

# THE LUTHERAN CLARION



Lutheran Concerns Association  
1320 Hartford Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116

November 2008  
Volume 1, Issue 2

## The Specific Ministry Plan – Part I

The 2007 Convention of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod was significant for a number of reasons, not least of which was the adoption of the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) Program. For those unfamiliar with SMP, it is a new class of ordained clergy educated through distance education rather than formed by Seminary residence. Once in office, the SMP and his congregation are dependent on supervision by a GMP (General Ministry Pastor, i.e. a Seminary trained clergyman) on behalf of the District President. His ordination takes place after eight distance education classes and is followed by eight more distance education classes. If he fails to complete the program, his temporary ordination and service will theoretically be terminated.

**“...discussion by the Synod at large was avoided by first publicizing the Specific Ministry Plan less than two months prior to the opening of the Convention.”**

Resolution 5-01B (“To Establish Specific Ministry Pastor Program”) was adopted by a vote of 908 to 287 and, by its overwhelming passage, radically redesigned the Office of the Ministry in the Synod. One can only be amazed by the political abilities of its *Ablaze!* proponents. Prior discussion by the Synod at large was avoided by first publicizing the SMP resolution in the *Convention Workbook* less than two months prior to the opening of the Convention. The endorsements of Synodical entities such as CSSL (Concordia Seminary Saint Louis), CTSFW (Concordia Theological Seminary Fort

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Wayne), CTCR (Commission on Theology and Church Relations), COP (Council of Presidents), BOD (Board of Directors), BMS (Board for Mission Services) and BPE (Board for Pastoral Education) (welcome to the alphabet soup of the Synod) were gained and touted as the voice of experts. Perhaps most importantly, the Academic Deans from both Seminaries were used to sell the SMP and convince conservative delegates that this critical *Ablaze!* initiative would salvage the Holy Ministry from the degradation of the various District lay ministry programs. Sadly, Resolution 5-02 (“To Address Licensed Lay Deacons”) passed by an even larger majority (948-202), allowing the continuation of “Lay Deacons” as a necessity in some situations while the Council of Presidents “studies” the issue.

So....what is new since the last Convention? The big news is that the SMP program has been initiated. According to the October 2008 *Reporter*, in the Fall of 2008 over 50 SMP students have

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SMP.....continued

enrolled between the two Seminaries. What is not mentioned is the fact the over 30 seminary trained candidates (Masters of Divinity or Alternate Route) were not placed in the Spring 2008 due to a lack of Calls, although reportedly most have been placed subsequently. Nor are the hundreds of Candidate for the Reverend Ministry (CRM; Bylaws 2.11) pastors mentioned, many of whom anxiously await a Call to a place of pastoral service.

Even more SMP students will enroll next year – the goal is 80 SMP students each year. This appears already to have impacted the Seminaries. Although exact figures have not been released as of this writing, the Fall 2008 entering on-campus, residential classes at Fort Wayne and Saint Louis are substantially smaller.

There are several issues that will bear watching in the coming months. First, what is the actual Fall 2008 enrollment in residential pastoral programs at the Seminaries? The critical numbers are the M.Div. and Alternate Route students (i.e. men preparing for Calls into the Holy Ministry). Graduate students, Deaconess students, on-line Greek students and others may be included in the total census but are not relevant for evaluating the impact of the SMP enrollees on the Seminaries. How do the Fall 2008 pastoral formation classes compare to prior years before SMP was an option?

Second, what information will be forthcoming about the SMP students? Will demographics be made available – age, marital status, education, type of “ministry”? Resolution 5-01B requires a report 9 months prior to the 2010 Convention, or sometime around November 2009. Will there be specific data?

Third, are the individual district “Licensed Deacon” programs continuing? Or have they been shut down and their students diverted to the SMP Program?

Finally (and this may be simply wishful thinking), will any District Convention in 2009 declare their District to be a “SMP Free Zone”? Such a District would have no shortage of fully trained Pastors anxious to serve within their jurisdiction!

**HELP THE LUTHERAN CONCERNS ASSOCIATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Once again, we of the LCA are pleased to bring you informative and thoughtful articles by well-respected Confessional leaders and writers of our Synod. Our goal is to keep our Synod faithful to God’s Word and our Lutheran Confessions as we bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations of the world. Will you help us in this task? With your continued support, we can continue to publish *The Lutheran Clarion*, advise the Synod, and make a difference for the faith we believe, teach and confess. Thank you for your anticipated help!

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 1320 Hartford Avenue  
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**Delegate Representation and the Blue Ribbon Plan**

The LC-MS President’s “Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance” has issued a report titled “Proposals and Possibilities for Consideration and Discussion.” This “Blue Ribbon Plan” proposes that the synod “Allow congregations with more than 750 confirmed members to be represented [at district conventions] by two additional delegates for each additional unit of 750 confirmed members or majority thereof.” Since the Blue Ribbon Plan proposes the elimination of electoral circuits, this proposal for delegate representation will affect both district and synodical conventions. The synod presently grants equal voting power to each congregation.

The Blue Ribbon Plan proposal means that big congregations will have more voting power while medium and small congregations will have less voting power in the synod. The largest will have up to six times the voting power of the average congregation, based on current statistics. At first glance, voting power based on congregational

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**Delegate Representation.....continued**

size seems to be democratic. But this is based on the assumption that **individual persons** are members of the Missouri Synod. The truth is that **congregations** are the members of the Missouri Synod with regard to its governance and each is represented equally.

*“...big congregations will have more voting power while medium and small congregations will have less voting power...”*

Why didn't the Missouri Synod base delegate representation on congregational size in its early

years? The following statistics are for baptized members in a parish. In 1848 congregational size ranged from 892 at Trinity, Saint Louis, to 85 in the dual parish in Harford County, Maryland. In 1854 congregational size ranged from 1,086 at Saint Paul, Fort Wayne, to 90 at the congregation in Philadelphia. Some congregations were twelve times the size of the smallest, but this did not lead synod's founders to change their representation principle.

Carl S. Munding once observed that the principle of equal representation of congregations “was introduced to maintain the balance of power between the clergy and the laity. Had the founding fathers imbibed the American spirit of democracy, they would have insisted that human beings be the basis of representation. They would have counted the number of heads and arranged for one representative for every given number of communicants or voting members. But their representative arrangement was not the product of American political thought, . . . it was the result of a catastrophic experience in their own midst” (*Govern-ment in the Missouri Synod*, pp. 182-183).

Martin Stephan deserves the credit, in an ironic way, for the Missouri Synod's principle of representation. His ego, inflated by his congregation's size, created a pathology one might call the “Stephan Syndrome.” After Stephan was removed from office, the Saxon laymen were determined not to let any egotistical pastor of a “super-size congregation” have more governing power than the average pastor or average laymen. Today the

Blue Ribbon Plan expresses the opinion that pastors of “super-size congregations” should have more power and influence than they already do. The Blue Ribbon Plan's proposal is a symptom of the “Stephan Syndrome,” and can only aggravate, not cure, the disease.

Rev. Dr. Martin R. Noland



**Task Force on Structure –  
Don't Get Rid of the Program Boards**

President Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Structure Report provides much food for thought. However, it is difficult to respond to most of the report because it so vague. This suggests that the more focused discussion will be left to a later day. Of course it also makes reasoned input somewhat difficult on most of the subjects of discussion. However, there are a few more specific proposals that already give reason for serious concern. One of those proposals is that the program boards become “advisory” and that the executives all report directly to the President of the Synod, and presumably also be appointed by the President. This is the exact opposite of what should be done.

Although not given as a reason in the Report, if efficiency of operations and finances influenced this recommendation, this would be an appropriate factor. There is perhaps justification for change to one or two of the program boards if it will have the effect of streamlining operations and reducing costs. But making “all program boards” merely “advisory,” and having the executives report to the President of the Synod is misguided.

First, by making the President the direct administrative supervisor over the executives confuses the responsibilities of the President of the Synod. As a church body, the President of the LCMS is the “chief **ecclesiastical** officer” of the Synod, not a corporate “Chief Executive Officer.” (Bylaw 3.1.1.1.) And while the President currently “over- sees the activities of officers, executives, and

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**Program Boards.....continued**

agencies of the Synod,” this is in connection with the narrow responsibility “to see to it that they are acting in accordance with the Constitution, the Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod.” (Bylaw 3.3.1.2). The President of the Synod is not a corporate CEO, and we should not turn him into one. Expanding and shifting the President’s role from one serving in an ecclesiastical function to one ruling with executive power would not be good for the Synod.

It takes no more than a glance at the secular world today to recognize the potential negative consequences to changing the role of the President from an ecclesiastical servant to an executive ruler. On nearly a daily basis we hear from the secular realm of situations in which presidents and CEOs have been given too much power. When considering the financial and legal consequences, why would we as a church body incorporate into our structure the failures of a greedy secular world? Instead, we should learn from those failures. We should not incorporate into our structure a philosophy of control and concentration of power. Instead we should retain and promote an attitude of service.

The current responsibilities of the program boards and the selection of their members also weigh heavily against transferring such power to the President. The members of the program boards are currently elected primarily by the members of the Synod in Convention or appointed by the Board of Directors, who in turn are elected by the Convention. The program boards, especially in the areas of missions, human care, and higher education, have significant helpful influence over these vital areas of ministry. Why take away from the members of the Synod the ability to influence the direction of these important ministries and transfer all of this responsibility to the President? In the congregations throughout the Synod there are wise, talented, dedicated and highly qualified people ready to serve. Why reduce this tremendous asset of the Synod to a purely “advisory” role and transfer the responsibility and authority to a single person holding the office of President? This would be very unwise.

Christian A. Preus, President, LCA  
Member of the LCMS Board of Directors (1995-2007)

**Sweet is Sour**

When I was a vicar in Minnesota South District, a pastor came to speak at the Pastor’s Conference; he spoke with such love for the lost and dying world in which we live. It was overwhelming to a wet behind the ears vicar. He spoke with passion about the faith that we confess with each other, and how this faith we confess, must be the faith that we confess as we reach out to this lost and dying world. He proclaimed, “Get the message straight Missouri” and “Get the message out Missouri”. I knew little of Synod politics and all the conflict that those two phrases brought; all I knew was Rev. Dr. Alvin Barry had the ears of all in attendance, and a heart for all who didn’t have faith in Jesus the Christ. He was passionately striving to teach how doctrine and missions work hand in glove, not in opposition to one another. It made perfect sense, if the message is not straight, it’s not worth getting out, and if the message is straight you will be compelled by the message to get it out.

Little did I know at that time, that I was in the presence of a man with a true pastor’s heart at work, as he strived to rebuke and correct many of the theologies of glory that continue to creep into the Church and beloved Synod. Rev. Barry looked over the room full of pastors and applied the law to this very common problem among clergy. He leaned into the microphone and said, “Gentlemen, I have found the best pastoral counseling book ever,” the pastors and one vicar sat up on the edge of their seats, with pens in hand waiting to write down this wonderful book’s name and the guru who authored it. Then, after a deliberate pause, Rev. Barry leaned back into the microphone and said, “It’s called the Bible”. The moaning and groaning of the pastors lead to uncomfortable laughter but I think he got his point across. We in the Church have got to stop looking for the quick fix and get back into God’s Holy and inspired Word.

Contrary to the “gurus of our age,” all claiming that everything is worse than ever and every thing must change or the Church will die, this man was pointing us back to the rule and norm for the Church.

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**Sweet is Sour.....continued**

There is nothing new under the sun, Christians of every age have struggled to differing degrees with the same issues we struggle with today. Evangelism, children, family, money, work, health, and on and on the list goes. Thanks be to God throughout every age there have been those who have stepped up to direct our focus, not to the earthly things, but to heavenly things, to the life suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. In our day people will no longer put up with sound doctrine, and their itching ears seek another voice that wrongfully points believers past Jesus, to their feelings, actions, and instead to visible signs.

Welcome to The LCMS where our congregations and beloved Synod are running after the teaching of gurus who often ask probing questions but lack the foundational truths of Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith

Alone, and Christ Alone to give you a proper answer.

Case in point: when our beloved Synod gathered together some of

our brightest minds in St. Louis to discuss Synods structure, they invited Dr. Leonard Sweet to come and make a presentation. Dr. Sweet was an unknown to me as he is a Methodist pastor and having been a Methodist I have sought to avoid their leaven since becoming Lutheran. *The Reporter* calls Dr. Sweet a futurist and author.

What is a futurist? The definition that I found was, **1.** a theologian who believes that the Scripture prophecies of the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) will be fulfilled in the future, **2.** someone who predicts the future. So I went to *Futurist.com* and they defined a futurist as one who focuses on one of these three areas:

1. Forecasting the future, using quantitative and qualitative means,
2. Imagining the future, using primarily intuition and writing skills, and
3. Creating the future, using techniques of planning and consulting.

**“Get the message straight Missouri” and ‘Get the Message out Missouri.’”**  
**- Rev. Dr. Alvin Barry -**

I believe that maybe the third would be the one that fits. Still striving to find out why Lutherans would invite a Methodist to speak to them on structure, my desire was directed to what does this futurist confess? Happening upon an article in *Relevant Magazine*, where Sweet is asked about songs sung in the church and how they haven't changed in the last hundred years, Sweet responds:

“And that's the reason it's been dying. It's been feeding off fruit that's decaying and rotten; nobody wants to touch it except for a few die-hards that have grown used to the rancid odor. We do need classics. We need the depth and the mystery. So you come around to some classics, but you don't stay there. I think the church has got to embrace impermanence, fluidity.” When asked “How do we hold on to the unchangeable God while embracing change? Sweet answers, “Well, it's a part of what I call the "double ring.” Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, but for Him to be the same yesterday, today and forever, it's got to become fresh every morning. The only way for things to stay the same is for them to change. That's the paradox here: if you want things to stay the same, you've got to constantly change. So, if you want the Gospel to be as alive to your children and grandchildren as it is for you, then you've got to constantly make change.”

Just how fluid does Sweet think the Church needs to be? Perhaps that answer is given in his book *Quantum Spirituality*:

“A globalization of evangelism “in connection” with others, and a globally “informed” gospel, is capable of talking across the fence with Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim—people from other so called “new” religious traditions (“new” only to us)—without assumption of superiority and power. One Caribbean theologian has called this the “decolonization of theology.” It will take a decolonized theology for Christians to appreciate the genuineness of others’ faiths, and to see and celebrate what is good,  
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**Sweet is Sour.....continued**

beautiful, and true in their beliefs without any illusions that down deep we all are believers in the same thing (Leonard Sweet, “Quantum Spirituality” pp.130-131).”

Is this the future we desire for The LCMS? Are these the thoughts of someone who should be helping guide the direction of our Synod and Churches? Lord have mercy on us.

The future I pray for in The LCMS and all the congregations associated with our beloved Synod, is one in which we will search the Scriptures, rather than the Bylaws. One that will declare the Good News of our Salvation with clarity and charity, as we go to all nations, rather than one that is actively apologetic for its past and worried about her future. A Synod and congregation does not need a futurist to tell her how to survive, because her future is sure, so long as She has Jesus the Christ as Her head. He is the One who built His Church, and He has promised that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against Christ’s Church.

Rev. Joe Fisher  
 Pastor, Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
 West Bend, Wisconsin



**The Appearance of Impropriety:  
 How the Process of Changing the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod Truncate Real Discussion**

At the 2007 Houston Synodical convention the new Constitution and Bylaws juggernaut was set in motion. Justified by a supposed financial crisis, a special Synodical convention was first demanded and then retracted in the days following Houston. It would seem that the impending, dire financial crisis wasn’t as impending or dire as we were led to believe. Fraught with potential for centralized

power and financial redirection, some of the proposals could well change both the character and nature of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod forever. Even more troubling is the way it is being done.

Given the potential for sweeping and radical change that the proposals under consideration may seek to establish, why is it that there will be no “Final Draft” of the new Constitution and Bylaws provided for the comment and consideration of the Synod for a reasonable period of time prior to the convention vote? It is only the select few who will actually know what is being proposed until it is revealed to the delegates of the 2010 convention. Shortly after they see them, they will also have to vote on them. Keep in mind that any proposed Bylaw changes will never come to the congregations at all since they may be passed by a simple majority vote of the Synod in convention.

**Wouldn’t it be preferable for every congregation to be able to thoughtfully review and comment on a final draft prior to the Synod in convention taking action?**

Instead of a “Final Draft,” the Synod at large is only given a list of possible and often contradictory options to consider and on which to comment. Missing are the critical details of how a new Constitution or Bylaws would actually work. Who will be elected and who will be appointed and by whom? Is the President of the Synod going to have the power to appoint the majority of the members of the various administrative boards of the Synod or is the Synod in convention going to retain its responsibility to elect all of the board members as we now do? And even if they are elected rather than appointed, will all of our administrative boards only serve as advisors to the Synodical President or actually make decisions within their areas of responsibility as Christian Preus rightly says in his article on such boards in this issue of *The Lutheran Clarion*. Will we be a Synod of five or six large regional “districts,” or will we be a Synod with 150 smaller “districts”? Will there be five or six very powerful regional  
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**The Appearance of Impropriety....continued**

“Presidents” who are appointed by the President of the Synod or will they be elected by the Synod in convention and what will be the scope of their power? We are left to guess. The proverbial “devil” is most certainly in the details! It is simply foolishness to be expected to comment on something about which we know very little. How can the Synod at large provide meaningful comment or suggestions if nothing final is being proposed?

As currently structured, the procedure will only provide a final “yes” or “no” opportunity to accept or decline the coming new Constitution as a whole when the matter is brought to the congregations of the Synod following the 2010 Houston convention. No congregational vote will be required for new Bylaws. Virtually every opportunity to provide meaningful suggestions for the new Constitution and Bylaws is being truncated by a procedure which does not seem to want any meaningful comment.

Why is this being done? It would seem that comment is kept to a minimum because it isn’t really desired. What does the Task Force really mean in terms of the future of the congregations who created the Synod and indeed the corporate Synod itself? Could such a procedure lead one to think that someone is trying to put something over on the Synod? If we are going to have a new Constitution and Bylaws, why not take our time and do it properly?

Rev. Richard A Bolland, Senior Pastor  
Holy Cross Lutheran Church  
Kansas City, Missouri

*“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” Jude 1:3*

**Do you know when your District meets in Convention in 2009?  
Are you prepared?**

DISTRICT	CONVENTION DATES	LOCATION: CITY, ST
North Dakota	Jan 18 - 21	Minot, ND
Southern Illinois	Feb 19 - 21	Collinsville, IL
Oklahoma	Apr 24 - 25	Norman, OK
Minnesota North	Apr 27 - 29	Brainerd, MN
South Dakota	Apr 29 - May 2	Sioux Falls, SD
Wyoming	Apr 30 - May 2	Casper, WY
Southeastern	May 1 – 3	Norfolk, VA
Northern Illinois	May 8 - 9	Lombard, IL
Calif-Nev-Hawaii	May 15 - 17	Fremont, CA
New Jersey	Jun 4 - 6	Swedesboro, NJ
Kansas	Jun 4 - 6	Topeka, KS
Nebraska	Jun 4 - 6	Seward, NE
New England	Jun 4 - 6	Springfield, MA
Atlantic	Jun 5 - 6	Bronxville, NY
South Wisconsin	Jun 7 - 9	Milwaukee, WI
Minnesota South	Jun 11 - 13	St. Paul, MN
Mid-South	Jun 12 - 15	Memphis, TN
Florida-Georgia	Jun 12 - 14	Lake Mary, FL
Eastern	Jun 12 - 13	Buffalo, NY
Missouri	Jun 14 - 16	Columbia, MO
North Wisconsin	Jun 14 - 16	Green Bay, WI
Montana	Jun 15 - 18	Billings, MT
Northwest	Jun 18 - 20	Portland, OR
Ohio	Jun 18 - 20	Dublin (Columbus), OH
Rocky Mountain	Jun 18 - 20	Denver, CO
English	Jun 18 - 20	Hales Corners, WI
Southern	Jun 18 - 20	Baton Rouge, LA
Iowa West	Jun 21 - 24	Milford, IA
SELC	Jun 22 - 25	Ann Arbor, MI
Indiana	Jun 25 - 26	Fort Wayne, IN
Texas	Jun 25 - 28	Addison (Dallas), TX
Iowa East	Jun 26 - 27	Cedar Rapids, IA
Pacific SW	Jun 28 - 30	Irvine, CA
Michigan	Jun 28 – July 1	Ann Arbor, MI
Central Illinois	Jul 5 - 7	Springfield, IL

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**THE LUTHERAN CLARION**  
*(The official publication of the Lutheran Concerns Association. A non-profit 501c3 organization.)*



*Published regularly to support issues and causes within The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod which build faithfulness to true Confessional Lutheranism and to be a clear voice of Christian concern against actions and causes which mitigate against faithfulness to the One True Faith.*

*The principle place of business for all matters pertaining to the LCA is:*

**1320 Hartford Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55116**

*Other faithful Lutheran individuals who are members of LCMS congregations are invited to submit articles of approximately 500 words for consideration to:*

**Rev. Richard A. Bolland, 1608 NW 78<sup>th</sup> Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64118 (816) 519-3780. Articles should be approximately 500 words in length. Inquiries are welcome. Manuscripts will not be returned and may be edited.**

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**Lutheran Concerns Association**

