

OUR PRAYERFUL VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE LCMS

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

EPHESIANS 3:20-21

1. **We pray for and imagine a church shaped by hope in the Lord of the Church and the power of His Gospel.** We repent of the fear that continues to debilitate our congregations and our leaders. Facing decreasing worship attendance, aging membership, and financial stress, we have focused more on institutional survival than on the mission of Jesus Christ. Fear has stalled our mission. We have looked to demographic studies, birth rates, and “riding it out” as approaches to our decline. We have circled the wagons and turned inward. In the darkness of a declining church, we seem to have lost hope in the Holy Spirit’s power to grow the church. We pray for a renewed and bold confidence that the kingdom still comes by God’s strong Word.

Acts 4:28-29 ²⁸ *They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.* ²⁹ *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.*

Romans 15:13 ¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Ephesians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

Revelation 1:17 *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.”*

2. **We pray for and imagine a church driven by a mutual confidence in Scripture alone as the sole authority for our teaching and confession.** We repent of the elevation of our Lutheran confessional documents and convention resolutions to an authority equal to that of Holy Scripture. While we subscribe wholeheartedly to the Confessions as a true exhibition of Scriptural truth, we are alarmed at the neglect of Biblical study. In a time of growing Biblical illiteracy, many of our churches have no youth or adult Bible study. An emphasis on Lutheran identity coupled with a relentless quoting of Luther and Walther have left many of us hungry for a dynamic teaching of the inspired Scriptures. We pray for our church’s return to its commitment to “Scripture alone.”

John 5:39 *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

3. **We pray for and imagine a church in which congregations freely carry on their mission without the hindrance and control of church hierarchy.** We repent of the obstacles we have placed in the way of congregational and district mission by the Synod's restrictive policies. A growing centralization of power in the Synod has led to controls being placed on its members required by neither the Scriptures nor our founders. Uniformity in practice seems to be a higher value than Christian freedom. Congregations seem to be asked to serve the needs of a centralized Synod rather than Synod serving the needs of congregations. We pray for a church in which congregations worship and witness in the encouraging context of Christian freedom.

John 8:31-32 ³¹ *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Galatians 5:1 *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

Romans 14:1-4 ¹ *Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ² One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Philippians 3:2-3 ² *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*

4. **We pray for and imagine a church in which a wide variety of gifts and people are celebrated among us.** We repent of our unwillingness to recognize the unique contributions of people of all ethnic backgrounds to the culture of our life together. We treasure a church which looks more and more like heaven as the nations come to Christ. We long for hymns and spiritual songs in our liturgical worship which express both our common faith and our diverse backgrounds. Most of our congregations simply do not look like the communities they serve. We cherish congregations which invite and welcome those who are "not like us." We yearn for pastors who joyfully take up the Scriptural challenge to equip the baptized saints of God for ministry. We pray for a new generation of leaders who joyfully celebrate the growing diversity of gifts among us.

Mark 11:17 *And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: " 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" [Isaiah 56:7]*

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 ⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Galatians 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Ephesians 4:11-13 ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Colossians 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

5. **We pray for and imagine a church which balances the nurturing of the saved and the seeking of the lost.** We repent of placing our own interests over the interests of those who do not know Christ. We confess that we spend so much energy focused on one another that we have little energy left to reach new people with the gospel. We have turned inward. We have erected walls of separation between our churches and their communities. In our relationship with other churches, we have become sectarian and prideful. How are we confessional when we only confess with one another? Our gospel light flickers under a bushel. We pray to be a New Testament church as defined by Scripture, fueled by the power of Word and Sacrament and sent into the world as bold witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:8 *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Acts 2:46-47 ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 13:1-3 ¹ In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Revelations 7:9 *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.*

6. **We pray for and imagine a church which celebrates our amazing unity in Christ and concord in confession.** We repent of the loveless judgments we have made on one another's doctrine and practice. We are wearied over the negative voices in the Synod, always bent on looking at what divides us rather than what unites us. We are saddened over a church so poised for dynamic growth yet so committed to endless conflict. Few, if any, Christian denominations are blessed with the level of concord we have within our Synod. We pray for a church at peace within itself and speaking with one voice the glory and grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John 17:22-23 *²² "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

Ephesians 4:1-6 *¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

2 Timothy 1:13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

7. **We pray for and imagine a church in which mutual trust and love characterize our relationships.** We repent of our party spirit and our repeated breaches of the eighth commandment. We have yielded to Satan's strategy to sow seeds of distrust among us and so to divide the church. The "slash and burn" practices of centralized control have left the Synod confused and endlessly conflicted. We long for a time when voting lists are no longer needed because we are unified in our purpose and mission. We long for leaders who exhibit the best of our Synod as bold confessors and bold witnesses. We yearn for leaders who are transparent, who speak the truth in love. We pray for leaders who embrace the whole Synod and restore trust among us all.

John 15:12-13 *¹² "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 *¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

Ephesians 4:29-32 *²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Colossians 3:12-15 *¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe*

yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

-- All Scripture quotations are taken from the 1984 New International Version (NIV)

Note:

This 2018-2019 statement by missional leaders was comprised of current and former district presidents, other Synodical and District leaders and missional pastors and laity. The formulators (subscribers) saw the future of the LCMS as a church in repentance, aspiration, and prayer for participation in Christ's mission (*Missio Dei*).