

Anglican Church in North America and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Dialogue—Report on the Discussions (2010-2012)

Introduction

In 2010 representatives of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)¹ began a series of theological discussions. Foundational to the dialogue was the mutual recognition that we share a high regard for the authority of the Holy Scriptures and a commitment to the continuing validity of the great tradition of creedal faith and life. LCMS and ACNA representatives agreed on an initial series of four meetings, beginning in the fall of 2010 and held in the spring and fall over two years. Because the ACNA includes congregations in Canada as well as the US, the LCMS decided to invite a representative of its partner church, the Lutheran Church—Canada, to participate in the talks. The themes of the first four meetings have been, in order: “The Background and Identity of Our Churches,” “Authority in the Church,” “Theological and Societal Challenges Facing the Church,” and “The Practice of Ministry: Worship and Catechesis.”

The commitment by the ACNA and LCMS to engage in dialogue has had, from its beginning, the purpose of increasing the level of mutual understanding and affirmations between the churches. Both were aware of important areas of coherence, but each was equally cognizant that much was not known about the other. Our respective theological traditions have differing understandings of the level of agreement necessary for full communion between churches. While both agree that an ideal outcome of theological dialogue would be full agreement and inter-communion between churches, both also understand that more modest achievements are realistic and desirable (such as mutual affirmations in significant matters of theology and practice and, perhaps, mutual cooperative efforts in matters other than Word and Sacrament ministry, joint publications, legal briefs, and so forth). So, while the LCMS requires full doctrinal agreement for “altar and pulpit fellowship” (full communion)—a level of agreement not yet achieved—both church bodies’ representatives nevertheless strongly affirm the value and benefit of our meetings and are committed to their continuation.

A Statement in Common

We, the representatives of the Anglican Church in North America and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, rejoice that we can jointly affirm without reservation core teachings (articles) of the Christian faith shared by our church bodies. Together we hold the catholic faith of one God in three persons as confessed in the three western ecumenical² creeds: the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian (*Quicumque Vult*). As we confess together faith in one Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man, who is the savior of all the world, we recognize the Fall into sin and the reality that only by grace through faith in Christ can fallen human beings find justification and salvation. We rejoice together in one Baptism for the remission of sins and the new life given

through this sacrament. In the confession of these truths, we also recognize and affirm that they are known through the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the very Word of God written, which are the infallible basis for all church teaching.

Because of these significant areas of agreement, our churches recognize certain grave, particular challenges that we face today. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- We recognize a widespread failure to affirm the biblical teaching of the creation of man and woman, the significance of our embodiment as male and female, and the complementarity of man and woman within one humanity.
- We recognize a pervasive threat to the understanding of marriage as the life-long union of a man and woman as husband and wife and oppose any efforts to redefine marriage in any other terms.
- We recognize that Western Christianity is threatened with increasing apostasy, denying the ecumenical consensus even in such central truths as the doctrine of the Trinity, the saving work of Christ, and the moral consensus Christians had in common for millennia.
- We recognize the threat to Christian evangelism and outreach caused by those forces which view the confession of one Lord, one faith, one Baptism as “intolerance.”
- We recognize the gift of sexual expression and affirm the biblical teaching that God intends sexuality only to be fully enacted within the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. We oppose efforts within society or by some churches to view other sexual relationships as moral alternatives to heterosexual marriage.
- We recognize the need to promote chastity before marriage, as well as the biblical call to celibacy to those who are unmarried or to those who have given themselves to serving Christ in this way in everyday life or in religious community.
- We recognize a continuing threat to the most vulnerable of human beings, especially the unborn, the aging, and the terminally ill, but also to those who suffer from calamity, poverty, sickness, persecution, and need.
- We recognize the need to exercise a biblically responsible stewardship of creation without any idolization of the natural world.

On the basis of our mutual recognition of such challenges, we believe our churches should consider ways in which we may work together in the future. The practical implementation of the growing relationship between the LCMS and the ACNA may take various forms, from practical matters such as sharing buildings to such deeper concerns as a commitment to pray for each other’s congregations, institutions, and other ministries. Denominationally we look toward the possibility of joint statements on important issues facing our churches and our culture such as questions about homosexuality and abortion. We also anticipate opportunities to work together to address human needs like hunger, homelessness, and other ministries of mercy toward those in crisis.

One example of cooperative work that is presently being explored involves publications. Concordia Publishing House is in discussion with an ACNA jurisdiction to see whether CPH might facilitate the publication of a hymnal supplement for use in the ACNA. Our seminaries are exploring ways to support our common mission by not only hosting the present series of dialogues but also the possibility of joint courses or colloquies that help us learn about and from each other while addressing issues of common concern. As church bodies we are committed to exploring ways we can support our brothers and sisters in Christ in proclaiming God's truth and love in a world that so desperately needs Him.

Finally, our churches have together identified areas about which we have differing views and about which we may profitably engage in further study and discussion. Some examples of areas for further conversation include:

- We recognize that we do not have the same understanding of the need for, approach to, or value of authoritative theological confessions in addition to the creeds.
 - Lutherans have unreserved subscription to the creeds and dogmatic definitions of the first four ecumenical councils. The LCMS also highly values and requires unreserved subscription to the *Book of Concord*.
 - Anglicans have unreserved subscription to the creeds and the dogmatic definitions of the first four ecumenical councils. The Anglican Church in North America place a high value on the authority of the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; however the Anglican church has historically not been confessional in the same way as the Lutheran Church.
- We recognize that further discussion is needed regarding issues of ecclesiology and the office(s) of ministry.
 - Further exploration of the understanding of the office of bishop (its definition, nature, and necessity) is needed.
 - Disagreement exists among Anglicans about the propriety of ordaining women to the pastoral (presbyteral) office, while the LCMS opposes this practice.³
- We recognize that further discussion is needed regarding our respective understandings of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper and the administration of this sacrament.
- We recognize that we have differing levels of appreciation for and usage of the western liturgy.
 - Anglicans follow *The Book of Common Prayer* with a great measure of uniformity.
 - Lutherans currently exhibit a greater variety in liturgical practice and some significant internal disagreements about the conduct of worship.

We appeal to the laity and clergy of our two communions to take to heart the developing relationship between us, fostering our mutual bonds by personal and group contacts, by each side becoming better informed and more appreciative of the other, by supporting each other, and by seeking opportunities for common study of God's Word and prayer. May the Lord in his good time grant more than our weak eyes can envisage or our dull hearts conceive.

¹ As noted above in the first paragraph, the LCMS has been joined in this dialogue by a representative of the Lutheran Church—Canada. For the sake of convenience, references to “LCMS” in the body of this document should be understood to include also the theological perspective of the LCC. Bishop Ray Sutton, Dr. Jonathan Riches, and Bishop Wes Nolden serve as representatives of the ACNA. Dr. Albert Collver, Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, Dr. Lawrence Rast, Dr. Frederic Baue, and Rev. Larry Vogel are the official representatives of the LCMS, while Dr. John Stephenson was the representative of the LCC.

² We wish to distinguish herein between "ecumenical" (referring to what is universal or catholic) and "ecumenical" (referring to the work of theological dialogue between different church traditions).

³ LCMS/LCC representatives have discerned agreement with the majority in ACNA in regards to this issue. Although presbyteral ordination for women occurs in ACNA, a majority of ACNA bishops reserve presbyteral ordination only for men.