

GREETINGS

Rev. Gerald B. Kieschnick
LCMS President

Since Canada is officially a bilingual country, I thought I'd begin this greeting in both French and English. But since I've never studied the French language, I thought again and decided instead to share with you the story of the young Texas woman who had just begun to work as a receptionist for Air France...

Terry and I are honored to be here with our good friends of Lutheran Church–Canada. We bring you heartfelt greetings from the 2.5 million baptized members, 6150 congregations and 2000 schools of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.

You are to be congratulated, Dr. Mayan, on your recently received honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. Your family and church members are undoubtedly very pleased at this fine recognition, as are we all.

We also congratulate you, even if it is a bit premature, upon your expected re-election as President of Lutheran Church–Canada. It's intriguing to witness an election with only one name on the ballot. Some can only dream about such an election, especially those of us who are finally elected on the fourth ballot with an overwhelming 50.8% of the ballots cast!

It is my distinct pleasure to serve on the International Lutheran Council Executive Committee under your chairmanship. I firmly believe that the ILC is capable of accomplishing so much more for the kingdom of God by working together than any of our church bodies could ever hope to accomplish individually.

Your convention theme, "With Great Boldness... That all may know His name", illustrates this need to work together to bring the light of the Gospel to a world in darkness. In fact, it complements the Great Commission—to go and make disciples of all nations, and not to be shy about it!

The LCMS began doing that in Canada—impacting people for Christ—148 years ago in Ontario. From those mission seeds scattered in 1854, there have sprouted congregations that for 134 years were a part of our church body, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and which for the last 14 years have constituted your church, our partner in the Gospel, Lutheran Church–Canada.

Since LCC's founding in 1988, it has grown to nearly 80,000 baptized members with some 325 congregations. You and your seminaries have done a fine job of recruiting and training pastors, and I understand a growing number of congregations are establishing elementary schools to nurture and educate Canadian (and newly Canadian) children from a Christian perspective. May God continue to bless that work!

You have made great strides in mission work with immigrants to your country. Canadian society is undergoing much the same transformation that we in the United States are experiencing. We, like you, are becoming increasingly multicultural and ethnically diverse, and we must all find ways to communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people of other cultures and creeds. We offer mutual encouragement and partnership with you as we progress in these efforts.

Let me say just a few words about a number of the challenges and opportunities facing The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, some of which are similar to those you face as well. While blessed with an astonishing degree of harmony and concord in most arenas of faith and life, we also experience a degree of disharmony and disagreement in some areas, including:

- Church and ministry
- Church relations
- Inter-Christian relations
- Public proclamation of the Gospel
- The nature of pastoral authority
- The priesthood of all believers
- Close communion
- The role of women in the church

As Lutheran Christians, we accept the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. At the same time, we don't always agree precisely on what the Word of God says about contemporary issues facing the church today. We have much work to do in this regard and are resolved to accomplish that work, by the grace of God.

Toward that objective, later this summer we will hold a model Theological Convocation to be subsequently replicated in all 35 Districts of the Synod. The theme of this Convocation is:

"Conflict, Confession and Unity: Addressing Doctrinal Issues Faithfully and Fraternaly for the Sake of Christ's Mission".

The topic of discussion will be: "What the Scriptures and Confessions (AC VII, FC X, et al) Teach Regarding Church Fellowship, with Reference to the Section Titled 'Cases of Discretion', in The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions."

We are aware that our deliberations, decisions and actions on this and other topics have at least some impact on Lutherans around the world. We take very seriously

our role as partner to the 29 Lutheran churches with whom we have declared full altar and pulpit church body fellowship and earnestly solicit your prayers as we work toward God-pleasing harmony and concord on these and other important matters under discussion in our midst. We pledge to you our prayers for Lutheran Church–Canada, as well.

In spite of these areas of challenge in our midst, the mission of the LCMS moves boldly ahead. That mission is stated as follows:

In grateful response to God's grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of the LCMS is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world.

Three specific illustrations of our efforts to accomplish this mission will suffice:

Shake the Earth! This is an initiative to reach 100 million people with the Gospel of Christ in the next 15 years, in partnership and alliance with congregations, institutions, agencies and partner churches throughout the world.

For the Sake of the Church! This is an initiative to double the number of LCMS students in our colleges and universities and to raise \$400 million in endowments to support the financial needs of these students.

Serving with Joy! This is an initiative to provide answers to the twin questions:

- How does the LCMS increase the number of persons entering a vocation of church work?
- How does the LCMS help persons in a vocation of church work be joyful, competent and faithful as they serve?

All these initiatives are borne of the mission God has given to His church on earth. It is my conviction that we must begin to honestly view as simply unacceptable the fact that we are surrounded by people who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior from sin. It must be of utmost concern to the Lutheran church and to each member thereof that such individuals are on their way to eternal condemnation. We must, in winsome fashion, share the Good News of what God has done through Christ in order that those who accept by faith His undeserved love will spend eternity with Him, in heaven, forever. Today is the day to begin to refocus our efforts on the mission that Christ has given His church on earth, and to do so with renewed vigor, energy and passion!

My friends, this is not a game. We have not the luxury of time and energy spent on incessant internal purification at the expense of the eternal destiny of the

souls of men and women for whom Christ died, but who know not His name and have accepted not His saving grace.

Over the years, many a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod speaker and perhaps also many a Lutheran Church–Canada speaker has been fond of quoting a statement attributed to Billy Graham, who once called the Lutheran church a sleeping giant. We're big, we're strong, we're laden with talent and purpose, and yet we don't seem to accomplish as much as we might because we spend so much time in introspection and internal housekeeping.

Let me try a different metaphor. It comes from a favorite poem of mine by Robert Frost.

In the poem, called "The Woodpile," Mr. Frost is walking through a snowy marsh somewhere in New England. Suddenly he happens upon a stack of firewood, a cord of maple, cut, split and neatly piled. It's sitting all by itself in the lonely swamp, with no tracks or footprints or any other sign that it's being used.

Upon closer inspection, Frost notices that the wood is old. It's not this year's cutting, or last year's cutting, or even the cutting from the year before. The wood has turned gray, its bark is warping off, and creeping, climbing vines have intertwined themselves between and among the logs.

Who would spend the labor of his ax, Frost wonders, only to leave his work so far from a useful fireplace?

This woodpile, some might say, is The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod or Lutheran Church–Canada or the Lutheran church, period. It is big and impressive. It is seasoned and ready. It is full of potential to bring the light and warmth of Jesus Christ to a cold, gloomy, sin-filled world. And yet, too often, ignition that could lead to a roaring blaze is doused by our own hand. We pour water on our own wood. We pour water on one another's fires because we don't like the way our brother is going about building and burning his. It's not exactly how we would do it, and so for some reason it can't be right. We meddle in so many other fires that we fail to tend to our own.

And so our woodpile sits, in Frost's words,

"To warm the frozen swamp as best it could

With the slow, smokeless burning of decay."

The Lutheran church is not about "the slow, smokeless burning of decay." Our history, our present and our future are too vital and too promising for that. I am convinced, brothers and sisters in Christ, that we can keep our cord of wood—namely, our doctrine and practice—neatly stacked, perfectly tidy, carefully arranged, and yet be supportive of one another in the various and creative ways we seek, and sometimes need, to use it. And when honest disagreements arise, whether over doctrine or practice or style or methods, I am convinced that we can learn to deal with those

disagreements in love and trust, rather than letting them fester into major squabbles that embarrass the church and stymie our proclamation of the Gospel.

When the day comes that we are able to do that, and I believe it is coming, the sleeping giant will rise. He will gather up logs in his powerful arms and feed them into many fires. And we, the children of the Light, the people of the church who collectively are that giant, will carry our torches like lamps throughout the world. For that is what the God of the universe has called us to be. And that is what He has called us to do, by the power of His grace, in His most holy name.

On behalf of all members of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, I am blessed to say how very

pleased we are to share with you our oneness in Christ as a partner church. In some ways we are like mother and daughter. In other ways we are more like sister and sister. In all ways, we truly are brothers and sisters in Christ. I look forward to many more productive years of mission and ministry together, by the grace of God and for the sake of His Great Commission.

May God richly bless the labors of our hands and the proclamation of our lips in the precious name of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world and the true Lord of the universe!

Thank you and God bless you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ!