri River—50 miles west of St. Louis. From what I know after now-and-then visits out there, Peace is a beacon of Good News in that town.

So it comes as no surprise that the congregation and pastor get recognized. Also by the Missouri Synod Lutheran pastors in the neighborhood who want it to be perfectly clear that they are NOT connected with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

There's an old joke we once-upon-a-time Missourians used to tell on ourselves, namely, this one:

When groups of Missouri Synod folks would move west with the pioneers into the expanding frontier years ago, and would come to unclaimed territory to settle down and homestead, they would regularly build two churches in their settlement. One to belong to. One NOT to belong to.

It's happening still. In Robin's town last week a group of LCMS pastors published a letter-to-the-editor in the local newspaper—The Missourian—to make it perfectly clear that they were NOT connected with the ELCA. Pastor Robin's response, presented below along with the LCMS pastors' letter, has now

appeared in this week's issue of the paper.

Here they are—documents of a time for confessing in Washington, Missouri.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

“Don't Confuse Us With Them”

The Missourian

09/22/2009

To The Editor:

Please don't confuse us with the “Lutherans” recently in the news: “Evangelical Lutherans' landmark shift – Vote lets gay men and lesbians in committed relationships serve as clergy” was the heading of New York Times story on Page one of the Aug. 22 St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Collectively, “Lutherans” are the largest Protestant denomination in the world. However, many are in name only. There are also numerous divisions or “synods” that can vary from being very liberal (both theologically and culturally) to being very “conservative,” i.e., holding to the Holy Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, the “confessional” standards of the historic Reformation (of the 1500s), and family values in light of biblical teaching.

We are the LCMS (Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod), a 2.4-million-member church body with some 6,000-plus congregations throughout the United States of America and mission work in dozens of nations (not to be confused with or associated in any way with ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church of America], a

membership of 4.8 million).

By God's grace, we, pastors in the Washington Circuit of the LCMS, still believe, confess and teach:

- The Holy Scripture is the true, inerrant Word of God in its entirety (II Timothy 3:16);
- The moral code of God's law is for all people, for all time, and this moral code is clearly expressed in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5-7) and Christ's Apostles (Ephesians 5:3-21);
- Salvation from sin and eternal death is solely by God's grace through faith in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Ephesians 2:1-10);
- The sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman has God's design and blessings (Genesis 1, 2, John 2:1-11, Ephesians 5:21-33);
- The sanctity of human life (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5, Luke 1:41-44);
- Sex outside of God's design of marriage is sinful, therefore harmful to both the individuals who practice such and to society at large (Leviticus 18:20-23, Romans 1:21-31, I Corinthians 6:9-20, I Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 13:4; Jude 7); and
- "The Great Commission" – in the power of the Holy Spirit, to share the "Good News" with all the world, to love the sinner and call everyone to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:46-49, I John 4, 5).

We are far from perfect. We are repentant sinners and rest in the comfort of God's sure forgiveness through the bloody sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross of Golgotha.

We pray for those who defend sin and justify its practices, that they may repent and no longer mock the atonement of Christ.

We pray for those who call themselves “Lutherans” but are so in name only, that they may truly follow the lead of Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546), holding to the sacred Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God, remain steadfast to the historic Luther’s Small Catechism and the Lutheran confessions, and refrain from “political correctness” and “secular moral relativism” shaping their theology and practice.

– Bill Zastrow, Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Port Hudson; Herman Otten, Trinity Lutheran Church, New Haven; Kevin M. Koester, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Belle and Zion Lutheran Church, Owensville; Aaron P. Kotila, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rosebud; Lloyd E. Groenke, retired, Union; Dennis Schmelzer, Faith Lutheran Church, Washington; Timothy Brown, St. John’s Lutheran Church, Beaufort; Mark Bangert, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Washington; Mark Goucher, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Haven; Norman Dierking, Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Freedom; St. John Lutheran Church, Drake.

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Response to Don’t Confuse Us with Them

As pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation across Hwy 47 from the Washington Middle School, I want to thank my Missouri Synod brothers in Christ for this opportunity to clarify our ministry in this community.

We believe that God, our Creator, sent Jesus into our broken world because He loves the world and longs to bring wholeness to all of His creation. God’s mission in our world is two-fold. God calls all human beings to care for creation, not only Christians, but all people. God calls Christians, specifically, to share the Good News of Jesus with those who are longing for a

more intimate relationship with God.

We are committed to telling everyone about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but we believe that our actions often speak louder than our words when individuals are deciding whether a congregation is the right community for them.

Peace is a Lutheran congregation that is significantly involved in keeping Franklin County a good place to live:

1. Members of Peace have built relationships with at-risk middle school students for the last two years by offering after school tutoring two days/week.
2. Members of Peace are presently offering English as a second language classes for Hispanic and Chinese immigrants in our community.
3. Members of Peace were founders and continue to be members of Neighbors United Undoing Racism which sponsors Washington's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration.
4. Members of Peace have supplied resources for and worked side-by-side with our Missouri Synod brothers and sisters to build Habitat for Humanity houses in Beaufort, Sullivan and Leslie.

And most importantly, members of Peace welcome everyone to worship with us on Sunday morning. Everyone is welcome to be nourished by God's word and to partake of the Lord's meal at Peace. It doesn't matter who you are, what you're wearing or where you've come from.

Everyone is welcome at Peace.

Rev. Robin J. Morgan
Peace Lutheran Church
Washington, MO