

The Cloud

September 2026, Issue 19

lcmscloud.org

News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

The Convention Issue (1)

Hear from our
delegates.

A Lay Person's Perspective (4)

Memento Review (5)

Congregation Conflict pt 2 (6)

Book Review (8)

*Divorce and
Remarriage* by
Benjamin Mayes

Memes of Grace (10)



Convention in Review

By Rev Dr James Gimbel (St. John's, Kimball, Voting Pastoral Delegate at Convention)

It was already hot when I left my home at about 5 a.m. on July 18 to catch the shuttle to the MSP airport. Phoenix? Mid July? Okay, to be fair, when you stay in an air-conditioned room in a comfortable hotel, walk a city block to an air-conditioned convention center, the average temperature of 106 degrees wasn't really horrible. It rained on Saturday when we arrived, but, in an arid climate, it was still "a dry heat." Walking in the heat was kind of nice after sitting in a cool room all day.

The Convention Theme

The Convention was held under the Easter theme, “Christ is risen: He is risen, indeed, Alleluia!” We are Easter people, and even when focusing on things that are more administrative in nature than ministry oriented, Christ’s victory guides our whole Church.

The Process

One might imagine that a synodical convention is just a very large Voter’s Meeting. If you have been to a MNN (or other) District Convention, your image might be a bit closer to reality. The Synodical Convention is even larger, and far more tightly organized in both process and procedure, with a very formal structure.

Delegates

The LCMS is, by C.F.W. Walther’s vision and the shaping of our Synodical fathers, designed to be quite closely patterned after parts of the American democratic process. Each congregation of Synod belongs to a circuit. Each electoral circuit selects one voting pastoral delegate (and an alternate) and one voting lay delegate (and an alternate) to attend the Convention, striving for an equal balance of power between clergy and lay. There were roughly 940 voting delegates who attended. In addition to voting delegates, advisory delegates are selected (following a pro-rata formula) who have voice but no vote, representing groups like retirees, universities and seminaries, district staff, Lutheran school teachers, DCEs, and other church workers.

Reports

Every board of the LCMS, primary agencies/entities (LCEF, Concordia Plans, the seminaries and universities of LCMS, etc.), and primary officers (President, Treasurer, Secretary) produce a report of their activities that is printed in the first “Today’s Business” edition (softbound 8.5x11, over *two inches thick*). The reports provide a helpful perspective of the responsibilities, functions, and goals achieved by that group. Thereafter, there was a second “Today’s Business” with Floor Committee reports, and each day of the convention had a “Today’s Business” edition with agenda and items for the table.

Overtures

Every congregation in the LCMS is allowed to submit overtures to the Secretary of Synod with a topic and direction for the Convention to consider. These overtures are classified and categorized into one of ten broad subject areas considered by a floor committee. Any congregation can petition the LCMS to consider making changes in practice (not in doctrine, though of course, practice is rooted in our doctrines). This democratic approach invites us to trust that any voice can be heard as we walk together in faith, even if our preferences aren’t adopted in Synod or even agreed with by all others. Some overtures are affirmations or reaffirmations of past positions. Some commend the individuals or boards/agencies of Synod. Some reflect gratitude to God for His work through the Church. Many overtures express individual or congregational views that reflect a perspective and desire for action by the LCMS as a whole. This means that, where Synod is a bit divided, overtures may represent quite differing viewpoints. For example, two significant opinions were reflected in many similar overtures: one view encouraging that pastoral formation be done in traditional ways at one of our two LCMS seminaries; the other encouraged more openness to online pastoral formation and/or training that occurs in the context of a congregation rather than the seminary. Each view has some merit, and some

strongly held views. The challenge is to present actionable resolutions that strive to capture the best of both sides, if possible, and direct Synod in ways that empower action.

Resolutions

Based on the direction of the Floor Committee and the realm of possibility, floor committees attempt to capture the best content from the relevant overtures and prepare a resolution to the Convention floor for consideration. Some overtures are clustered into categories that are non-controversial and expected to pass without debate; thus they are presented as a streamlined and efficient “Consent Calendar,” in other words, all approved together if no one petitions to remove a resolution for separate consideration. Heavily controlled microphones placed around the convention floor allowed delegate input. The Convention can also consider an Omnibus Resolution that assigns resolutions that were not considered (for time constraints) to designated boards or committees to deal with.

The Floor Committees

Each of the ten floor committees considers all the overtures assigned to them, and they attempt to capture the content of those overtures and move them forward. This is difficult when there may be multiple similar yet different resolutions on either/both/all sides of an issue. The floor committees are chaired by one of the 34 District Presidents and populated with additional District Presidents and selected lay and pastoral churchmen who have experience or expertise in that area. Each floor committee strives to find the best legitimate presentation of their topics as resolutions for the voting delegates to consider.

Elections

A significant amount of time was spent electing the slate of Synodical officers and board members. President Harrison had already been elected by congregational vote, but other elections remained. The electronic voting devices made counting the votes efficient.

The Major Challenges and Celebrations

One of the major challenges addressed by the convention was the pastoral shortage, addressed by recruitment efforts (like Sent to Serve) and the work of the Concordia University System pre-seminary programs and the programs of the seminary. Another challenge dealt with conflict resolution steps, and pastoral care for church workers that address physical and emotional wellness and address issues like misconduct and its impact. There was discussion on unity in worship styles surrounding the reinstitution of an LCMS Commission on Worship. Celebrations included numerous occasions when the voting body would approve a resolution by standing and singing the Common Doxology or another hymn. An inspiring time came when it took two very large groups to fit on the huge stage all our Lutheran world partners, and different missionaries and mission areas.

Fellowship

Meals (like our MNN breakfasts) allowed for fellowship, and each evening had a sponsored event with the *expectation* that delegates would mingle and become acquainted, based on the belief that fellowship is part of God’s design that supports deeper bonds of unity.

Exhibits

A large exhibit hall also invited participants to walk through and talk with Synod's partners about their mission and ministry. Exhibitors included the seminaries and university representatives, Higher Things, LWML, LCEF, Lutheran Foundation, Concordia Benefit Plans, Bethesda, Dakota Boys Ranch, etc. Most enticed with candy and pens to invite a conversation and distribute a brochure and share information.

Worship

There was a major Divine Service event that began the Convention on Saturday night. Each Convention day (which ran 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.) started morning and afternoon sessions and ended each day with a Chapel service (allowing us to hear a variety of leaders as preachers). The singing and focus on Scripture and prayer was inspiring.

I arrived home late on July 23 exhausted but enlightened by the process. God is at work. I welcome anyone with questions to visit with me further; if you would like to see the workbooks from any of the days, please let me know.

Christ is Risen! My Experience at Convention

By Mr Bruce Plautz (Member of Faith, St. Cloud; Voting Lay Delegate at Convention)

As your circuit lay voting delegate to this year's 69th Regular Convention of the LCMS, I first want to thank all of you for allowing me to represent you and experience this triennium event. I have served in many different church leadership roles in my 40 years in the LCMS. I served on a District board in Wisconsin for 7 years, and that was a great experience. But being at the convention, in Phoenix this past July allowed me to see the overall big picture of our Synod, and I was not disappointed. I could write pages and pages about the Convention, but I am going to just focus on a few specifics.

First, having over 1000 voices singing and praising the Lord together 16 different times was simply amazing. Hearing a message from a variety of our Synod leaders was also very inspiring. When I left the Convention on Thursday, I was disappointed that I would not participate in that type of worship again for a very long time.

Secondly, as we all gathered for 5 days (over 40 hours) to review and ultimately plan the future of the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, it was humbling to think that my vote would be part of the decisions being made. The Convention floor was designed so that lay and pastoral delegates alternated, side by side. This allowed for some great conversation and ways to better understand the work we were there to do. Did every vote I cast come out the way I had hoped and prayed for? No, they did not, but many did. Was there some controversy? Yes, there was. But as a believer in Christ, I knew He was present in the room, and we would work through anything that needed further discussion and a resolve.

Lastly, we were all there as brothers and sisters in Christ. Phoenix in the summer: not bad. Working together for the synod and our churches across this country, great: Worshipping together: great! Conversing and getting to know others: great! Seeing our Lutheran church partners from across the world: great! Seeing how they and our missionaries are spreading the Word of God and Gospel to those that have never heard it is uplifting and the work we all need to do daily in our own lives. The

bottom line is staying focused on the Lord, read the Bible daily, pray for our Synod and our leaders, our churches, our pastors, this country and know that God is walking by our side in every step we take.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

Are 59 Minutes and 60 Seconds Enough?

By Mr Marc Dunker (Member of Redeemer, St. Cloud)

Yes, I did that on purpose, even I know that's an hour. But what kind of a title would it be if I asked, "*Is an Hour Enough?*" A little about me - I was "raised Catholic". I put that in quotations to indicate skepticism and irony. What I mean by that is, sometimes my parents would take us to Mass at a Catholic church. Not every week and not even most weeks, and even not every Christmas or every Easter, but most Christmases and some Easters. Get the picture? Please allow me to put an even finer point on this. When we went, it was for 59 minutes and 60 seconds. That was our obligation. According to my dad, that was the requirement. And at about 58 minutes, he was looking at his watch and getting antsy in the pew. One might think he was becoming charismatic! In fact, he really wanted to get home to watch "rassling"! (Wrestling, specifically AWA Wrestling aired at 11AM Sunday morning.)

Now before you think I am breaking the Fourth Commandment, please let me explain. I loved my dad. He was a pretty good dad in most ways, and I know for a fact that he loved Jesus. But like many of us, he was slothful – perhaps apathetic to regular attendance. But that's not really what this article is about. Instead, I wanted to gain your attention¹ so I could explain a program that has helped me become a more sincere, appreciative Christian. Ready? It's called Memento 70 (memento70.com). I hope you will continue reading, and maybe even consider learning more about and joining us.

What is Memento 70? Well, in short, it is a well-developed online and personally interactive program that encourages men to regain their Christian masculinity and to understand, accept, and act on their God-ordered role of men in the church on earth. What it's not: it's not a replacement for active participation in your local church. And it is certainly not a replacement for the Word, Sacrament, and fellowship you'll find there.

The program was conceived and is administered by a group of LCMS pastors, theologians, and seminary professors. It includes daily Scripture readings, prayers, and devotions meant to ground a man's life in God's Word by reminding us of ancient Christian practices that are based on God's intended order and the rhythm of the church year. The program is intended to strengthen the male role in the family and the church, but also to encourage brotherhood and fellowship through discipline, clarity, charity, and faith.

Along with the daily devotions and prayers, the leaders have also provided, for lack of a better term, certain challenges meant to remind us of Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us, by encouraging our own personal sacrifice. To be clear, that means creating a pattern of daily reading and understanding, written

¹ You always have my attention, Marc -editor

prayers as well as encouraging personal prayer, coupled with fasting, feasting, and other acts of kindness, humility, alms giving, and work.

Men are encouraged to form fraternities (a brotherhood) of 3-7 other men to meet regularly to discuss, share, support, and sharpen one another (fellowship). We openly identify our own personal weaknesses and overcome those through the Word and teaching of our faith (fulfilling our role as men).

In addition, members are continually encouraged to follow these often forgotten or denied rhythms of the church. Such as feasting according to the traditions of our faith, fasting as an act of contrition in response to our personal and corporate sins, and in reverence and appreciation of Christ's own example of fasting. We are encouraged to be men, meaning leaders of ourselves, our families, and our communities. Simply, we're encouraged to be men as ordered by God Himself - defenders, protectors, providers, and caregivers. We are to deeply love and appreciate our responsibilities, our wives, children, and our faith, ultimately to gain freedom through commitment and action. Christian freedom doesn't mean free to sin, or even free from temptation, but rather Christian freedom means the real freedom explained by Dr. Luther in his tract "On the Freedom of the Christian".

Rather than try to explain the entire program in this article, I encourage you to read up on Memento 70 yourself. Ask your pastor about the program and maybe find a fraternity to join or even create your own. My own experience has been life changing. That is not hyperbole. It's the truth! I was encouraged to join by my pastor. I have tried in the past to discipline myself to get deeper into Scripture and to pray regularly. Brotherhood and fellowship have made the difference. Because iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17), I am more accountable. When something confuses me, or when my fast becomes overwhelming, I have my brothers in Christ to support and encourage me, and to exhort me and help me. I couldn't do that alone because it's God-ordered that we do not toil alone (Eccl 4:9-12) (Gen 2:18).

Memento 70 has not been easy. It has been challenging and humbling in many ways, but well worth the \$60 and the extra time commitment. I believe that even dad would have given this extra 20-30 minutes of time daily. Because 59 minutes and 60 seconds is a good starting point. But true growth and development require a little more effort. It's not about works' getting us into heaven, but after God has saved us, He still calls us to work in the vineyard.

Finally, here is my proof – ask my wife. You can literally ask her if you know her. Her name is Tammy, and I can honestly say she is the crown on the head of this man as God intended. (Prov 12:4). Memento 70 has helped me be a better husband, father, and dare I say, a better Christian man.

Restoring Congregations to Missional Health, pt 2

By Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt (St. John's, Popple Creek)

Jesus said, **"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church"** (Matt 18:17).

The problem with conflict between Christians is that it will expand. People take sides, families turn against families, factions of congregants choose who they will follow. St. Paul addresses this issue in 1 Cor 1:10-13;

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. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you said, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

The divisions Paul described above put the congregation(s) into deep conflict. In congregations today, small conflicts can easily end up as deeper conflicts that need an external objective process of resolution.

Jesus said, **"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."** Deep congregational conflict requires intentional evaluation and application of these words. It requires more than the internal process of congregational leaders. It calls for the larger "church" to be involved. Jesus declared in Lk 17:3, **"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."** How can we know that someone has sinned? A *judgment* must be made. One needs to compare what a person has said or done to God's Word. That is a judgment, a righteous judgment, the kind of judgement the church needs if sinful conflict is to be truly resolved. Jesus did not forbid such righteous judgment. He forbade hypocritical judging, as we see in Matt 7:1-5.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

When an individual admonishes another, it is common to hear that person react by saying, *"Judge not..."* This is an attempt to distract away from the Word of God regarding the sinful behavior of a Christian brother(s) within congregational conflict. Jesus warns Christians against a judgmental spirit that stems from a self-righteous attitude. However, Christians are to judge ourselves (*take the log*) prior to judging our brother (*take the speck*). The church dare not judge others without cause. If the cause is to resolve conflict between Christians, then judgement is righteous according to the Word of God.

Gal 6:1 reveals a proper attitude when confronting sin; **"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."** 1 Cor 5:12; **For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?"** 1 Jn 4:1 reveals righteous judgement; **"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."** Finally, we must follow Jesus' words; **"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"** (Matt 18:17).

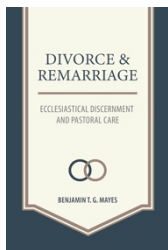
This is the final step towards congregational conflict resolution. If the conflicted persons listen to the church, meaning they agree to listen to an objective resolution expert so that the conflict can be judged, there are two possible outcomes; separation or unity, sins forgiven or not forgiven, sins bound or sins loosed. Jesus said, **"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"** (Matt 18:19-20).

When unity is restored by confession of sin, true repentance, and absolution, Jesus' words make sense, **"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."** This is a statement of missional health within a congregation. Restored Christians may again gather around Word and Sacrament, faithfully worship, and know Jesus' presence. Unless this occurs, the church remains in an unhealthy conflict, the Gospel will not be proclaimed, and the ministry that Christ desires is absent.

This step requires the leadership of a conflicted congregation (pastor, elders, deacons, etc.) to work with an objective resolution expert. In a Biblical manner they **"tell it to the church"**. The resolution expert listens, then offers a binding judgement regarding the sinful conflict. When this judgement is accepted by all, the missional health of the congregation can be restored.

BOOK REVIEW by Rev Joshua Reber (Faith, St. Cloud; Trinity, Clear Lake; editor)

Divorce & Remarriage: Ecclesiastical Discernment and Pastoral Care by Benjamin T.G. Mayes (CPH, 2026, 283 pages)



This book is how casuistry should be done. The term casuistry might be unfamiliar to you (as it was to me before I took a class in seminary with the author) or it might be a bad Catholic word because the Jesuits are famous for using it. But as this book proves, it's a helpful methodology to think through tough ethical and practical situations.

Mayes provides a helpful definition of the term by Roderick Henry Martin - "Casuistry broadly conceived, is any effort to apply general moral principles in particular circumstances, particularly when two otherwise valid principles conflict, or when, for whatever reasons, we simply do not know how to apply our principles in our current circumstances" (p 173). My review will follow a (rough) outline on how to do casuistry well and why Mayes' book excels.

The first step is to understand what the general moral principles are. Mayes does this in his introduction by defining the standard - the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. I found his description of his approach insightful and semi-poetic. "I write as a Christian. Jesus is *the* Lord Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. Paul is *St.* Paul, the Lord's apostle. The words of the Lord and of His apostles are the words of God, given to the church and to the human race for making us wise unto salvation (2 Tm 3:15)" (p vii).

What are the main biblical texts that lay out the general moral principles for marriage and divorce? Mayes provides a helpful list: "Gn 2:24; Ex 21:7-11; Dt 24:1-4; Mal 2:16; Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mk 10:2-12; Lk 16:18; Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 7:10-11, 15, 39; 1 Tm 3:2, Ti 1:6 (p xvi)." There's one passage in the Lutheran Confessions that explicitly applies to this (not forgetting there's plenty about clergy marriage in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology). The *Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope* says, "Unjust also is the tradition which forbids an innocent person to marry after divorce" (Tr 78 cited on p xvii).

The second step of casuistry is to provide a state of the question. How have Christians dealt with the topic of divorce and remarriage throughout the centuries? What wisdom can we gain by how they handled the Scriptures? Mayes provides helpful historical background, with particular insight on how Lutherans have disagreed on this topic, particularly in the 20th Century. Anybody who's read extensively on this topic will be particularly interested in Mayes' excursus on the views of Andrew Das and how Mayes disagrees with Das' exegesis.

The third step of casuistry is to render a decision. The last chapter of this book (and second longest chapter by page count) contains case studies. Here, the principles established by the general moral principles (the Bible) are applied to specific situations that commonly occur.

The biggest contention of this book is that it is usually possible to determine guilt and innocence in a divorce. Jesus' words in Matthew 19 (the most cited biblical text concerning divorce along with 1 Corinthians 7) must necessarily mean this. **"Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Mt 19:9).** The exception clause means we have to determine if the exception applies to a party.

At the heart of Mayes' application to particular cases (ie remarriage of the guilty party) is the question of repentance. What does repentance look like for a man who left his wife and his wife wants to reconcile? It looks like the man returning to his wife. What does repentance look like for a divorced man (guilty party) who cannot return to his wife because she remarried? Because it's impossible for him to return to her, he's allowed to remarry, granted he's displayed contrition and faith (see p 62 for Walther's thoughts which echo this sentiment).

Who gets to determine who the guilty party is and what repentance looks like? This is where Chapter 5: Implementation comes in. I need to more thoroughly digest the suggestions for implementation. I think a circuit (or group of circuits) could come up with a fruitful plan to help adjudicate divorce and remarriage cases. Right now, the problem is that everyone does what is right in his own eyes. We need some kind of due process that's consistent.

Conservatives may take issue with Chapter 3 - The Remarriage of Pastors. "Innocently divorced pastors should not be removed from ministry" (p 124). After reading Mayes' arguments and biblical principles up to this point, I can't help but agree with him. Mayes acknowledges that the requirement to manage one's household well (1 Tm 3:4) could be applied here, but pastors can't be held responsible for the actions of others (like a cheating wife). Mayes labels as a Fort Wayne Conservative™, so he's to be commended for taking a position contrary to the Montana District of the LCMS because he's convinced of what the Bible says.

If you're a pastor in the LCMS (or a Christian who wants to learn what God's Word teaches about this difficult issue), stomach the cost of CPH's shipping and order this book right now. It deserves to be read and discussed at Winkels. If one disagrees with Mayes' conclusions, one should demonstrate his rationale in the same way that Mayes so helpfully does here.

MEMES OF GRACE

**SCIENTISTS DISCOVER
THE MEANING OF LIFE**

**VISIT
LCMSCLOUD.ORG/SECRET
TO HAVE YOUR LIFE
CHANGED**