

May 4, 2020

Office of the President
Rev. Timothy Teuscher

Dear Brothers and Fellow Workers in the Gospel,

“The mutual conversation and consolation of brethren” (SA, Part III, Article IV); so I concluded my previous letter of April 21 with that quote from the Smalcald Articles. What I want to share with you at this time are matters pertaining to these four words:

‘mutual’ – two or more people or groups doing the same thing to or for each other;

‘conversation’ – talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged;

‘consolation’ – to bring comfort to another person after a loss or disappointment;

‘brethren’ – people who belong to the same group.

In C. F. W. Walther’s *Pastoral Theology* we read these words: “However dear, therefore, the honor of Christ, the advancement of His Gospel and kingdom, and his own salvation is to a preacher, he should thus be prepared to bear the burden of his colleagues in the ministry (Gal. 6:2) and prefer to tolerate anything than to let a bitter root that disturbs the peace grow up between him and them (Heb. 12:14-15)” (p. 462).

Why do I mention this? Because, quite frankly, while I have seen and heard of many positive things across our Synod when it comes to pastors striving to minister to the people entrusted to their care during these unusual and uncertain times of the Covid-19 pandemic; there are also some negative things going on among us. Two things in particular have been brought to my attention.

First, concerning those words ‘conversation’ and ‘consolation.’ While we might be using the wonders of modern technology to share the Word of Christ and other information with our people, there are some who are using that same technology to ‘cast stones’ at those who might be advocating or engaging in certain practices which are not in accord with his way of thinking or doing. At the same time, that fellow brother in the ministry is not contacted in order that such might be personally and fraternally discussed. We all, as such, need to take to heart what Luther says in the Large Catechism: “Let this, then, be your rule, that you do not too quickly spread evil about your neighbor and slander him to others. Instead, admonish him privately that he may amend his life. Likewise, if someone reports to you what this or that person has done, teach him, too, to go and admonish that person personally, if he has seen the deed himself. But if he has not seen it, then let him hold his tongue” (LC, Part I. 276).

In addition, the Large Catechism goes on to say: “So the person concerned in this matter must always be dealt with personally, and must not be spoken of without his knowledge. But if that does not work, then bring it publicly before the community, whether before the civil or the Church court. . . . But if we gossip about another in all corners, and stir the filth, no one will be reformed” (LC, Part I. 279-281). In our synodical structure this would mean involving and informing the Circuit Counsellor and Regional Pastor of the matter. And let us not be so quick to justify our accusatory and condemning words of others by citing this statement from the catechism, “Where the sin is public, the rebuke also must be public, that everyone may learn to guard against it” (LC, Part I. 284); but do that only when it is clearly manifested on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions that such is indeed wrong and improper.

Consider in this regard these words of the apostle Paul: “If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another” (Galatians 5:15). And further: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6). And if such is to be the case among all Christians, how much more so among us pastors! A lot of repentance, it seems to me, is necessary on the part of all of us . . . and, yes, that includes myself as well . . . for our lack of consolation and conversation with one another.

Which brings me to the second item of concern connected with those other two words from the Smalcald Articles – ‘mutual’ and ‘brethren.’ Those words are reflected in the common definition and understanding of the word ‘synod’; that is, a walking and joining together of those who believe, teach and confess one and the same faith. So the Statutory Bylaws of LCC states: “‘Synod’ refers to the voluntary ecclesiastical bond shared by Member Congregations and Individual Members walking together to carry out the ministry and mission given by Christ to His Church.” What this means and implies in part is that we pastors do not act unilaterally in implementing certain practices in our congregations without fraternal discussion with neighbouring brothers in the office of the ministry and apart from consultation with the Regional Pastor.

While, thankfully, there are some circuits across our Synod where pastors meet regularly (even via electronic means during this pandemic) for a time of prayer, meditation on God’s Word, fraternal discussion of casuistry, and the like; far too many of us go about our work in isolation from one another and with little, if any, regard or concern for the ministry of our fellow brother pastors. Of course, some would cite that word ‘autonomy’ to justify this. However, being ‘a law unto one’s self’ (which is the literal meaning of that word) isn’t exactly what is meant in the context of our walking together as members of our Synod. So, for instance, Synodical Bylaw 1.33 states: “Congregations are self-governing (i.e., autonomous). In exercising such freedom, however, congregations also commit themselves to act in accordance with the Synodical Constitution and these Bylaws under which they have agreed to live and work together.”

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Sadly, this assessment of the times during the period of the judges in Israel of old is one that might also be said of the ‘new Israel’ in our times, is it not? Instead, as St. Paul says: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). And once again, a lot of repentance, it seems to me, is in order on the part of all of us for this lack of mutual and brotherly consideration.

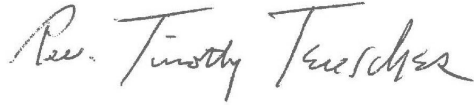
So much for my own version of St. Paul’s ‘sorrowful letter’ to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8). In fact, it would be fitting for all of us to read his letters to the Corinthians at this time; for as Luther puts it in his ‘Preface to the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians’: “In this epistle St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be one in faith and love, and to see to it that they learn well the chief thing, namely, that Christ is our salvation, the thing over which all reason and wisdom stumbles. . . . In short, things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be the expert and do the teaching and make what he pleased of the gospel, the sacrament, and faith. Meanwhile they let the main thing drop—namely, that Christ is our salvation, righteousness, and redemption—as if they had long since outgrown it. This truth can never remain intact when people begin to imagine they are wise and know it all” (*Luther’s Works*, AE 35:380, 381).

In closing, I would share with you this account from Luther’s *Table Talk*: “In January 1540 a request was delivered to Dr. Martin by a pastor who complained about the disobedience of his chaplain. Dr. Martin Luther said: ‘O, dear God, how the devil hates us! He is causing strife even among the ministers of the Word, so that one hates the other. He is always lighting one fire after another. Oh, let us put them out with prayer, reconciliation, and by overlooking one another’s sins, so that one gives the other the benefit of the doubt! Let go of the fact that we are not one in life and conduct and that this person has this custom, that person has another custom and is stubborn—one must let that go on and happen (yet this also has its measure). For in terms of customs and life, one will certainly be unable to turn a crossbow and make it straight as a line. So long as there is unity in the proper, pure doctrine—there not even a little mite may be impure and false, but everything must be pure and choice, like a dove. There no patience nor

ignoring nor love applies; for 'a little leaven corrupts the whole lump,' St Paul says (1 Cor. 5:6)'. ” (quoted in Walther's *Pastoral Theology*, p. 462).

"Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:13).

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Timothy Teuscher". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Rev. Timothy Teuscher, President
Lutheran Church—Canada