

**Arizona – California District Joint Pastors/Teachers/Staff Ministers Study Conference  
Reformation Lutheran Church, San Diego, California  
Thursday, November 2, and Friday, November 3, 2017**

**PROPOSED MINUTES FOR THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2:** Respectfully submitted for correction, rebuke, instruction and training in what to include and how to write, spell, construct, proper minutes.

**9am.**

**The conference worship service, “Five Solas of the Reformation”** set the pace of the conference with a dynamic and edifying mix of music, song, and Scripture. Every element sought to underscore that the 500<sup>th</sup> celebration of the Reformation is not about Luther, but

- about Christ alone as the redeemer of the human race,
- about grace alone as the essence of God whereby he embraces all of us,
- about faith alone as the gift of God that negates any reliance on our own good works,
- about Scripture alone as the power that the Holy Spirit uses to make a person wise for salvation,
- about giving God alone all the glory for every man is a beggar dependant on His mercy.

**The sermon made it clear that**

- surrounded by devastating plague,
- pagan terrorism,
- a decadent church administration,
- theologically ignorant church leadership, and
- the church’s stranglehold on the laity’s temporal resources by means of theological terrorism

The Lord God, through his powerful word, created and sustained faith in the eternal Gospel by leading Luther and others

- to see the Law’s weakness,
- by revealing to them the Gospel’s focus of free forgiveness, and
- encouraging them to proclaim that Gospel’s eternal grace and free forgiveness as agents of God.

Despite facing similar challenges in our day and age, among them our own attacks of conscience, our legacy, as parents, called workers, all laity is to focus on the forgiveness that frees us from sin, death, the power of the devil, and the burden of guilt and celebrate

- the righteousness that is credited to us through faith in Jesus,
- the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus’ atonement,
- the promise of our place in Heaven through faith in Jesus , and
- the promise of our own resurrection through faith in Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life.

**The celebration of the Lord’s Supper proclaimed**

Our individual faith in as well as our joint confession and proclamation of

- the real presence of the body and blood of the Lord in, with, and under the bread and wine,
- the power of God at work in the sacrament and the forgiveness he gives to the repentant participant,
- the Lord’s death as the punishment that brought us peace and will continue to do so until he returns in glory,

**11am. – Announcements regarding Reformation’s amenities.**

**11:05am. – 11:35a.m**

**The conference was recessed for a break.**

**11:35am.**

**Dr. Keith Wessel, MLC professor, presented part one of a power point enhanced lecture, “It’s All About the Cross”.** (The lecture’s outline will be available online in a PDF format and the PowerPoint screen shots also will be available to those who wish to have copies.) **Part One: Standing at the Foot of the Cross.**

Part One focused on the centrality of the cross in all we do by reminding us to focus on

- where we are *as individuals* in relation to the cross,
- asking ourselves, “Who am I?” in relation to the cross,
- reflecting Christian character not only when we teach, but also *as our lifestyle*,
- the need for *daily repentance* and the fact of our *personal forgiveness*,
- not on the general redemption of the cross, but on it as God’s grace to me, a sinner,
- our election as a source of amazement in the sense of “Why me?”
- the fact that God made sure I would get in contact with and remain in contact with the Gospel.

At the “Foot of the Cross” is where Luther started, where we all have to start, where we come to understand what our life is all about. As Psalm 103 opens our eyes and “blows us away” in the knowledge that we are children of our Father in Heaven, co-heirs with Jesus Christ, and servants of the Most High God, in turn, we will pursue the privilege given to us to proclaim God’s glory in Christ Jesus among the nations.

**Questions were presented to stimulate discussion and / or further meditation on Part One’s focus.**

1. How do we teach the concept of repentance to members, students?
2. How do we teach repentance to others while also seeking to promote healthy Christian self-esteem?
3. What flawed ideas about repentance exist in some Christian churches today?
4. How would you describe the Christian teacher’s persona, that is, the personality that has taken to heart that which the teacher seeks to present to others?

**12:30am**

**The conference attendees were dismissed for LUNCH, browsing, shopping the NPH displayed on site.**

**1:30pm**

**1. Sectional Session #1, segments 1-8, was offered at different rooms on campus. All the subjects related to various levels of and elements of education from ECM to collegiate level instruction. For the specific presentations offered, see the AZ-CA District Reformation 500 Conference book of agendas, theology papers, and reports.**

**2. Sectional Session #1, segment 9, was offered in the church. The presentation was an exegesis of Romans 3:21-26 with an emphasis on its importance on Reformation era and modern day theology.** The exegesis is may be found in the AZ-CA District Reformation 500 Conference book of agendas, theology papers, and reports, pages 17-29. In the **discussion that followed,**

- Concern was expressed for using “objective forgiveness” and “objective justification” as synonyms, since “forgiveness” has a sense of a subjective focus. A request for passages in which “forgiveness” is used in an objective sense accompanied the concern.
- Psalm 103:3 and following was suggested as one such passage because it refers to an unconditional offer for anyone. John the Baptist’s declaration, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”, was cited as a possible passage.
- It was noted that everyone was jumping on the Reformation 500 “bandwagon”, even churches that do not hold to certain aspects of theology that are part and parcel of the Reformation, such as infant baptism. It was suggested that this behavior is pretentious as it seeks to speak highly of Luther, but denies the objective nature of grace. The question was raised, “How do you address that attitude?” It was suggested that one has to meet a given person where he is at and seek to reaffirm what the Scriptures teach in a gentle, tactful way and so seek to give the Holy Spirit a chance to correct the errant thinking.
- A concern was raised regarding the translation of verse 21, that it should be read as “law”, not “the law”, since Christ is the end of all law, every law, any law. Apart from any laws in Scripture or composed by any given religion, Christ stands apart from all as “A righteousness from God”.

- It was remarked that, “Unbelief is an assault against God” since such is “volitional”. Such a person has no trouble believing. Such a person just does not want to believe. His “heels are dug into the ground”; it is something he chooses to do.
- It was noted that sinful man has the ability to reject God, as difficult as it is think that a man could say “No” to God.
- It was suggested that the oft heard metaphor, “Faith is the hand that reaches out to receive” may be misunderstood as suggesting synergism.
- In contrast, another idea was offered. “Faith is a chalice the Holy Spirit creates in our hearts to receive (the outpouring) of the Gospel.
- It was noted that, from one English speaking country to another, different strands of meaning are often associated with the same word. The same word is not always understood in the same way. So we have to be careful about how we use words and insure that the language of justification is always based solely on Jesus’ life and death. Keep the emphasis on that and it keeps things clear.

**After the discussion, a motion was made, seconded and carried that we thank the essayist. The chair called for a “Thank you!” in unison and it was given.**

**2:30pm.**

**The conference was recessed for a break.**

**2:50pm.**

**A Study of Ephesians 4 – Together in Christ, Bible study sectionals began. In thirteen different locations on campus, thirteen groups led by thirteen different presenters worked through that section of Scripture. A copy of Group 5’s study notes as presented by Pastor Ross Else is included in the secretary’s file. Since the secretary attended that section, his notes on that section’s presentations follow.**

The study was entitled, “The Beautiful Bride” – A Picture of Christ’s Church – Family in Christ (4:1-16)  
The study was pursued in a catechesis format; introduction to questions leading to open discussion of the question. After reading the text, the following was noted.

Due to the pride each person has in his/her personal opinion, it is easy to lose the focal point of unity and focus on the pride of the sinful nature. Ego, “I”, takes precedence over the “we”. Thus it is important to

- consider others better than yourself, to be “lowly”, to, in a manner of speaking, “to fall to the ground”, an oriental posture when in the presence of royalty,
- avoid harsh tones of voice that may stir up anger, (keep in mind God’s still small voice in rebuking Elijah)
- keep in mind how God’s love covered a multitude of your own sins, and so reflect that same unconditional love to others,
- to “put up with one another”, even when we are aggrieved or aggravated by a give person,

When it comes to maintaining the unity, we should focus on

- the peace in Jesus created in us by the Holy Spirit, that is, that the unity is already there, as the same Holy Spirit has done that work in all of us,
- that that unity, that bond of peace, is what Satan seeks to break by working on breaking down each of us as individuals,
- the “ones” list in this section of Scripture which reminds us of all our common confession,
- that, in the final analysis, whatever we are going about, it should all be about bringing glory to God while we work for the common good recognizing the value that each other one has in working for that common good,

In the process of such interaction, keep in mind that

- since Jesus has ascended on High, the major mission has already been accomplished and
- our King is on his throne and so our work together is not in vain,

- we need to keep reminding one another of the “there” that is Heaven, the hope of us all, but also that
- the word and sacraments is where Jesus is found and connects with each of us and all of us, so that
- we do not begin to take one another for granted.

Thus our primary goal is to build one another up, to use our individual gifts to equip one another in preparing all of God’s people for works of service and thus, in unity, establish the gospel’s outreach. To do this well, each of us has to keep in mind that “growth in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ” is not an option, but the personal focus that unites us all in one body. In this way, we come to understand that each of us is important, that each person’s gift is from Christ, that each one of us is a “ligament” that supports the body of Christ in advancing his mission.

**3:45pm.**

**The conference recessed for a break.**

**4:00pm.**

**Dr. Keith Wessel, MLC professor, presented part two of a power point enhanced lecture, “It’s All About the Cross”.** (The lecture’s outline will be available online in a PDF format and the PowerPoint screen shots also will be available to those who wish to have copies.) **Part Two – Standing Behind the Cross.**

Part One could be summarized by the idea of Christian “breathing”, a metaphor for leading a life of repentance. In some churches, they only practice confession, exhaling, but there also needs to be inhaling, breathing in the love of God in Christ. To know what sin is and “out with the bad air” and then to know what grace is and “in with the good air”, that is what it means to stand at the foot of the cross. It is important for Christian called workers to practice true contrition, true repentance with such breathing. Then it will follow that the same workers focus on **Part Two – standing behind the cross so that Jesus is always “the main show.”** If this is done then

- We will not proclaim ourselves, but Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:5.)
- We will not have people leaving our classrooms saying, “What a great teacher,” or leaving our churches saying, “What a great pastor,” but rather proclaiming “Wow! We have a great Savior.”
- Jesus will become more, as we become less, standing behind the cross.
- People will be less interested in the one presenting than in the one being presented.

One of the challenges is that there are so many larger congregations that have a multitude of ministries, but often have “hidden” the Gospel behind programs that do not speak of the cross and the empty tomb. To avoid that downfall and maintain the high priority of presenting God’s word and Christ crucified, we must give high priority to the three “L”s: **Lutherans...Lego...Lucy**

“**Lutherans**” are careful to avoid

- A disconnect between doctrine and life, an emphasis on esoteric theology at the expense of practical application
- An emphasis on the pulpit at the expense of a focus on the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,

“**Lutherans**” are careful about balance between

- The practical knowledge of Scripture, what it means in its original context and what it means to a given person or audience now.
- The preaching about Christ as Savior and presenting Christ as an example.
- The value of personal knowledge of Bible history and the way that knowledge becomes a source of application throughout the course of one’s whole life.
- The presentation of the first and third articles and the value of presenting the second article as often or more often.
- Teaching the Bible as a rule book (consensus about application through discussion) and the historical content of the Bible as the basis of the faith we hold dear.

“Lutherans” will emphasize that

- Faith in fact and faith in history are not opposites; there is a content to faith and it is historical and it is fact.
- That gaining fresh knowledge and recalling old knowledge are vital to grasping any references to the bible when allusions to it are being preached from the pulpit or taught in the classroom. Thus expounding on the facts in evidence is just as important as seeking to apply what the Bible means.
- Memory work and a knowledge of Bible history are just as important as teaching what the Bible has to do with “my life now.”

“Legos”

- The ability to have the building blocks of the Bible –the knowledge of what happened to whom at what time, causes to effects, the principles set forth in mind – enable the learner to “build” applications through each stage of life.
- Critical thinking that leads to problem solving is built on a knowledge of facts; thinking well and wisely requires them to be stored in long term memory, not just found in the environment in which they live. Thus thorough knowledge of the Bible enables the learner to control his reaction to the environment rather than be formed by it.

“Liz” (Wessel’s wife”)

By saving all the letters that Keith ever wrote to her and treasuring them, Liz paralleled the value of how Christians should preserve every bit of information of God’s love letter to us, the Bible. In doing so she echoes what Bernard of Clairvoux said. “The reason for our loving God is God.”

Usually,

- In our youth, we want to go to Heaven because we don’t want to go to Hell.
- In middle years, we want to go to Heaven because of what we will get: the joys and pleasures at God’s right hand.
- As we mature in our faith, we want to go to Heaven for no other reason than to see Jesus face to face.

Keeping that last experience before our listeners maintains our place “behind the cross”. We emphasize that there is nothing that is unimportant in the Bible, that to know him from all of his word is to love him for all of his word. So we preach the whole counsel of God and how that counsel, that word, became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:6-14)

For all Lutheran educators, standing behind the cross helps us to form our world view and brings impact to our counseling in that we learn to see beyond the immediate to the bigger picture of what the future holds for those who hold onto Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. In this way, we keep Jesus as the “main show.”

**Questions were presented to stimulate discussion and / or further meditation on Part One’s focus.**

A chart was distributed which defined several potential “false christs”. After reviewing the chart, the assembly was asked:

1. Which false christs presented are particularly prominent in American Christianity today? Are most appealing to Christians today? Why?
2. Which OT and NT building blocks are vital to know and share as we plan the courses we are going to teach?
3. What is distinctively Lutheran about our worldview?

It was noted that the names on the chart are not those of real people, but labels for the type of person that might exhibit such tendencies.

It was noted that we do not get to decide to whom we preach. Control over the facts and constantly reviewing them might prove useful and enable us to morph or modify applications for a given counseling session. So it is important that we renew our efforts to remain familiar with our source material, rather than only search it out as the need arises. This enables theology as a “habitus practicus.”

We all might be considered people “limping to the altar”, bringing with us our burdens and leaving them there at the foot of the cross behind which we stand focusing them on the cross; “Do this in remembrance of Jesus!”

**5:15pm.**

**Vice-chairman Adam Mueller announced the election results: Fred Casmer, chairma, Adam Mueller, vice-chairman, Bill Herrmann, secretary / treasurer, Paul Meitner, program committee coordinator.**

**Announcements regarding the planned fellowship gathering at the Bali Hai Restaurant.**

**Announcement that we will begin sharply at 8am on Friday.**

**The closing devotion was led by Pastor Fred Casmer. Based on Psalm 30, he emphasized that we are changed from Sorrowful to Joyful by**

- repentance which consists of weeping over sin, but rejoicing over how God clothes with joy by the imputed righteousness of Christ,
- emphasizing God’s grace throughout our lives, because his favor lasts a lifetime,
- relating to the joy we see in other’s faces when we share our knowledge with them, and by
- such conferences as this one where grace and grace alone are the focus of our worship and study.

No matter how long ago The Reformation took place historically, the power of the Gospel it restored to the church is renewed in us day by day and so changes everything every day; it leads our hearts to sing praises and not be silent, because, though we may have one foot in the grave, the other is solidly planted in Heaven.

**The conference was recessed until Friday morning.**

**PROPOSED MINUTES FOR FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3:** Respectfully submitted for correction, rebuke, instruction and training in what to include and how to write, spell, construct, proper minutes.

**8:00am.**

**The conference was called to order. It was announced**

- **DP Pastor Buchholz’s opening service sermon,**
- **MLC professor Dr. Wessel’s keynote lecture’s outline and PowerPoint screen shots,**
- **SP Pastor Schroeder’s keynote essay,**
- **As well as other essays**

**Will be posted on the district’s website.**

**Pastor Jeff Gunn led the opening devotion. Based on Galatians 5:13, 14, he emphasized that we are changed from Selfish to Servants by**

Noting the difference between

- Eden’s perfection, where, out of love, God did everything for us and we, in turn, responded in love toward God,
- And the post-Fall world in which we became our greatest idol, our sinful flesh focused on self-centered self-worship.

In Paul’s day, this led some to insist that rituals, especially circumcision,

- were necessary actions that insured God’s grace and forgiveness,
- that God loves me more for who I am and my obedience to the Law than for Jesus’ sake.

In Luther’s day, and ours, this self-worship

- viewed certain tenants of the Law as performance based initiatives
  - which we selectively obeyed when they suited our flawed sense of righteousness,
  - and the focus became, “What matters to us”, not what matters to God,
- which obedience then fed our ego, assuring us that we are “Ok” and therefore God should be “Ok” with us

Through Luther’s study of Scripture, the Holy Spirit led him to see

- the damned flaw in this work-out-my-own- righteousness before God and
- the grace of the “alien righteousness”, a righteousness “outside of ourselves” that comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ.

This insight that , “Jesus record is our record before God”,

- not only freed Luther from his own striving to create his own righteousness,
- but also freed him to respond to God’s gift of righteousness
  - by becoming a servant to others,
  - by encouraging others with the beautiful Gospel, the good news of free and faithful grace in the gifts of righteousness and forgiveness.

This insight is also now ours, that we, too,

- are free from the cycle of self-worship,
- free to worship our Savior God by expressing that worship in loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

We no longer consider ourselves superior to others,

- but brothers to all, walking beside them as they confront their trials and tribulations
- and giving them encouragement from God through the Gospel.

**8:35am.**

**Dr. Keith Wessel, MLC professor, presented part three of a power point enhanced lecture, “It’s All About the Cross”.** (The lecture’s outline will be available online in a PDF format and the PowerPoint screen shots also will be available to those who wish to have copies.) **Part III: “Standing Under The Cross.”**

He noted

- that many things in Scripture are hard to perceive with the eyes or grasp with the mind. Example: Jesus ruling now as King of kings and Lord of lords and that we are ruling with him now,
- that it is hard to reconcile teaching the “millennium” as part of our experience now in the context of terrorism, of a violent society, of natural disasters, and various other personal, national, or international tribulations
- that we are winning because it doesn’t *look* like we are winning.
- that despite our knowledge of all these things being “birth pains presaging the return of Jesus, we are still troubled and ask, “Where is the *victory!*”

This concern is answered in coming to terms with what it means to “Stand Under the Cross.”

What we now call, “The Invisible Church”, Luther promoted as, “The Hidden Church”. Its true glory is hidden while all creation waits for the “sons of God to be revealed.” Though not readily apparent as victors now, we still are victorious over the world for Christ has overcome the world.

Yet declining statistics in the visible Christian church have led to “sure fire ways” to make the church grow. These “sure fire ways” often imply that simply preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments “just won’t do it”. While plans based on methodology that works to draw people into the church are not without merit, when those who promote them downplay a focus on word and sacrament, the true glory and power of God at work through the Gospel in word and sacrament is hidden from them.

We must never lose sight of how amazing it is that God accomplishes his work through such means as we proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments. He still uses “cracked pots”, men made of clay, and the teaching of the cross that seems foolish to the “wise”, and the sacraments that seem “weak” to those who want miracles, to accomplish his purpose.

But as we labor under the cross, **there are three challenges that we must keep in mind.**

- Doing so will establish the truth that, “God plus one equals a majority.”
- Doing so will keep our focus on the theology of the cross as we meditate on the pain and persecution Christ suffered during his public ministry while acknowledging that pain and persecution may also our lot as we carry on our public ministry, enduring that heartache by our confidence that God goes with us, “The Valiant One is by us on the plain”, and that God’s Word prevails.

### **Challenge 1: Our Identity - What is “Lutheran”?**

- The Lutheran “Theology of the Cross” is one which confesses that, “Acceptance (of it) is by faith of God on his terms, not ours,” and that, “God deals with us in paradoxes.”
- Peter struggled because, at first, the Lord’s plan made no sense to him. He came to terms with it the same way that we do. Though, as Luther said, “We are born so sinful that we don’t realize that we are sinful”, though God hides his divine purposes “under the cross” of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals them to us.
- Thus we find hidden under the cross the deepest essence of God’s revelation. Only the theology of the cross, the preaching of the Gospel, leads us to Jesus, who is the Gospel.
- The theology of the cross crowns us with glory in Christ now as we anticipate greater glory later. What Satan offered Jesus is what some churches offer; glory now, success now, evident victory now in respect to health, finances, relationships.
- Jesus rejected the offer to have the whole world laid at his feet and so avoid the cross. He knew his Father’s and his own purpose in coming into the world: first the cross then the crown.
- In the light of this, we know who we are and what we have to offer. It is our ‘identity’.
- So, as he ruled Luther, so Christ rules me with grace and mercy. This rule is established through distinctly Lutheran education.
- The Reformation was about education; it was integral to the Reformation.
- Evidence that Luther recognized this was the translation of the Bible into the language of the people, his many great writings during the 1520s, the 1529 publication of the Small Catechism to provide parents with an instruction book for the home, Luther’s continuing efforts to teach the people how to read the Bible. “No greater outward offense as neglect to educate children.”
- In contrast to the Roman Catholic emphasis that a believer’s relationship has to be with the church, Luther did not want people only to have a strong relationship with the church, but, more importantly, he also desired that they have a strong personal relationship with God. He wanted them to be educated so that they could know their God, grasp their role in the priesthood of all believers, reflect on their vocation, their place in the world, as a calling.

### **Challenge 2 – Our Stability: Maintaining our Lutheran Foundation**

Luther understood the value of maintaining civil order and proper regulation of society by means of a sound government. He realized that society needed well trained boys and girls who as men and women would seek to establish such order and regulation. In our day and age, we recognize and value those same principles. However, we need to be careful to maintain the focus on our Lutheran Foundation, the Theology of the Cross as we go about educating the future leaders of our churches and our nation.

Parents usually value those same things and are looking for a quality education for their children.

- When they seek information about our schools, are we clear about our mission and our vision.
- Whether we are or not would be revealed in the answer to this question; “Am I an educator who happens to be a Lutheran or am I a Lutheran educator?”

- The answer lies in whether we focus on church history from God’s clear presentation of it in his word to the current day’s reflection of that word in society, in the world.

The challenges to such a full and stable presentation are both external and internal.

### **External challenges take place**

- when and where there is competition for student enrollment when people are more concerned with the quality of the education than the theological underpinnings of it,
- when school voucher/school of choice/ ESA/ Scholarship Tuition Tax Credit and other programs that vary state to state come into play/ with all the potential for government interference in the operations and curriculum of the schools that receive such funding,

### **Internal challenges are**

- the downward trend in enrollment in pastor and teacher training schools and
- the increasing number of vacancies in our synod, the need for all called workers to become recruiters.

### **Challenge 3 - Our Society: The Rise of False Christs**

Over the past three decades, atheism, paganism, and skepticism have increased. Major universities that began as Christian seminaries no longer hold to the Bible as inspired, allow for such groups as, “Loyola Pagan Student Alliance”, and one of every four Americans is unchurched.

The next generation, labeled “Generation Z” – 1995-2015, also labeled “screenagers”, are people who

- who feel better connected to friends, feelings, and life via social media,
- grew up in an uncertain world of terrorists, school shootings, increase in violent criminal behavior. (By law, even Martin Luther College is required to practice “Active Shooter” drills and “Intruder Alert” drills.)
- are often driven by how they are promoted or demoted by friends as well as strangers via social media.
- believe they have to rely on themselves, can’t be sure of others loyalty, (trust is a big issue), and
- are not driven by money but by seeking meaningful careers,
- don’t care about awards, or thrive on competition.
- like to have information at their fingertips and need to be constantly connected to receive it.
- are more inclined to believe that if it is online it must be true,
- have a fear of “missing out”, believe the world is scary place, will volunteer if “voluntold”,
- can be creative in entrepreneurship.
- see parents as role models, “trusted mentors”, (88% compared to 54% of generation Y and 29% of generation X).
- often look to parents for financial and emotional support. Other role models would be teachers (but not religious leaders-too many scandals associated with such), coaches who don’t yell, peers, and movie heroes/heroines such as Katniss (The Hunger Games) and Harry Potter.
- distrust bosses, religious leaders, and politicians.

This extensive profile challenges our Lutheran education in that, as “religious leaders”, we proclaim the Bible as historical truth, teach its standards as absolute morality, and believe in group learning (“Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together”). Many in generation Z believe they can best learn by themselves without assisting or being assisted by a group working at a project together.

On the other hand, we offer

- a friend in Jesus who can be trusted, who has lived and died for them,
- a peace in Jesus that surpasses all understanding,
- a role model without sin but who also understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses, and
- a Father who can mentor them through every trial in life.

**A motion was made, seconded, and carried that we thank Dr. Wessel for his thoroughly edifying presentation. The chair called for a unison acknowledgement of same by asking all to shout, “MLC!”**

**9:30am.**

**District President Pastor John Buchholz gave his report. A copy is included in the secretary’s file.**

**Discussion that followed the report included**

- examples of how a given congregation’s constitution and bylaws might not be followed as stipulated in the C & B such as failure to hold regular meetings, failure to pursue defined roles of the council members, failure to follow election and term procedures,
- instruction regarding updating pastor profiles,
- the task of discovering which retired pastors are willing to serve in vacancies and how and how long they are to serve,
- discussion whether retired pastors should fill out the profile is an open question,
- instruction that those who serve in ECM (preschool) teaching positions which involve regular Bible instruction, Gospel teaching, should be called to their position, not hired,
- an appeal that we keep Pastor David and Emily Sweet in our prayers as they struggle through his failing health in respect to mental, cardio, and cancer issues.

**District Mission Board Chairman Pastor Matt Vogt gave his report. A copy is included in the secretary’s file. He highlighted key segments of the printed report and provided a PowerPoint presentation updating the current situations of several mission stations.**

**Pastor Michael Otterstatter, MLC Vice-president for Mission Advancement, presented a report on MLC’s recognition as one of the most affordable colleges offering the best value in education, #3 in the nation, as well as its ranking as #1 in offering a quality online Masters Education program. It serves over 1,000 graduates in continuing education each year.**

**10:30am.**

**Break for snacks & NPH shopping**

**10:55am.**

**Sectional Segment # 3.**

**The teachers went to the offered sectionals on various aspects of education.**

**Pastor Paul Meitner presented his essay, “95 Theses – Why All the Fuss?” A copy is included in the secretary’s file. The discussion that followed the presentation of the essay included,**

- “Like others we have heard, you go back to the same sources” to Luther, to the Lutheran confessions, to Scripture to substantiate the history of the church and the Reformation, and the application of it to our times,
- that it is overwhelming how much confusion was sown by the papacy and how much deception was sown by Satan in Luther’s day and
- that the darkness that was then still is spreading today, that the content only confirmed the author as a “great historian”.

**A motion was made, seconded, and carried that the discussion of the essay be extended to Noon.**

**Further discussion revealed**

- that the earliest verifiable images of Luther’s physical appearance in 1519 revealed him to be a short man of gaunt stature (“maybe 5’5” and 110lbs soaking wet”),
- that his physical heft came to him as a blessing after his marriage,
- that the greater revenue source for the papacy might have come from rent charged on the vast number of land holdings owned by the papacy rather than the penitential system of indulgences,

- that the increase in the curia led to a need for new and ever increasing revenue streams,
- that Thesis 26 which stated that the Pope does not hold the keys reflects the fact that at that time only penalties that the Pope himself imposed could be removed by the Pope,
- that the Pope could not override penalties imposed by God, but only seek to change God's mind by intercession,
- that no one at the time of the Reformation or since could prove any of the theses wrong or heretical, though some tried to do so.

**A motion was made, seconded and carried to thank Pastor Meitner for his work.**

**An announcement was made that the 2018 AZ-CA District Pastors Study Conference would be held on November 23-25, 2018, at a Northern California Conference site. Member congregations of that site were asked to submit invitations to host.**

**12:00Noon. Break for lunch**

**1:00pm.**

**Joel Walker gave a brief report regarding The Commission for Lutheran Schools.**

**Conference chairman Pastor Fred Casmer announced that three congregations had offered to host the 2018 conference. They are St. Peter, Clovis, CA, Apostles, San Jose, and The Springs, Sparks, NV.**

**1:10pm.**

**WELS Synod President Pastor Marc Schroeder presented an amusing video, "Not My Kind of Lutheran," which, though "humorous" was also true in that it reflected the erosion of Scriptural application present in some Lutheran churches today. He then read his essay, "500 Years Later: What Now? Unchanging Reformation Truths for Ministry in a Changing World." A copy is included in the secretary's file. The essay included an introduction, eight segments, each one focusing on a different aspect of ministry, and a conclusion. Discussion followed after each segment focused on one of the questions presented at the end of each segment. Some observations made during the discussions:**

- The success of a special event that seeks to draw people to the church's campus or to promote its presence in the community should not be measured by the numbers of people who come,
- but whether or not the motivation is to draw people to the proclamation of Law and Gospel at that church and some attempt is made to share that proclamation or encourage people to come and hear it.
- Though it has been said that, "Once something is determined to be a matter of adiaphora, that's not when the discussion ends; that's when it must begin", any discussion that ensues should be one that asks the questions, "Is it wise? Is it beneficial? Is it loving?"
- In respect to Christian education, what happens in the home is just as important as what is happening in the school. In fact, the home needs to be the primary source of Christian education. This is especially true since anyone of any age needs knowledge before they can be effective witnesses.
- The Bible might have things that are difficult to grasp with reason, but it is not an impenetrable book.
- There is no greater value in one vocation over another; but in every vocation there is a calling to give glory to God in the way we serve in the place where he has planted us.
- Ministry that focuses on temporal needs (mercy ministry) does not always have to bring with it a specific effort to share the Gospel,
- but when opportunities arise to do so, they should be seized as a good work God has prepared in advance for us to do.
- 300 ethnic groups around the world are asking the WELS to, "Come", and help them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and how a confessional Lutheran church reflects that in what it believes, teaches, confesses and puts into practice.

- Even in a country where all the pastors were killed some 60 years ago, there are still Christian leaders there asking us to “Come”: ‘We want to be Lutheran.’ Surprisingly, government officials have guaranteed our safety if we go.
- Surprisingly, there are 6,000,000 Lutherans in Ethiopia but the theology of the word in its truth and purity which once gave them a Lutheran heart has strayed from the truth and broken hearts.
- One leader of Lutherans in that country is saying to us, “Come”.
- Our work in one country is staffed by 60 WELS members, many teaching ESL.
- Several pastors trained at our Asia Lutheran Seminary are involved in establishing a brand new Lutheran church body in Asia.
- In conclusion, Pastor Schroeder remarked, “The Book of Revelation has one simple message to proclaim: Yes, the world is a mess. Yes, Satan is alive and well. Yes, persecution abounds. Yes, it *looks* like we are loosing.
- BUT, in the end, Jesus comes and He wins!”

**A motion was made, seconded and carried that we thank Pastor Schroeder for his essay.**

**2:40pm.**

**Pastor Tim Henning gave a brief evangelism report announcing that Christmas videos will soon be available from NPH and that Schools of Outreach continue to be held and may be requested.**

**Pastor Paul Mueller gave the Ministry of Christian giving report announcing that it is \$231,000 ahead of last year’s gifts and that the synod’s Stabilization Fund has increased by \$1,000,000 this year, and that the Disaster Relief Fund saw \$1,000,000 in donations. He also pleaded with us to send in our CMO commitments by February 2, 2018.**

**Pastor Fred Casmer told the assembly that other reports from various areas of ministry may be found in printed form in this conference’s workbook.**

**A motion was made, seconded and carried to hold the 2018 AZ-CA District Pastors Study Conference at the Springs, Sparks, Nevada. We were reminded that the conference would be held on Tuesday through Thursday, November 23-25, 2018.**

**A motion was made, seconded and carried to thank the host congregation, Reformation Lutheran Church and School, its pastor, teachers, staff and lay people, the worship service planners and leaders who guided us through the liturgy, expounded and read Scripture, preached the sermon, those choir members, instrumentalists, children, and director who used their skills to enhance the worship service with special praise, the keynote speakers, Dr. Wessel and President Schroeder, the theological essay presenters, the morning and evening devotion leaders, every teacher who led a sectional, in fact, anyone and everyone who did anything for the conference from setting up snacks to presenting profound messages and thus let their light shine before us so that we were blessed by their good works and give praise to our Father in Heaven for their efforts.**

**A motion was made, seconded, and carried that we adjourn the 2017 AZ-CA Joint Pastors / Teachers Study Conference.**

**2:50pm.**

**Pastor Luther Zuberbier led the conference in the closing devotion. Based on Matthew 10:16-23, he emphasized that “We Are Changed from Silent to Speaking”**

- by recognizing the pressure Luther resisted and the resolve he demonstrated as remarkable demonstrations of his courage and his resolve to forsake temporal safety for the safety of holding to the safety and honesty of a conscience bound by the word of God,

- by recognizing that we too face pressures that lead us to get “sick of being prey...of being lambs led to the slaughter...with targets on our backs”, of being hated by the world,
- by realizing that fighting such “fire with fire”, only condemnation, or avoiding any conflict altogether remaining silent, we reject what gave Luther his resolve,
- by taking to heart what Luther knew; that history and times change, move on, but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow,
- by looking to the Son of Man, God’s one and only Son, our Savior, who, for the joy set before him, our salvation, endured the cross and scorned its shame,
- by that focus never growing weary or loosing heart, but continuing to take our stand and against all odds, proclaim the Gospel of Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.