

FORUM LETTER

Volume 40 Number 9

September 2011

Inside this issue:

Ships sailing apart 4

Omnium gatherum 8

The American
Lutheran Publicity
Bureau is on the web
www.alpb.org

FORUM LETTER is published monthly by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (www.alpb.org) with LUTHERAN FORUM, a quarterly journal, in a combined subscription for \$27.45 (U.S.) a year, \$49.95 (U.S.) for two years, in the United States and Canada. Retirees and students, \$22.00 a year. Add \$8.00 per year for Canadian, \$12.00 for overseas delivery. Write to the Subscription Office for special rates for groups. Single copy, \$2.50.

Editor: Pr. Richard O. Johnson
<roj@nccn.net>

Associate Editor: Pr. Peter Speckhard
<pspeckhard@hotmail.com>

Member: Associated Church Press.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: P. O. Box 1394,
Grass Valley, CA 95945 <roj@nccn.net>

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE: American
Lutheran Publicity Bureau, P. O. Box 327,
Delhi, NY 13753-0327 <dkralpb@aol.com>
Telephone 607-746-7511. Postage paid at
Delhi, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address
to P. O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327.

Copyright © 2011 by the American
Lutheran Publicity Bureau.
ISSN 0046-4732

I am far too just



“This business of forgiving is by no means a simple thing. It is not so hard because we are opposed to it on principle. Oh, no, we’re not all that stubborn. It is hard because we are so just and because in our mania to be just we proceed to divide the burden of forgiveness among both partners and thus again parcel out forgiveness ‘justly.’ We say, ‘Very well, if the other fellow is sorry and begs my pardon, I will forgive him, then I will give in.’ We make of forgiveness a law of reciprocity. And this never works. For then both of us say to ourselves, ‘The other person has to make the first move.’ And then I watch like a hawk to see whether the other person will flash a signal to me with his eyes or whether I can detect some small hint between the lines of his letter which shows that he is sorry. I am always on the point of forgiving (for even as a purely secular person I know that life can’t get along without forgiveness; the machine of society would immediately burn out its bearings without this oil); but I never forgive. I am far too just.”—Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father* (trans. John W. Doberstein; Harper & Row, 1959), p. 112.

Sex and division, Canada-style

by Brad Everett



A wife turns to her husband and explains that she has decided to take a lover. She doesn’t want a divorce; in fact, she says, this has the potential to make their marriage even stronger. When he protests this infidelity, wondering out loud how he can possibly continue in this relationship, she gets defensive. After all she’s promised to stay in the marriage; why would he leave? Doesn’t he love her? Isn’t he committed to their relationship? Because she certainly is. But she’s keeping the lover. She concludes by declaring her commitment to their relationship. If it fails and they split it’s because he, not she, chose to walk away, and the blame for the failure lies squarely on his shoulders.

The dilemma facing the husband is the same one facing members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). At its 13th biennial National Convention this July, the ELCIC decided to alter the traditional teaching and practice of the Church catholic by redefining marriage, family and human sexuality. The Convention approved a new social statement, as well as two motions making provision for ELCIC clergy to perform same-sex marriages (such arrangements are recognized by Canadian law) and allowing for the ordination of non-chaste homosexuals in partnered relationships. After passionate and prolonged debate, these motions all passed with around 60 per cent of the vote.

Electoral shenanigans

The motions were handled in a way that made one wonder just how serious the church's leadership was about promoting unity and avoiding cause for scandal. In the past the Committee for Conduct of Elections (a committee of delegates appointed for the convention) did the counting, which meant they missed much of the convention business and some of the votes. So this year a group of volunteers was assembled to count.

This able group had counted written ballots for National Bishop as well as several other elections during the convention. Yet when it came time to count the ballots for the social statement and the three motions arising from it, the volunteers were informed their services weren't needed. Instead the Elections Committee had others do the counting, including one of the National Bishop's assistants. Having heard rumors and rumblings, I privately asked both the National Bishop and the committee chair about the change. (As a media representative, I wasn't allowed on the convention floor and was later chastised by the communications director for approaching them directly and not going through her.)

You can do anything you want

I was told that the Committee on Elections has the discretion to appoint whomever it wishes to count ballots for any given vote. A quick return on the results of this yes/no ballot was desired, and so an *ad hoc* group of counters was appointed. How much discussion took place between the bishop and the committee is not clear, but neither party objected to the change. Then immediately after the results of each vote were announced, there was a motion from the floor to have the ballots destroyed. Typically, such a motion is reserved for the end of the convention, the last item before the traditional all-encompassing "thank-you" motion. But this year there were five motions to destroy ballots—one after each of these votes and then one at the end for the balloting for bishop, National Church Council, etc.

Anyone with experience in politics or working through contentious issues with groups knows that how things are done can be as important as what is done. So why change the counters and not address the matter publicly? (I told both the Bishop and committee chair that I was speaking to them because of rumors and speculation of wrong-doing.)

And why allow the destruction of the ballots instead of waiting until the end, as is customary? The best response I heard to all this was a quote attributed to Napoleon: "Never attribute to malice that which can be more easily explained by ignorance." Even if everything was done "by the book" it did nothing to encourage confidence in delegates and members who already felt these motions were the result of a carefully prepared and executed agenda.

Satis est—or is it?

That's troubling enough. But it was the motion that came to the floor immediately after the Social Statement passed and before the motions concerning same-sex marriage and ordination that was most alarming for the future of the ELCIC. That was a "Motion on the Unity of the Church." The motion was intended to communicate "to congregations, partner churches in Canada and sister churches in the Lutheran World Federation and other Lutheran church associations in Canada" that since according to Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* "it is enough for the unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments," and since "the church ought not to be divided because of agreement over moral issues," there is no reason why we can't all go on just as before. After all, the social statement and other motions don't force anyone to "do" anything against their conscience but simply allow others to act in accordance with their own. (Those in the ELCA will recognize this; fortunately that absurd phrase "bound conscience" was removed from an earlier draft).

Moral issues aren't church-dividing or a threat to salvation? What about Paul's concern for the spiritual welfare of the Corinthian church in the case of the man who took up with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5)? When a pastor asked this question of a member of the task force that wrote the Social Statement, the response was that Paul's concern was misplaced and misunderstood.

Don't be divisive

But then the motion went further: "We believe that any attempt to divide the church because of disagreements over morals, polity or liturgy is an unacceptable confusion of Law and Gospel, which will lead inevitably to a distortion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . We ask those persons, congrega-

tions, synods and/or churches who are in disagreement to refrain from actions that will divide the body of Christ.”

So just to be clear—the ELCIC has decided to head out on a radically different path apart from what the church has taught and practiced for 20 centuries and which the overwhelming majority of Christian churches continue to hold to today. Yet (and here is the tricky part) anyone who disagrees and would say the ELCIC is wrong and in grave error, anyone feeling therefore the need to reconsider his or her relationship with the denomination, is the one guilty of confusing Law and Gospel and dividing the church.

This combination of ignorance of Scripture and the Confessions, and arrogance toward members, congregations and partner churches who hold an opposing view, is astounding. So like the wife and husband of the earlier analogy, if anyone would distance themselves from the ELCIC because of its drastic departure from Christian teaching and practice, that person is the one guilty of creating division.

An exquisite framing

Yet in a backwards-kind-of-just-stumbled-into-it sort of way, those who drafted this motion have framed quite exquisitely the real question facing the ELCIC and those in relationship with it. As the motion puts it, this is now not about personal opinions or agendas that were not accepted or achieved. This is about the Gospel. Essentially this motion is giving an ultimatum: if we agree on the Gospel, we must agree (or at least be willing to agree to disagree) on the motions. If it is enough for unity to have agreement on the teaching of the Gospel but there is division, it is because there is no agreement concerning the Gospel. I don't make this point lightly or flippantly. The gravity of it was evident as more than a couple of delegates speaking against the social statement and motions alluded to it but for whatever reason never came out and said it. But we're pondering it: "Is the ELCIC with these actions proclaiming and practicing another gospel?"

It will be instructive to see how the various partner churches answer this question. It appears relations between the ELCIC and Lutheran Church—Canada (the Canadian cousin of the Missouri Synod) will be even more distant because of this. Indeed, the LCC president was not invited to

bring greetings to the convention; instead the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, a representative from the ELCA and the Moderator of the Mennonite Church Canada were there. The first two denominations are on board with the changes and the Mennonites are beginning a process of discernment on the issues. Meanwhile, the LCC released a statement that regardless of what the ELCIC decided, the LCC wasn't changing its teaching or practice [<http://tiny.cc/e0t9b>]. One can only guess what this will mean for relations with the Roman Catholics—but then that only seems to matter every five years when we celebrate the Joint Declaration on Justification.

And in other news . . .

While those were the pivotal events for the convention, there were a couple of other noteworthy items. Bp. Susan Johnson was elected to a second term as National Bishop on the second ballot, receiving 238 votes (233 necessary for election). She said she was scared when first elected four years ago, but in some ways is more scared now. One can understand that fear.

The other major piece of business which was lost in the shadows was the approval in principle of the Structural Renewal Task Force's recommendations, authorizing National Church Council to begin the implementation process. The recommendations include reorganizing the ELCIC into three synods from five (amalgamating the Synod of British Columbia and the Synod of Alberta and the Territories; and the Synods of Saskatchewan and Manitoba/Northern Ontario; the Eastern Synod will remain as is). Within synods, conferences will be reconfigured into "areas" which are geographic groupings of congregations to be supported by leadership teams instead of elected deans. National and Synodical conventions will be held triennially, with the attendance at each being smaller. Currently every congregation is entitled to send a delegate to National Convention; under the new system 50 delegates from each synod will be elected at synodical conventions. At synodical conventions, retired pastors are currently entitled to voice and vote and in my synod (Alberta) their convention costs are covered; under the new recommendations retired pastors will not have these privileges, the logic being that decisions affecting the ministry of the synod should be voted on by those still active in that ministry.

Good to know

While presented to the convention in terms of making the ELCIC more effective for mission and ministry, many delegates noted that it appeared to be little more than an exercise in “right-sizing” and cost cutting, something that is no doubt needed in a denomination where giving to the national church has decreased every year since merger in 1986. Those concerned about the usefulness of this restructuring proposal (given how much may change in the five years it will take to implement) need not be too worried; the report reassures us that “a scenario wherein the number of congregations and total membership is reduced by 50% continues to support the proposed grouping [i.e., reducing the number of synods from five to three].” Good to know the plan will still work if half the denomination disappears.

I understand the Saturday night banquet included celebration of the 10th anniversary of full communion with the Anglicans, the 35th anniversary of women’s ordination and the 25th anniversary of the ELCIC—the irony of celebrating exclusively the 25th anniversary of the ELCIC in the wake of the passage of such divisive and damaging motions was too much for some. For those who attended the closing worship on Sunday morning (I wasn’t one of them), Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, presided and Bp. Johnson

preached the same sermon she posted to the ELCIC website for congregations to use that Sunday (see the August *FL*).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Now the real work begins as ELCIC congregations and individuals consider if they can go along with the changes to the denomination’s teaching and practice. Of course there will be those who agree with the new direction or are at least indifferent. But for those who cannot embrace the changes, the next steps will be challenging ones, as our brothers and sisters in the ELCA already know. Just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel were both faithful to God by remaining in Jerusalem and going into exile respectively when Babylon conquered Judah, so too will we have those who will be faithful in following Christ by staying in the ELCIC as long as they can to bear witness to the Truth, while others will be called to leave for other Lutheran bodies such as LCC, LCMC and NALC. God grant the grace to give one another the evangelical freedom to follow where Christ leads and figure out what to do with the fragments of a shattered relationship with what was their denominational home.

Brad Everett, our occasional Canadian correspondent, is pastor of Nazareth Lutheran Church, Standard, Alberta.

Ships sailing apart



Editor’s note: On July 18, 2011, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod President Matthew Harrison issued a letter entitled Moving Forward in Military Chaplaincy without the ELCA, Beginning 2012. In that letter he announced that “the past cooperative working arrangement between [LCMS and ELCA] with respect to the military chaplaincy can no longer be supported. Beginning in 2012, and for the foreseeable future, the LCMS will conduct its chaplain training conferences unilaterally.” [The full text of the letter is posted at <http://tiny.cc/mtlc3>]. Widely seen as part of the continuing fallout from the ELCA’s 2009 decisions about human sexuality, the decision reflects the view that, in Harrison’s words, the two church bodies are “like two ships at sea sailing apart on different compass headings [which] have lost sight of each other.” Forum Letter asked

three Lutheran military chaplains to reflect on the end of this cooperative relationship and what it means.

“About face! Forward march”

by John Hannah

The adverse consequences of ELCA decisions on sexuality continue to unfold and exacerbate American Lutheran dysfunction. President Harrison’s letter *Moving Forward* may be the beginning of the end for Lutheran cooperation, a time-honored tradition among Lutheran chaplains.

That tradition was born in World War II. The old Galesburg Rule advises, “Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only,” which seems to lead to a corollary: “Lutheran communicants at Lutheran

altars only.” But when communicants are removed from their altars for military service, the church is called to take her altar to Lutheran soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen scattered around the world. No single Lutheran body with its limited number of chaplains can serve them adequately. Sacred duty and necessity gave birth to Lutheran cooperation, and when the Lutheran Council in the U. S. A. was activated, its military chaplaincy arm provided joint retreats for Lutheran chaplains. That arrangement prevailed even after the demise of LCUSA.

Moving Forward makes clear that the chaplain retreats will be discontinued. Dr. Harrison says that the ELCA had already made a decision to join the Episcopalians for joint conferences, but this is not quite the case. The ELCA let it be known that they would prefer to maintain the long standing Lutheran conferences with the LCMS; the arrangement with the Episcopalians was not made until after LCMS representatives indicated that the LCMS would be withdrawing. In any event dual sets of conferences mean that each will likely be weakened. That is a sad development; the joint retreats have been the envy of non-Lutheran chaplains, many of whom feel detached from their own churches.

Dueling services?

Less clear from *Moving Forward* is what will happen to scheduling Lutheran services at military installations around the world. In the past these have been conducted with LCMS and ELCA chaplains working interchangeably. That permits continuity in an always mobile military and provides a larger pool of potential communicants. Will there now be an “LCMS service” and an “ELCA service”?

A strict reading of the letter (“Lutheran chaplains will continue to minister to all Lutherans”) might suggest that pan-Lutheran services will be permitted to continue. But then there is this proviso: “We can no longer commend our LCMS military personnel to ELCA chaplains without increasing and grave reservations.” Perhaps that means we should continue cooperation when a particular ELCA chaplain disapproves of ELCA policy.

Some might take the *Moving Forward* letter as an order to terminate any and all cooperative chaplaincy work—especially those pan-Lutheran services which have been under criticism for many years [see *FL*, Feb. 1996]. The tone of the entire letter suggests

that, even though it is not stated explicitly. Chaplains and donors to LCMS’s Ministry to the Armed Forces could take *Moving Forward* either way: “There is limited change” or “There is a sea change.”

A fatal wound?

It will make a difference. On installations where the pan-Lutheran ministry is abandoned, any Lutheran ministry will be wounded, perhaps fatally. It will be very difficult to gather Lutherans separately. Those Protestant colleagues who have groused about Lutheran competition will find this new Lutheran division amusing and advantageous. All in all, Lutheran communicants will be going less frequently to Lutheran altars because they will be harder to find. LCMS chaplains will find themselves doing ministry of Word only, without Sacrament. Those who see themselves as merely another brand of Evangelical Protestant will accommodate readily. Though the new policy is intended to strengthen confessional integrity, the unintended consequence may be just the opposite. If it reduces our effectiveness, the Synod should be prepared to reverse it.

Moving Forward could also make a difference in contributions to the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces. Each year donations are sizable and exceed the needs of the Ministry itself, permitting generous revenue for general purposes. It remains to be seen if, over time, losses will be offset by increases from those who have demanded a complete separation from the ELCA chaplaincy.

John Hannah retired from the U.S. Army Chaplaincy in the grade of Colonel after 30 years of service. He now serves as associate pastor at Our Saviour Lutheran Church [LCMS], Bronx, NY; he is also board president of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau.

The reality of a divided church

by Daniel Gard

When the Lutheran Council in the U. S. A. was founded in 1967, it had wide-ranging fellowship implications. The participating bodies (Lutheran Church in America, American Lutheran Church, and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) had their differences but those differences were not judged to preclude joint work among Lutherans in uniform.

Much has changed since then. Missouri has changed. The painful split in the 1970s ended the incursion of higher critical methodology in the Synod and reaffirmed Missouri's commitment to an inerrant Scripture and a *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. In the LCA and the ALC, higher critical studies continued with inevitable practical implications. Among those were the ordination of women and the sending of female chaplains into the military.

Different directions

After the formation of the ELCA, fellowship agreements were reached with Episcopalians and various Reformed bodies. The ELCA officially approved *A Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* which states that there is not a significant difference between Roman Catholics and Lutherans with regard to this central doctrine of the church. More recently, the higher critical approach to the Bible has resulted in the 2009 ELCA decision to ordain practicing homosexuals and to recognize gay "marriage." For Missouri, none of these developments are possible; clearly the two church bodies have taken very different directions.

How an individual chaplain feels about the positions of his church body does not change his public subscription to the synod to which he voluntarily belongs. One might privately have a different opinion but it must be subordinated to the public confession that is made by virtue of membership in a synod. Fellowship is not established by an individual pastor on a selective basis but by his synod on the basis of common doctrinal commitments. The directions that the ELCA and the LCMS have taken are the dominant and public confession of every pastor who belongs to either synod.

No other option

I do not greet President Harrison's letter *Moving Forward* with joy but with profound sadness. Despite my sorrow over what is stated in the letter, I realize that the LCMS has been left with no other option. The public confessions of ELCA and LCMS chaplains (indeed, of all their clergy and congregations) no longer have much in common. Missouri has been extraordinarily cautious and patient in what now appears to have been the false hope of reconciliation among American Lutherans.

So seriously has the LCMS taken these developments that the 2001 Convention affirmed that "we cannot consider [the ELCA] to be an orthodox Lutheran church body." The same 2001 resolution resolved that "the current cooperative pastoral working arrangements with the ELCA be evaluated by the Praesidium with results and recommendations reported to the next synodical convention." [Resolution 3-21A; *2001 Convention Proceedings*, 142]. After ten years, action has at last been taken. The wheels grind slowly but they do move.

Ours is the greater loss

The severing of joint work with the ELCA will have little impact on the life of ELCA chaplains. Frankly, ELCA chaplains and military members do not need Missouri. They are in full altar and pulpit fellowship with many Protestant faith groups and can participate in shared ministry (including Holy Communion) with Episcopalians and many Reformed groups. In many ways, the greater loss will be felt by Missourians and our small sister synod, the American Association of Lutheran Churches. Our LCMS chaplains will, of course, continue to care for every person and exercise responsible pastoral care of individuals.

The severing of joint work is the direct result of decisions the ELCA has made with the full knowledge of their implications for working relationships with the LCMS. Missouri has recognized and honored the right of the ELCA to make these choices. Perhaps this and future changes in joint work with the ELCA will serve to encourage those within the ELCA who dissent from the positions of their synod. They are not alone; the LCMS stands in solidarity with them. The divisions among Lutherans must be recognized as a sad reality, but a reality nevertheless. May God have mercy on his cloven church!

Daniel L. Gard has served as a chaplain in the Navy Reserve since 1988, and is currently Deputy Regional Chaplain, Navy Region Midwest. He is also Professor of Exegetical Theology and Dean of the Military Chaplaincy at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN.

Public split, private confusion

by Scottie R. Lloyd

Lutheran chaplains serving in the military have united for 70 years in a mission maintained

primarily by two strengths: the love of God through our Lutheran heritage and our commonly agreed mission of bringing people to God and God to people. President Harrison's letter *Moving Forward* harms that unity by presenting a public split and a private confusion. The letter's fallout publicly ends our annual chaplain training together and says to other faith groups that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod considers Evangelical Lutheran Church of America clergy to be in the same category as other Protestant churches outside an orthodox Lutheran circle of doctrinal acceptability. Privately it challenges LCMS chaplains regarding their relationship and cooperation with ELCA friends and colleagues. This may further isolate LCMS chaplains and tarnish the traditional luster of Lutheran solidarity in military ranks—a sad witness to be sure.

No surprise

This event comes as no surprise to chaplains in both Lutheran camps, given the conservative trend of the LCMS and the equally liberalizing trend of the ELCA, particularly since the August 2009 resolutions concerning homosexuality. Both churches have contributed to this moment. But President Harrison's statement, "The two churches are pursuing different courses in our ministries to military members," is questionable. How are these courses defined? Are there widespread complaints from the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines we serve or is this a clergy concern by a minority of chaplains?

What the impact will be on the ground remains to be seen as President Harrison's letter is interpreted and internalized by LCMS chaplains and their endorser. No one is yet sure what Harrison's letter means when it says that "past cooperative working arrangements between our two church bodies with respect to the military chaplaincy can no longer be supported." If it is only cancelling the annual Lutheran training conference events, then the issue is more emotional than substantial for some of our chaplains, and the impact on Lutherans serving in the military is low. The LCMS and ELCA chaplains will continue to receive superb theological training by other means. Already the ELCA and Episcopal chaplains are scheduled to join in an annual cooperative training effort.

What military Lutherans seek

If these words mean a narrower or negligible partnership in ministry to Lutheran military personnel, then it is a hard loss for everyone. On the ground it causes confusion with Lutherans served who most often care little for synodical labels and are more interested in finding forgiveness and love within a Lutheran worship setting. Neither proper ritual nor exact doctrinal purity is their great concern. Spiritual survival and sanity from the Gospel of Jesus Christ in simple terms for times of conflict and stress is what our uniformed folks most frequently seek. Using the means of Word and Sacrament within a Lutheran setting is deeply appreciated, whether the chaplain be ELCA or LCMS. ELCA chaplains will continue to extend this ministry to all and cooperate with their LCMS colleagues. The question becomes whether LCMS chaplains will be willing or able to reciprocate under President Harrison's edict. Again, the greater pressure will be upon LCMS chaplains as they are shepherded by their endorser under the new guidelines.

Another second order effect may be how the Service Department Chaplaincies (Army, Navy, Air Force) react to these Lutheran changes. During the past decade, it has been increasingly difficult to maintain denominational Lutheran services around the world. If LCMS chaplains are forced to work separately from ELCA partners, the Service Chaplaincies will likely not extend additional resources in a fiscally constrained environment to allow for different Lutheran services. The end result will be less support for our Lutheran people from both church bodies.

Serving the sheep, not the shepherds

This is why Harrison's cryptic comment, "we can no longer commend our LCMS military personnel to ELCA chaplains without increasing and grave reservations," confuses rather than clarifies the rules of engagement on the ground for everyone. The military chaplaincies continue to change, reflecting the American religious scene and the American people. One of these strong trends is the reduction of sacramental chaplains in service ranks, including Lutheran chaplains. Never before has there been a greater need for Lutheran sacramental ministry. A strong cooperative working relationship between the two largest Lutheran chaplain groups is critical

to meet that basic Lutheran pastoral requirement. Therefore the timing of this letter is especially disappointing.

Thank God the military, like many missionary settings, has a way of forging comradeships that accomplish God’s mission by sometimes serving on the side of the sheep more than on the side of shepherds. It is my hope that Lutheran chaplains will maintain our mission of bringing people to God and

God to people, starting with where good ministry always begins—with the Lutheran service people to whom we minister.

Col. Scottie R. Lloyd is an ELCA Army chaplain, currently serving as Director of Personnel and Ecclesiastical Relations for the Army Chief of Chaplains at the Pentagon.

Omnium gatherum



Dueling translations • We haven’t spent very much time covering the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod here at *Forum*

Letter, though perhaps we should pay more attention to the third largest Lutheran church body in the United States. It’s not that we don’t care; there’s just the matter of the language barrier (theological language, I mean). But I was intrigued by the hot topic at WELS’s 61st biennial convention in July, held at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, WI. It seems that for quite a few years the favored Biblical translation among WELS folks has been the New International Version (NIV). Most of our readers will recognize that as the version often preferred among evangelicals (in the normal American sense), at least among those who aren’t sticklers for good King James. But it’s been the official translation of choice for WELS, and their published materials use it when Biblical quotations are needed (which, you can figure, is pretty often). Trouble is, the publishers of the NIV are releasing a revised version this year, and many in WELS are troubled by some of the revisions—including the movement toward “inclusive

language” with regard to human beings. It is likely that permission would not be granted to the WELS publisher to continue to use the older NIV, so WELS found itself needing to make a decision as to whether they could go with the new version or not. They appointed a “Translation Evaluation Committee” which concluded that the new version could be used, essentially saying it isn’t perfect but remains probably the best option (to be preferred over the English Standard Version of which the Missouri Synod is so fond). The Convention wasn’t ready to say that, and they kicked the matter back to district conventions next year for debate and decision. From an ELCA perspective, it seems remarkable that this debate is taking place; I don’t recall any such conversation in the ELCA, and have no idea how the New Revised Standard Version became the *de facto* translation of choice for ELCA publications. But to think that a national convention would debate the merits of a particular Biblical translation (and apparently with some sophistication)—and then expect its *district* conventions to do the same! Just remarkable.

—roj

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MASON CITY, IA 50402
ALPB

AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU
LUTHERAN FORUM / FORUM LETTER
POST OFFICE BOX 327
DELHI, NY 13753-0327