



104th Michigan District Convention 2025

LCMS Address – Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison

President Davis:

In addition to my responsibilities here in the district, by virtue of this office I'm also part of the Council of Presidents, and that group is led by President Matt Harrison. In working with him over the last three years on the Council, I've appreciated building a frank and fraternal relationship with him. We might have had a couple of difficult situations that we've worked through, but he's been very responsive and respectful, and for that, I've been very grateful in our work together. One of his responsibilities as Synod President is to visit with districts and their leadership. And President Harrison has been with us here in Michigan these last three years—a lot. On at least three occasions, he's met with leaders here in the district. He's been with our Board of Directors twice, and he brought the Synod Board of Directors to meet with the Michigan District Board. President Harrison is here with us to share his report. We may have some time for questions and answers, but I'll let him direct that. We're going to begin, though, with a video on behalf of the president's office of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Video:

Greetings in the name of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been richly blessed to proclaim Christ's love and mercy across the nation and around the globe through the dedication of our ministries, our international missions, disaster response, life ministry, church planting, missions of mercy education, and more. The Gospel has gone forth to comfort the hurting, uplift the downtrodden, and bring the joy of salvation to the lost. In this video, you'll see and hear about exciting work being done by faithful workers across the Synod. This mission belongs to all of us, to every congregation, every district, every pastor, every church worker, and every layperson with talents and energy given by God to bring Christ's love and mercy to those who need it most. Our efforts together reflect this shared mission to make Christ known to the world. As we reflect on these blessings, we look ahead to 2026 when we will gather under our convention theme, *Christ is risen indeed*. With hearts, souls, and lives full of saving faith, gratitude, and hope, we proclaim together, Christ is risen indeed.

Well, the Office of National Mission has had broad impact in a variety of ways. One of the ones that's most timely right now is our disaster response efforts.

When we were in St. Petersburg, we were working, and we met a lady that's a member of the church that lives right on the coast. The water had come into her house, completely decimated it. All of her earthly goods were on the lawn.

I was calling for help over on Facebook because we thought we were going to die. The waters were rising. I had to go up and stand on my kitchen counter. You will not believe this, okay? It's horrendous, but thank you. Thank you to the church. Thank you so much.

When a disaster strikes, we bring together pastors, district presidents, deaconesses, school teachers, volunteers, young people, teenagers, college students, senior citizens that come together with helping hands in the name of Christ to help out their community. One of the things that I want to mention, and that I hear time and time again, is the gratitude that people have for what the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is doing, both praying for and caring for their neighbors, not just in the United States, but also around the world.

One of the areas where the partnerships with the districts of the Synod have been of great benefit is for the work of church planting. In just the last year, we've been working actively to partner with all 35 districts. We're working hard to ensure that we're working together, working in collaboration with one another. This past January, we had a significant opportunity to speak God's truth and to stand up for life. As we participated in the National March for Life, district presidents and district representatives came to join President Harrison and our life ministry team.

[Loudspeaker] "Lord God, without any merit or worthiness on our part, you have given us our lives, our bodies and souls, as well as our neighbors. We give you thanks, especially for the grace you have shown to us in our savior Jesus Christ."

One of the other ministries we're excited about for the years ahead is our All Nations ministry. We've recently called Stephen Heimer to lead this effort.

All Nations Ministry is a recent expansion of the longstanding work that our Synod has been doing in a variety of ethnic communities. And so this ministry is seeking to support outreach and witness and discipleship to all nations here in the United States.

When we are asked about the top priorities of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod these days, we often think in terms of some critical factors, such as the planting of new Lutheran churches, the advancement of the Gospel through the establishment of new Word and Sacrament ministries, the effective recruitment, support, preparation, and deployment of church workers who will be a critical part of assisting our congregations in schools, in advancing the mission of God in their local situations, and also the service that we provide to our neighbors in love and mercy, the kind of work that Jesus did and encourages apostles and all of our church members to do to this very day.

Church worker recruitment is important in the Lutheran Church because Jesus himself said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." He said that when he looked out over the crowd, and he said to his apostles, "They're like sheep without a shepherd." And the shepherd he is talking about is a spiritual shepherd, one who feeds them the Word. We need pastors. He is the one who commanded that we have pastors in the Church to preach and to teach God's Word. *Set Apart to Serve* is the Missouri Synod's culture of forming and recruiting church workers. That happens at the congregational level with pastors and parents and laity and teachers and commissioned workers, so that we have people who will preach, teach God's Word from one generation to the next, because there is nothing more important in all of life than God's Word and eternal salvation.

I'm very proud of our LCMS chaplains and the training we receive in our seminaries. I'm particularly struck how our seminary training focuses in on standards, focuses in on expectations, focuses in on Word and Sacrament, ministry, and pastoral care. Those two elements, Word and Sacrament ministry and pastoral care are essential to meeting the needs of service members, but also is what commanders are looking for. You know, our LCMS chaplains in terms of their pastoral care, we are very comfortable in the one-on-one sort of ministry. Other faith traditions are kind of looking for the large crowds, but for us, we recognize that it can be that one-on-one, that mentoring, that pastoral care. So as we proclaim the Gospel and touch service members' lives and touch their family's lives, they come back into the civilian world and say, I heard the Gospel, and we've given them a taste for the Gospel, and they go looking for the Gospel.

Now, when we talk about doing mission work, we're talking about doing at least a 75-year commitment. So it's not a commitment where we're here one day and gone the next. When we go into a new area, we're thinking 75 years minimum to plant that church, to support and walk with that church until it grows into maturity. The best way for individuals and congregations to participate in international mission work is to assist with the *Foro* program. The *Foro* program was established so that individuals and congregations and even districts can walk alongside OIM working with the strategy of planting Lutheran churches and supporting that mission work.

The Riga Luther Academy began about four years ago. They were able to reach many international students from all over Europe, over what we call Eurasia, even as far as Pakistan. And this program has gone through quite a lot. And currently the Riga Luther Academy has achieved its accreditation.

Our church is looking forward to the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030. The presentation of the Augsburg Confession before the emperor during the Reformation was a defining moment in the history of the Lutheran Church and the articulation of our faith.

And frankly, I think what you could do, you could say that without the Augsburg Confession, there would be no Lutheran church. 1517 was a big moment. You can nail all the paper on church walls and doors that you want and still not have a Reformation church. Every Lutheran should pick up a copy of the Augsburg Confession.

Well, what's going on with the old Latin school these days?

All these past days, a Fortnite full of Lutheran leaders from everywhere. The wonderful thing is that there's so many resources which we can use, like the historical library in the Castle Church, which has got so many original copies, even from Reformation time, but even before that, for serious scholars. Hundreds of thousands, hundreds of thousands of items.

Yes. And it is just magnificent how welcoming they host us there.

And all of it is right here in Wittenberg. I'm standing right here on the old graveyard around Luther's Church, where he preached 2,400 sermons. There's nothing better than being in Wittenberg. You can take day trips around to see other sites come back nightly to Wittenberg, stay with us in the old Latin school.

The International Church Relations Conference is all about enhancing unity in Christ in His Word. And it's for all confessional Lutherans around the world with specific focus on the partner churches, our sister churches of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and we enhance unity in Christ in His Word by theological presentations; great, thoughtful discussion; invigorated friendships; and mutual support. And then those church leaders actually present it to the body together so that we could all understand some of their common celebrations and challenges. So that testimony to the breadth of the Gospel that we celebrate together is great.

The Scriptures predicted and prophesied that this Christ would die for our sins. Isaiah 53: "he's wounded for our transgressions, pierced for our inequities." "That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, that Peter then to the 12, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me," Paul says. Think of this, my friends. All of these apostles and the whole community burst upon the known world, and they proclaimed this life and salvation in Jesus' death and resurrection, and they all died for it. Would they have gone forth to the whole world around them proclaiming this Christ, risking death and indeed dying for it if it was a fable, if it was false, if it was a dream? Absolutely not. Christ has risen indeed. Hallelujah.

President Davis:

Please welcome our Synod president, pastor Matthew Harrison.

President Harrison:

Thanks so much. It's, uh, always a joy to be with you. My family's kind of come full circle with Michigan this year. My ancestor, Basil Harrison, from Schoolcraft, Michigan, was the first white settler in Kalamazoo County in 1827. His uncle Benjamin signed the Declaration of Independence. He died in 1874 at 104 years old and not long after that, the Harrison clan bought about 10 sections of land in Sioux City, Iowa, in that area. My mother passed last year, and we in April cleaned out the house, sold everything, and dad moved to Oxford to live with my sister and brother-in-law there. And I'm very happy that Dan Meckes is pastor to them and taking care of them. So it's kind of an interesting life, isn't it? Very interesting. It's good to see you all.

So what I'll do is I'm going to take you through a little run through part of the Augsburg Confession, touching on some of the issues that we face as a Synod, and then I'll talk a little bit about Concordia and some of the things going on in Synod. And then we'll have Q&A and, if we need some more Q&A time, I understand we have some

time scheduled after lunch, if I'm not mistaken, but we'll see how it goes. We want to give you time for that at your pleasure.

So you're all Book of Concord Lutherans, every one of you. Every one of you, pastors, in your ordination swore that you would uphold the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, the inerrant Word of God, and the confession of faith we make in the Book of Concord, exactly as your president described. The norming norm is the Holy Scriptures. The Confessions reflect that. The Scriptures give us God's Word. We respond and answer the question, "Who do people say that I am?" And we respond, "but thou the Christ, the Son of the living God". So these Confessions have, in the preface, some very worthwhile things to note. There's basically a mission statement toward the end, and it says we are here for the *Fortsetzung*, the expansion of the glory of God everywhere. That's mission. We're here for the *Fortpflanzung*, the planting forth of the Gospel for the salvation of souls everywhere. That's mission. We are here for the tranquility of Lutheran churches, congregations, and schools. That's the district president. Dead silent.

Because holding a church in the right faith, the catechism faith, means there's going to be better unity. Not perfect, of course, but the Preface says, visitation is the foundation. The foundation of the LCMS constitution is visitation. The whole thing is based upon did the Synod president going to visit districts, district presidents visiting congregations, etc. Pastors visiting their people. And then finally, lastly, the Preface to the Book of Concord says, this whole Book of Concord is about, and the whole doctrine of Christ is about consolation for troubled consciences. The issue of conscience appears in 400 places in our Book of Concord. Four hundred times. Why? Because at the time of the Reformation, people could not be certain about eternal life. You had to be participating in indulgences to shorten your time of getting persecuted or purged in purgatory. You couldn't be certain that eternal life was yours. You went to the Lord's supper in order to get points, even though your eternal punishment was forgiven, you had to make up for so-called temporal punishments. You could worship the bones of saints. Luther said, there are 18 apostles buried in Germany alone!

Luther changed the entire trajectory of the faith. Everything was doing something for God to be assured that you'll finally get to heaven. Luther said, God doesn't need your works, your neighbor does. And so God serves you in church. He gives you the forgiveness of sins so that you can praise Him and praise Him especially by loving your neighbor in your family, in your congregation, in your community, etc. Changed everything. The Gospel changes everything. There's another interesting thing about our Book of Concord. It says, "Though we have not come to agreement with all Christians as of yet, we recognize that there are pious Christians in other church bodies." It is not true that Lutherans have ever taught that you can't get to heaven outside of the Lutheran faith. And if somebody were to teach that today, I would personally pursue that issue with the district president to make sure it was dealt with. We recognize that wherever the Gospel is enough to create faith, even though it be covered up with other mistakes and errors, wherever enough of the Gospel is, wherever Baptism is, wherever the Lord's supper is, it creates believers.

And finally, one other thing, which is your confession, my friends, the Preface says, we intend to stand before the judgment seat of God Almighty with this confession. They follow Luther here in the Formula of Concord article seven on the Lord's supper. Luther says, "I am not drunk. I know what I say. If people come after me after I've died and say, 'if Luther were alive, he'd teach thus and so,' don't believe it. I've gone over these texts thousands of times. I know what I'm saying. I shall stand before the judgment seat of God with this confession unafraid."

And finally, at the end of the Book of Concord—you pastors will remember that line—we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ with intrepid hearts. "In" it's a privative and "trepid" trepidatious, afraid, without fear. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ without fear. Why? Because you have had your sins blotted out. You are Christ's. And that is the heart and soul, in fact, it's in every article of our entire Book of Concord, especially the Augsburg Confession. We're coming up on the anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. It was given in 1530. It's coming up in 2030, 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. You're going to hear about it in your communities. The Roman Catholics have told us in Europe, we're not going to let you have the Augsburg Confession. Well, I'm responding. How about getting rid of indulgences?

They got a full, full indulgence factory still going right now to shorten time in purgatory. It's like the Reformation never happened. This is our responsibility before the world: to confess the Gospel to everybody. The first article is God: who is God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that the Father is God. The Son is God. Jesus says, I and the Father are one. And the Spirit. "You have not lied to man, but you've lied to the Holy Spirit" in Acts 5 on Ananias. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, yet not three gods, one God. And we confess the creeds. The first documents in our Book of Concord are the three ecumenical creeds: Apostles' Creed, Nicene creed, Athanasian Creed. We know clearly who God is, and we know who Christ is. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. Christ is begotten, not made against the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Arians, the Jehovah's witnesses of their day who denied Christ is true God.

These creeds are ours. They belong to us because we are part of, and we confess the holy, small C, catholic church with the Church of all ages. Pastors, don't write your own creeds. Use your creativity. Write hymns. Be creative in the sermon. But don't steal the Creed from your people. Teach them. You have no right to steal the Creed from your people. Teach them the faith, our Apostles' Creed. That's what the Catechism does.

Second article is man. Sin. Norman Nagel, I was reminded recently, said, "small sins, small Jesus, big sins, big Jesus." Christ comes for sinners. Our Book of Concord says that sin is such a terrible malady, it can't be conceived; it has to be believed. "I've been sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me," David says in Psalm 51. Original sin. That original sin creates all kinds of desire to do what is anti-God. By nature, we cannot fear God. We cannot love God. We cannot trust God. We're worse than a block, our confession says. Worse than a block. And it's not like you're half dead. It's not like Jesus coming to Lazarus in the tomb and saying, "Lazarus, I've done everything I could for you. Now, it's up to you." What does Jesus say to Lazarus? "Lazarus, come forth. Where is the power for the coming forth? It's in the speaking; it's in the words of Jesus. Paul says that we are born again. That coming to faith is a resurrection. We're buried with Christ by Baptism into His death and raised again with Him. Faith is a resurrection from the dead, and it's all 100% Christ doing.

The third article of our confession is Christ. Who is he? He is God and man. The blood of Jesus Christ, the blood of a man named Jesus, God's son, God in the flesh, cleanses us from all our sins. Luther says, "If it were just the blood of a human being and nothing more in the weight against our sins, we would be sunk. But you have the blood of Christ paying for our sins. And as such, the blood of God outweighs the sins of the world." Christ has made atonement for all sins: put to death for our transgressions, wounded for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. It's a happy switch. The world's sins have been put on Jesus. The world's sins. There are no sins that have not been paid for. There are no sins that have not been atoned for.

Hebrews says Christ does this once, unlike the Old Testament sacrifice. He is the one sole Savior who pays for the sin of the world. And as I said last night, then our task is so easy. We speak a Word that He gives us. And the power for believing is in His Word that we speak. Ultimately, it does not depend on your arguments. It does not depend on your acumen. We can use all those things in apologetics—and we should use them. But ultimately, faith depends upon the message of Jesus Christ. The Word of God.

Article four is so marvelous. It's the most beautiful text in the history of Christianity outside the Bible. *Weiter wird gelehrt*, "Furthermore, it is taught that we receive the forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God not through our own efforts, merits, or works, or satisfactions. Rather, we receive the forgiveness of sins and are justified or righteous before God by grace for the sake of Christ through faith. When we believe that Christ suffered for us and that, because of His sake, our sins are forgiven, righteousness and eternal life are a gift. For this faith, God will reckon for righteousness." It's a court scene. It's a court scene.

So, after church on Sundays, I like to go to Brick Tops restaurant because they have the best prime rib in St. Louis. You ought to try it sometime. The prices aren't bad. I wear my collar because I can always find a Roman Catholic to buy my martini <laugh>. And so I'm in there after church one day, and this guy comes up to me. He's a Canadian, but he works in St. Louis. Nice guy, Adam. I get to know him over the months. He comes up to me about six months later and he says, you know, pastor, I've never been baptized. I said, would you like to be baptized? He said, yeah, I would like to be baptized. I said, I'll set it up. Come on over to the office.

Went over to the International Center, sat down. I'm talking to him, get his stories. Grandparents immigrated from the UK into Canada many years ago, and his parents dropped the ball. They just never baptized the kids or anything. And he said, "pastor, I don't know anything about Christianity." And he didn't. I mean, he didn't know the story of Lazarus, He didn't know the resurrection. He didn't know not one, not one Bible story, folks. And I'm thinking, now, where am I going to start here? Where would you start? Wow. I said a quick prayer and I said, well, Adam, it's like this. You're in court. God the Father is the judge or accuser, and he knows all of your sins. He knows even sins that you don't know yourself. And He's got a record of it all. And he stands before God and he says, "This Adam is the worst of the worst. The wages of sin is death. This guy does not fear God. He's ignored God for his entire life. He does not love God. He doesn't know who God is. He's full of filth and envy and terrible thoughts." And Adam said, "yeah, that's true."

And then I said, Adam, but you have a defense attorney. You have an advocate with the Father who says, "All of that is true about Adam, but I have taken his punishment upon myself, and I have died his sins to death. I have died for him in his place that he might go free." The judge says, "Not guilty." And I'm kind of waiting, you know. "So Adam, what do you think about that?" Adam says, "That's good new!" <laugh>

Fifth article. The fifth article is the *Predigtamt*, the Office of the Ministry. In order to obtain this faith, God creates the preaching office, which has specific functions. The office exists for these functions: preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. That's why pastors exist. We don't ordain men to non-preaching offices or offices not connected with preaching and Word and Sacrament.

The office exists for the function. The function exists in light of the office. Now, we have had arguments in the church. Luther says, a peasant wanders along on a donkey like a drunk. And he wobbles from this side to that side, but never stands up quite in the middle. That's sort of the Missouri Synod. And in order to hold up the office, some have said that the Word of God is not as effective when it is spoken by a layperson. Well, that is contrary to our public confession. Our Confessions are very clear. Look, for instance, at the Bible, John 4, the woman at the well. She says to her community, "Come and see the man who has told me everything I've ever done." And the text says, "And many believed through her witness." The Word of God is just as powerful when a child *sings Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so*. And we know this to be true because of how many people have gone home with children's storybooks or songs from their preschool and converted their parents.

Pastors have a sacred task to preach the Word very clearly. And make sure you make your pastor preach it. Pastor, you're not convicting me of my sin. I'm dying out here. I'm having a hard time in my marriage. I'm struggling with sin. I need to have my sins condemned and forgiven. And if he's not preaching the Gospel, grab him and say, I love your sermons, pastor. I love you, but you got to forgive me my sins. I need it. It's the only thing I have out here. So this powerful Word of God is proclaimed for salvation, and it renders salvation. You have this beautiful task in your families of speaking it, speaking it. I call it the German thing in my family. You know, Emma Caterina Wolf, she's the German, and she won the religious wars. But, you know, it was like I said last night, don't do it again. Instead of forgiving, speaking forgiveness, speak forgiveness in your congregations. Don't let it go by time and time again. When it does, your conscience will harden and you'll get used to not forgiving and used to not being forgiven. And that is a terrible position for Christians to be in, because Christ dwells only in sinners, says Luther. Christ dwells only in sinners.

The sixth article is on good works. We believe in good works. We do good works. We love each other. That's what the Bible calls us to do. That's what Jesus calls us to do. We love our neighbor as ourselves. We serve. God serves us and we serve our neighbor. Luther says, faith is such an active, aggressive thing, that it's ready to go all the time and even before it's commanded to do a good work, it's already done. And that's why you live. That's why you love in your families. That's why you care for your children. That's why you love your spouse. That's why you do what it's right. That's why you serve your communities. That's why you love your pastor and serve him. He doesn't deserve it all the time or maybe much of the time, but you love him. Pastors, that's why you serve your people. You love them in the name and instead of Christ, you love them. And we are to do good works.

The third use of the law is a good thing. It is good for a pastor to preach "Love people." Luther was preaching at the *invocavit* sermon. He famously came back from the Wartburg castle and things were a mess in Wittenberg

because they had run rough shod over each other, forcing liturgical practices and other stuff to change. And Luther just stood up there and said, look, I've been preaching here for years. You people know the Gospel and it's doctrine. Why are you treating each other like swine? I like that kind of preaching. It points right at me. <laugh>

Article seven. "Furthermore, it is taught that the Church will remain until the Last Day." *Ne Desperemus*, it says in the original Latin, that's for you pastors, that's a line Herman Sasse loved to quote all the time because of the challenges that the Lutheran Church has gone through its history. We do not despair. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. We don't know about the future of the Missouri Synod or who knows what, but we know the gates of hell are not going to prevail against the Church. And then it says, "It is enough for the true unity of the church that we agree on the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. "I used to think the right administration of the sacraments was simply getting the words right. That's not the case. It's broader than that. I looked it up diligently in our Book of Concord. Our Book of Concord calls, for instance in Article 12, that repentance must be taught before somebody goes to the Lord's Supper. It involves catechesis, teaching the faith. Luther says, in our Large Catechism, no one should come to the Sacrament unless he knows what he seeks or why he comes.

I'll talk more about the Lord's supper in a bit. But there's another part then of article seven, which says, uniformity in ceremonies is not necessary for the unity of the Church. Uniformity in ceremonies is not necessary for the unity of the Church. Now, there's a conundrum here because the Confessions will say, "Clothing does not get you any closer to God." So vestments, either they're there or not there, this is not a matter of true Divine Service. It is truly *adiaphora*. On the other hand, the Confessions say we retain vestments. There's not going to be any vestment police in the Missouri Synod. I'm sure not going to be one, and nobody else is. There's a lot of flexibility, enormous flexibility. But here's what we do. We take the ethic of Luther from the Freedom of the Christian man. This is what our Confessions do on the issue of worship. Luther says, under the Gospel, I am the free Christian Lord of all, subject to none, need no rules, or no compulsion whatsoever. Completely free. Under the law of love I'm the dutiful bondservant, servant slave of my neighbor, completely bound to do him good. And so we retain these things, in general, out of love. We realize that connects us with the practice of the Church. We are the conservative reformation. Our Confessions say we retain those ceremonies that do not contradict with the Gospel.

So we do so out of love. I think all the Council of Presidents agrees that we should stick to the *ordo* of the Divine Service. Certainly our Confessions support that. And why? Don't ditch confession and absolution. You're robbing your people of the forgiveness of sins. Don't ditch the Creed. You're robbing them of connection to the Church of all ages and the clear confession that has been made by a thousand generations. Don't ditch the lessons. It's neither commanded nor forbidden. But our Confession says, we retain the lessons. Preach a series, great. Preach on a topic. Wonderful. They did that in the Reformation all the time, but they had all kinds of different services on different days. But don't ditch the lessons because your people get huge swaths of the Bible in those one-year and three-year series. Don't rob them of that.

Make sure you give them Christ. Give them Christ, pastors, in your sermons. Give them Jesus, no matter whatever else, uh, you're teaching. You know our Augsburg Confession says, our people go to sermons because they're very practical. Practical sermons are good, even sermons that use the Law. But don't leave Christ out. Don't mess with the words of institution of the Lord's Supper. It's not yours to mess with. That's why we don't. And I would say even more. You've got many options. This is not about musical style. This is not about instrumentation. Of course, no matter what style you use, you got to be careful to see that it fits the Gospel. The Gospel is, it's a, it's a means for conveying the Gospel. This is not about instrumentation. Keep the *ordo*. You have myriads of opportunities for different settings, different portions of the liturgy done, etc, so that when your people leave your congregation and they travel elsewhere, they don't seek out the big box church. They seek a church where you can have confession and absolution upfront, etc. It's like this, those of you who travel the world like me, I know where I'm at when I'm in a Lutheran church, even if the language is quite different. I was in Finland helping the consecration of the Finnish bishop, our partner church over there (Any Finns here?) Certainly there are. They really ought to give the UP back to you guys. <laugh> On second thought, they're Finns; we don't want to do that.

Now, Finnish is very difficult language. One of the most difficult, and I don't even know what their word for God is. I couldn't even figure that out. I mean, at least in Germany, you got Gott. Ach, Gott. So the only two words I understood in this two-hour service were Pontius Pilatus <laugh>. That's it. But I knew everything that was happening. Confession and absolution, the lessons, the Psalm, the sermon, the Lord's Prayer, words of Institution, the Lord's Supper, benediction. I knew it all, and I could participate in all of it. That's the way it is globally. And that's the way it should be among us. Why? For the sake of love. There's flexibility to love those outside the love those we're trying to bring in to catechize, etc. Love.

Article eight is just a little more confirmation about a wonderful consolation to know that the Church is not perfect on this earth. And there are unbelievers mixed with believers, and it's just the way it is.

Article nine on Baptism. Baptism saves and children are to be baptized, our apology says. Baptism now saves you, not the washing of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a good conscience before God. And that pledge is Baptism. Baptism saves because it is the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Ghost, says the Catechism quoting Titus. It really does something. It saves, it is the powerful Word of God connected to water in such a way that it touches us and creates faith, received in faith. We are people of Baptism, and it's a cornerstone. And then finally, the Lord's supper. [garbled/skipped sentences] So presence, you can be ordained. And he said at his theological interview, the first prof said, is it close, closed, or closed? What's there? Body and blood. Examined and absolved or instructed and absolved.

[Unclear/skipped sentences in video] We know that is confirmation, especially. Can a person who does not believe in the body and blood and the forgiveness of sins. This is not a trick question. What's your name?

So, I come home from work one day and my wife says, Matt, my hairdresser's husband is ill. He's going to die in three weeks. The doctor tells him they've got a lot of problems. They have no church. I want you to go over there and talk to them. I respond, Matt's tired. Matt doesn't want to go talk to him. "Matt, you're going to go over there and you're going to go over there very soon." Me and Jesus are tired. We're trying to save the Missouri Synod <laugh>. "Matt?" (That tone, you know?) So I went. By the way, I used to think my wife was very cantankerous. You know, this is our 44th year of marriage this year. And then I found out about a year ago, she changed completely. I stopped insulting her and speaking sarcastically to her. It's amazing how a person can change <laugh>.

Anyway, I go see Tony, we'll call him Tony. I get his story. He's in bad shape, imminent death. And I'm thinking, what am I going to do here? What am I going to do? I said, dear Lord, I got one chance. I got to pull out the big gun. So pull out the 50 caliber: Tony, after talking to you, I want to tell you, you got four letters emblazoned on your forehead, HELL, and that's where you're going, unless you repent. Guess what happened? He repented. Thanks be to God. I said, Tony, do you believe what you were taught as a Catholic young person, that Body and Blood are truly in the Sacrament? Same Body and Blood on the cross, not just a symbol. And do you believe the words that Jesus says given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins? He says, I do. I said, Tony, would you like to receive the Sacrament? He said, I would. And I gave it to him. And then we had a big problem. He got better <laugh>. So what did I do? I catechized him and handed him off to my senior pastor after I'd spent some sessions with him. And he and his wife joined the church. And he died about a year and a half later. Fantastic.

The second principle is unity in the faith. Unity in confession. Zwingli is quoted in our Book of Concord saying, when our confession says, the Sacraments are not merely a sign of profession among men, they are more their Body and Blood for forgiveness. It was Ulrich Zwingli who said they were only a sign of confession, only a marker. So you know where to go to church. Our Confessions say they're that, but they're more than that. And the Bible calls us to unity in faith.

Third thing is there's pastoral discretion. Every resolution says there's pastoral discretion. There are all kinds of strange situations out there. There are Tonys and everybody else, there are relatives, there are who knows what. There's the ELCA grandma comes to live with somebody. Those are legitimate pastoral issues. My first parish, we got 30, 37 ELCA people who joined our church by not communing them, because every time they'd come, they'd get really ticked off. And I'd say, well, you want to sit down and talk? And they'd say, yeah, let's sit down and talk.

And I'd talk about the issue. And then I'd say, how are things going at your church? And they'd go, well... And what I would do is say, the choice is yours. You believe the Catechism. You believe Body and Blood for forgiveness of sins. You can start communing anytime you want. You're just not commuting at the ELCA anymore. If you want to start commuting this Sunday, you place yourself under my pastoral care and you go through the Catechism with me. It worked wonderfully. That was pastoral discretion.

So, I think what I'll do right now is just switch to just a few synodical things very briefly. We're going great guns in international mission. Very challenging getting missionaries, you know, numbers are challenging. We're seeing an uptick in numbers at the universities and the seminaries. Thanks be to God set apart to serve has got a lot of traction. Thank you for your work. We get 10, we get a guy going to the seminary for every 10 congregations. Our pastoral shortage is over. One guy for every 10 congregations, our pastoral shortage is over. It's challenging. Nobody's doing away with the alternate routes. Uh, they're serving their purpose well. We've got great stuff going to Central and South America. Those churches are unified, producing pastors and deaconess for Central and South America, taking in new partner churches. The Riga Seminary has got about 30 guys. They're all church planning at the same time. From Pakistan to Northern Europe. We're planting churches, especially in Southern Europe, where we haven't had traditional partners like Romania, Moldova. We ordained a couple of guys in Rome a couple of weeks ago. Fantastic.

Finances of the Synod. When I came in, we were about \$40 million in debt or borrowed against designated funds, funds for other purposes. Plus we had about 25 million in Concordia University system debt that is virtually all gone. We have significant reserves. And the challenge is to keep those reserves into the future. The big challenge is the dollar coming from your pocket to the plate to the district to the Synod is flat to shrinking. Just a function of our demographics, I suspect. But know this, there was a recent study of the wealth of individual religions and denominations in America. Who do you think is the wealthiest religion in America per capita? Episcopalians, you are wrong. Episcopalians. I thought that too. It's Hindus. We need more Hindus in the Missouri Synod. <laugh>

But guess what? ELCA is number six. United Presbyterians up there. We are the, we are the wealthiest Bible believing church in America. Catholics way below us. We are the wealthiest per capita Bible believing church in America out of 35. That's amazing. And you folks are unbelievably generous. Thanks be to God.

On Concordia. Here's, here's what I, I want to tell you, and this is of course, from my perspective. So over 10 years ago, Concordia was about ready to close the \$10 million debt. The Concordia University system Board voted to close. My representative was Bryan Salminen. Salminen is a blessed memory, or unblessed, I don't know. Anyway, he voted against on the CUS. It would've taken another vote—at the time, this is the way the system worked; doesn't work that way anymore—of the Council of Presidents or the Synod Board of Directors to close.

I asked the CUS people, has Pat Ferry been asked to look into taking over Ann Arbor? They said, yes, and no luck. I called Pat anyway. And Pat said, no, nobody's asked me, and I would be happy to take a look. And then he performed a yeoman's job, got his board of directors going in that direction, changed the strategic plan and everything else. And he gave this institution another 10 years of existence. When the new administration came in, they did a financial deep dive. Because the campuses had been amalgamated, it had not been clear to the Regents how much money was being made or lost at the Ann Arbor campus. They did a study with outside assistance and came back and said, the number is not good. It's not sustainable, and it's significant enough to jeopardize the future of CUW.

I immediately asked for the financials myself. I had Nathan Hawk, our Chief Financial Officer at the Synod, I asked him to get two guys from the Concordias, not from Mequon or from this place, but two other financial experts from the Concordias have a look at those financials and report back to me. They reported back to me and said that this is not a sustainable situation. It's not good at all. At that time, I communicated with the Regents, pleading with them to keep as much program as possible on at this campus, the Southern campus. I went to Brian Friedrich and said, Brian, this is the largest Lutheran University in the United States, now 7,000 students. I said, Brian and I asked Ankerberg, "Is it possible for Brian and you to talk to see if Concordia St. Paul could bring some leverage to bear?" That happened, but did not result in anything significant.

In February, we brought the Michigan District leadership together with the CUW leadership to try to broker something, to try to begin to look at some best-case scenarios for both parties going forward. Uh, there was some hopefulness there. It went through some rough times, but there was willingness to talk. The district offered its initial plan to the Board of Regents. And those Regents are the ones in charge of the situation that has not been responded to yet. I had hoped by this time that there would've been a response and some kind of agreement that it could have worked out as a best-case scenario of some sort.

That hasn't happened, and I apologize for that. And I'm sorry it's happened. I know I would feel exactly as you do. After record enrollment, the numbers looked good and so many blessings that came, to be hit with the financial issues was terrible. Ankerberg has admitted he rolled it out poorly, should have been done differently, should have been done with more collaboration. So that's where the situation is. And I wish I could change it, but I don't have the ability to do that. I'm still hoping for the best. Nothing has been presented on sale or use of property to the Synod's Board of Directors. So if Mequon wants to sell or use property for something else, they have to submit a plan to the Synod's Board of Directors for approval. There's no plan on the table. So that's where it stands. With that, we are probably out of time, but I can take questions if you'd like.

Pres. Davis:

We are indeed out of time, but appreciate your words and your presentation. Maybe I could offer this up, because we don't have time in the agenda later. But President Harrison among a lot of other things is a very approachable man. And maybe just over the lunchtime, if you could be kind of out and around, so if people had questions, they could approach you privately.

Pres. Harrison:

Absolutely. Yeah. And let me just say that Dave has been great. He's been a friend through this whole thing. He's expressed his pain. He's a very thoughtful person and he likes to take a little time to think. And then he really, when he writes things out, he really expresses his viewpoint. And it's been very helpful for us to continue to carry on a conversation on all those matters and others. So I really appreciate, and Dave is committed to being a genuine Christian brother. So we appreciate that enormously. God bless you all. And don't give up. It's not in vain. Don't worry. The Lord is in His heavens. And we are blessed in so many ways. We've got many across the Synod. Many young men are coming to church. Many young families are coming to church again. We're seeing it as a trend across the Synod. We are blessed in so many ways in the Missouri Synod. Blessed, blessed, blessed, not least of all by you. We know you're in small places and small congregations, many of you. Don't give up. The Lord has placed you there for a purpose to be His witness there and to bring salvation. God bless you all. Alright, thank you.