

# FORUM LETTER

Volume 43 Number 7

July 2014

## On altar and pulpit fellowship

### Inside this issue:

Garrison Keillor has the  
Lutherans wrong

*Omnium gatherum*

5

6



The next step in American Lutheranism is recognition and the application of the principles of pulpit and altar fellowship in accord with the new experiences and conditions. Is there present [among]

Lutherans in this country that “unity of faith” which must always be the basis for fellowship? Based on the official records of the bodies concerned, there is. Next comes the question: What right based on Scripture has a synod to go back of the record and withhold recognition, if the official record discloses beyond reasonable doubt that there is unity of faith? The only excuse for so doing is an open and notorious negation in practice of the official confession. When it comes to passing on such negation, sane and sober Christian judgment will have to be rendered. Many things must be taken into consideration, as for instance, the history and particular problems of the synod concerned, its general tendency, and its type of discipline. On the part of the one who judges there must be that charity of mind and heart and that large-mindedness and understanding which should characterize a Christian when he sits in judgment. There must always be a tolerance as to practice that can never be permitted in relation to principle. Just where the line is between sins of weakness and an open and notorious negation of the faith on the part of a synod or general body, is not always easy to establish. —Lars W. Boe, “God’s Moment and the Next Step in American Lutheranism” (*The Lutheran Church: A Series of Occasional Papers of General Interest to the Entire Lutheran Church*, Vol. 1, No. 2; Augsburg Publishing House, 1934.)

The American  
Lutheran Publicity  
Bureau is on the web  
[www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org)

FORUM LETTER is published monthly by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau ([www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org)) with LUTHERAN FORUM, a quarterly journal, in a combined subscription for \$28.45 (U.S.) a year, \$51.95 (U.S.) for two years, in the United States and Canada. Retirees and students, \$23.00 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 235, 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 © 2014 by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau.  
ISSN 0046-4732

## Lutheran disunity: the old, old story



The Lutheran World Federation announced in May that it was declining to accept the application for membership of the North American Lutheran Church. This decision came as a shock to some, an expected outcome to others, a relief to still others, but it is certainly a significant ecumenical twist for anyone concerned about the divisions among Lutherans in North America and the world. What’s the back story about this seeming rejection?

When the North American Lutheran Church was founded in 2010, one of the first issues it faced was the possibility of membership in the LWF. The Federation’s membership does not include all the Lutheran churches of the world, but it represents most of them — some 95% of the world’s Lutherans. The NALC intended from the start to be a church open to genuine ecumenical conversation; its constitution proclaims that the church will “participate in Lutheran, ecumenical, and inter-religious relationships as part of its ministry and mission.”

### Lack of enthusiasm

Not everybody in the NALC was enthusiastic about the LWF. One could have predicted this in a body that is trying to bring together an array of Lutheran “flavors,” from evangelical catholics to pietistic congregationalists. In the view of some on this spectrum, the LWF is little more than an international front for the apostate (or nearly so) Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and Church of Sweden.

But others take seriously the ecumenical commitments of the Lutheran confessions, and have seen the LWF not only as an important marker of legitimization of the NALC, but a vital linkage with other churches, notably in the global South, who share the NALC’s unhappiness over the direction of the ELCA and other large Lutheran churches in the West. This latter concern was stated overtly in the resolution which initiated the NALC’s application: “Our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Africa, especially in Ethiopia and Tanzania, desire the full membership of the NALC in the Lutheran World Federation to be an orthodox and confessional North American partner within LWF.”

That last phrase carries a lot of weight. In the NALC’s view, the two North American Lutheran churches that are full members of LWF – ELCA and ELCIC – are not orthodox and confessional; other North American churches (notably the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod) which are orthodox and confessional have never joined the LWF.

### Narrowest of margins

When it came before the NALC Convocation in 2012, the resolution to apply for LWF membership passed only quite narrowly – just a few votes more than the required 2/3. It was contentious enough that Bishop John Bradosky told the convocation “there is little joy when something this significant in our life together passes by the narrowest of margins.” It did pass, however, and so, under the NALC rules, went to the congregations for ratification. The vote of congregations to ratify this action was 167 to 61 – a comfortable endorsement, but only marginally better (about 73%) than the narrow margin at the convocation.

And then, after all that contention and all that work, the application was denied. Apparently the application went through the usual process, cul-

minating with a visit by LWF officials to the NALC offices in Ohio. But in May, General Secretary Martin Junge notified the NALC that “the LWF communion office will not, for now, pursue further discussions with NALC regarding its application for membership in the LWF. This means that the NALC membership application remains pending.” So not an outright rejection, but a “not now.”

### Pathetic

As of this writing, the NALC has not formally responded, at least publically, to the action, though Bp. Bradosky has promised that a response will be “forthcoming.” Plenty of other people have responded, however. First out of the box was LCMS President Matthew Harrison – no friend, obviously, of the LWF, but his response on his blog was uncharacteristically and inappropriately harsh:

“This is pathetic,” Harrison wrote. “The LWF leadership is happy to have The Church of Sweden, The ELCA, and various German churches . . . which all have affirmed same sex marriage or same sex attraction/relationship in direct contradiction to the Holy Scriptures. But when a courageous group of recusants and confessors formerly of the ELCA, tired of the ridicule and abuse heaped upon them for decades for desiring to be faithful to scripture, act according to their biblically informed consciences, they are ostracized. Truly pathetic. Yes, we in the LCMS have significant differences with our friends in the NALC (most notably the issue of the ordination of women, and issues of church fellowship), and no, the LCMS should not seek membership in the LWF, but these people deserve our respect and prayers. God grant repentance to all of us Lutherans on the eve of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.”

### None of his business

Nobody should quarrel with the last sentence, but the rest is good evidence that church presidents and bishops ought to avoid personal blogging. In the first place, the relationship between the NALC and the LWF is none of his business; it is quite unseemly for him to air his personal opinions about this. If he felt the need to comment, he would have been well advised to avoid a word like “pathetic” (especially to avoid using it twice in the same blog entry).

He also really should have avoided using this occasion to thump the ELCA (and the other churches) yet again over sexuality. It is no secret that he thinks they are apostate; it is more or less true that teachings and policies about sexuality were one factor—hardly the only one—in the decision of some to withdraw from the ELCA and form the NALC. That has little or nothing to do, however, with the LWF decision.

Perhaps President Harrison simply couldn't pass up an opportunity to bash the ELCA and the LWF. Perhaps he was making a calculated strategic approach to the NALC, a sort of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" kind of olive branch. Or perhaps he was just having a bad day. In any case, he really shouldn't have said anything at all; he was hardly modeling Christian charity.

### **Conspiracy theories**

There were others who were convinced that it was the ELCA or the ELCIC or both who put the kibosh on the NALC application. In this theory, neither body could tolerate the idea of what the officials of these churches still seem to regard as a "schismatic body" sharing their position as "the North American Lutherans" in the LWF. This is a conspiracy theory that can go in many directions; there were whispers, for instance, that since the LWF is primarily dependent on the ELCA and ELCIC for its financial support (as are, so the theory goes on, many of the global South churches in the LWF), all it took was a shake of the head from those two bodies and the LWF was quick to turn thumbs down.

All of which is almost certainly a bunch of malarkey. Sources at Higgins Road told *Forum Letter* that the ELCA (and the ELCIC) stayed far away from the LWF discussion of NALC. That has the ring of truth to me; it would be an appropriate stance to take, and I do not believe that these churches, for all their faults, are quite the bullies their opponents make them out to be—at least in their relationships within the LWF.

### **The real ELCA bullying**

In other contexts, one must say, there sometimes exists what appears to be bullying behavior on the part of the ELCA. Exhibit A is the adamant insistence on the part of many synod bishops that

ELCA pastors must have absolutely nothing to do with the NALC—must not, for example, do pulpit supply or assist in any other way in an NALC congregation. In this it becomes apparent that the ELCA's self-image as the most "ecumenical" of American Lutherans really has a lot of provisions for exceptions which can be trotted out when necessary.

On the one hand, the ELCA constitution claims that it acknowledges "as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession" (2.05). On the other hand, oneness in faith and doctrine doesn't mean the same thing as "altar and pulpit fellowship." Such fellowship, says the constitution (8.73) exists between the ELCA and other churches of the Lutheran World Federation, but not necessarily with Lutherans who are not LWF members. With such churches, altar and pulpit fellowship "may be locally practiced" with the approval of the synod council and the endorsement of the bishop (8.74) if it "serves the mission and ministry needs of the ELCA." But apparently that never is the case if the other non-LWF congregation is NALC.

### **Just say yes**

Way back in the 1930s, Lars Boe, a leader in the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, proposed simply declaring unilateral altar and pulpit fellowship with all other Lutheran churches. That went nowhere then, though there were continued echoes of that approach. Shortly after the founding of the Lutheran Church in America, that body was invited to join ongoing conversations about altar and pulpit fellowship between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. They declined, on the grounds that they viewed such talks as superfluous since they already considered themselves to be one in faith and doctrine with all other Lutherans.

But that was then, as they say, and this is now. So ELCA pastors are welcome to supply the pulpits of the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and a bunch of others, but not the NALC—at least not without synodical approval, which is never given.

### **The heart of the matter**

All of this may seem to be a digression, but

in fact that old Lutheran problem of “altar and pulpit fellowship” is really likely at the heart of why the LWF has declined to accept the NALC into its membership, at least for now. The LWF has always seen that kind of church fellowship as a corollary of participation in such a “communion of churches.” Indeed, the LWF constitution says as much: “The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.” As even the ELCA recognizes, member churches of the LWF share that relationship.

But the NALC has, in this whole process, downplayed or even denied this implication of membership. The resolution authorizing the NALC application stated it clearly: “Full membership within the Lutheran World Federation does not require, nor imply, altar and pulpit fellowship with all member Lutheran bodies.” This is the rather odd interpretation that was offered NALC congregations when they were asked to endorse the application – an interpretation that is pretty hard to square with the LWF’s own constitution.

### What the meaning of is is

The NALC’s Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine tried to argue that the LWF’s understanding of “altar and pulpit fellowship” didn’t really mean altar and pulpit fellowship. They suggested that the LWF itself has moved away from the old language and now prefers to speak of the federation as a “communion of churches.” Citing an LWF document, *Strategy 2012-2017*, the commission noted that “Altar and pulpit fellowship is not mentioned even once in the catalog of Aims, Goals, and Strategy Commitments (*Strategy*, pp. 19-32).”

That’s true enough, as far as it goes; but it doesn’t go very far. The cited document does quote the LWF constitution on “altar and pulpit fellowship” early on; it never repudiates or reinterprets it. If anything, it argues that “communion” is a deeper level of relationship than formal “altar and pulpit fellowship” – but it seems to assume that one presupposes the other. In this way, the LWF is like the ELCA, which has moved in recent years from talking about “altar and pulpit fellowship” (an exclusively Lutheran term, far as I know) to speaking of

“full communion” (a much more ecumenical term). Theologically and linguistically, it is difficult to understand how a “communion of churches” would not be in communion with one another.

The commission was on firmer ground when it reassured NALC congregations that the question of “who may commune with them” would remain a congregational decision. When push comes to shove, that’s pretty much the reality in most Lutheran church bodies; this doesn’t have a lot to do with the formal relationships between those church bodies.

### Avoiding division

You’ve got to feel some sympathy for the LWF leaders. Committed to this concept of altar and pulpit fellowship within the Federation, they are trying to deal with the increasing hostility of some of the African churches toward the actions regarding sexuality of some of the Western churches. The crisis is not quite as advanced as in the Anglican communion, but it is getting there. Among Anglicans, declarations of “impaired communion” between churches have become fairly common. This concept is still mostly being spoken in whispers among Lutherans, but it is in the air, and LWF leaders would very much like to avoid what would be a serious fracturing of the Federation’s self-understanding.

So it is little wonder that there would be resistance to the application of the NALC, which pretty much said upfront that they wouldn’t actually be in altar and pulpit fellowship with all the other member churches, even if they were admitted to membership. The leadership of LWF really had very little choice – not because of ELCA or ELCIC pressure, but because of the NALC’s own stance.

All of this is very sad, as church disunity always is – understandable and even defensible as it might sometimes seem to be.

### A not so modest proposal

Here’s an idea: Why doesn’t the ELCA take a cue from Lars Boe and simply declare itself to be in full communion with all churches that confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession? Not all would reciprocate, obviously, but then it’s on them, if that is their choice. Why doesn’t the ELCA step boldly into the LWF controversy and use its supposed influence – probably best behind the scenes – to pressure

the LWF to admit the NALC to full membership? Why don't the ELCA bishops say, "Well, this is the new reality, and if an NALC congregation asks an ELCA pastor now and then to provide word and sacrament to an NALC congregation — with whom, by the way, we have unity in faith and doctrine —

we won't hinder them"?

Not going to happen, I'm afraid. Matthew Harrison was right: May "God grant repentance to all of us Lutherans on the eve of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation."

— by Richard O. Johnson, editor

## Garrison Keillor has the Lutherans wrong

by Raymond J. Brown



Since 1974 Garrison Keillor has been defining American Lutherans in his weekly *Prairie Home Companion* radio show. His stories about the folkways of the Scandinavian transplants who adhere to the Augsburg Confession are charming, understated, humorous — and menacingly misleading.

Keillor ably demonstrates a sure eye for farce; his entertaining shaggy dog stories are about as true as P. G. Wodehouse's send-ups of the British upper class or Guy Gilpatric's comedic tales of the merchant marine. That is to say, there is a veneer of truth, but most of that is in the peripheral details of geography, weather, architecture and daily routine.

Yet Lutherans have often enthusiastically allowed Keillor to define them and their tradition for the American audience, seemingly pleased that someone — anyone — is paying us any attention at all. No longer are we a largely unknown communion vaguely stuck somewhere between the Roman Catholics and the generic Protestants, or by the more astute perhaps perceived as somewhat low-church Episcopalians who prefer coffee and beer to tea and sherry, and with suits more likely from Sears than Brooks Brothers.

### Quiet stubbornness

What are the Lutherans known for in Keillor's world? Potluck suppers, minor domestic problems blown out of proportion, a quiet stubbornness which is never righteously angry, and a piety which is cultural and hereditary as opposed to real and present.

I have listened to *A Prairie Home Companion* since the early 80s when my then fiancé (a Wisconsin Lutheran of Scandinavian descent) first introduced me to the variety show, and we are still lis-

tening. I felt a bit strange in those first days. I was a military aide to the Reagan White House at the time and considered PBS and NPR to be one step removed from Sandinista radio. But then as now, the *Prairie Home Companion* music is invariably excellent and the comedy skits ingenious. Moreover, Keillor certainly owns a voice made for radio. *But he gets Lutheranism all wrong.* Consider the following:

### Lutherans are theological

Unlike some of the later Swiss, Lowlands, French and English schisms, the Lutheran Reformation was not born of temporal power politics, ecclesiology, land grabs, monetary jealousies, or pietistic and experiential preferences, but of Biblical debate. The Augsburg Confession remains one of the clearest and most concise statements of belief ever produced. The world over, a Christian academic of any school will well gird his loins (and his memory) before taking on a Lutheran theologian in honest debate. Historically, Lutheran theologians have always been the first team. This truth is absolutely absent in Lake Wobegon.

### Lutherans are feisty

For better or worse, Lutheranism was born in polemics, polemics admittedly sometimes carried too far. Martin Luther would not be welcome on *All Things Considered* (he'd have to send the more irenic Philip Melancthon in his stead). Indeed, Luther's incisive wit would likely reduce Keillor to a squealing mass of protoplasm. But the church while on this earth is ever destined to be a body in conflict.

Onerous European state churches occasioned much immigration to North America by Lutherans who desired and demanded more of the freedom of the Gospel. Over the last fifty years, American Lu-

therans have had their own internecine and ugly disagreements over that same freedom and its limits. Arguably the dean of American Lutheran theologians is Carl Braaten, an octogenarian who still never engages and argues theology at room temperature. No one like him ever appears in Lake Wobegon.

### Lutherans understand the Two Kingdoms

Though Keillor's progressive politics are certainly no secret and occasionally become apparent in his show, Lake Wobegon's Lutherans are largely apolitical. Their joys and worries tend to be much more immediate. But there is a reason for this, one which probably Keillor himself does not fully appreciate. Lutherans do understand and take seriously that Christ's kingdom is not of this world.

In this Martin Luther was one with St. Paul and St. Augustine. Christians are to work within the fallen, extant world where God has placed them. But the Church of Jesus Christ is not a political party and utopianism on this mortal coil is not a possibility. Nor is theocracy.

### Majoring in minors

Garrison Keillor is not a Lutheran. Reared in a fundamentalist sect, he reportedly attends an Episcopal church these days. Yet he has truly lived most of his life in the most Lutheran and Scandinavian enclave in the United States – and not a few German sons and daughters reside there also. Certainly *A Prairie Home Companion's* host, in addition to producing a variety show of considerable value, provides certain atmospheric, caricatures, and largely unspoken traditions which are most entertaining. With respect to Lutheranism, however, Keillor majors in the minors.

As creator, host, writer, and principal entertainer, certainly Keillor can do with his show what he wants. Indeed, he has been a phenomenal and longstanding success. I expect I will listen this Saturday evening. My real gripe is not with him but with my fellow Lutherans. We have embraced Keillor's publicity without any serious question or qualification. One can hardly attend some regional or national church assembly without some homage being paid to the mythical Lake Wobegon and its Lutheran denizens who are so remarkable for being unremarkable. But of our true heritage we seem to think little and say less. A confessional church should be, uh, confessional.

### Lutheran sloth

Of the seven deadly sins in the Christian tradition, pride is usually considered the worst. Pride is very un-Lutheran. Lutherans have seldom been accused of the triumphalism and vainglory which has at times beset other religious movements. But perhaps in letting a second tier notoriety on a national stage both impress us and define us we have been guilty of sloth.

In three years we will observe the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation's beginning, as an Augustinian friar and several compatriots began to have second thoughts about earning their own salvation. For our confessional identity, Lutherans ought look to the rock from whence we were hewn, not the humorous musings of a brilliant entertainer.

*Raymond J. Brown is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. He is a participant in the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal. He is also a member of NPR.*

---

## Omnium gatherum



**Thrivent update** • You'll recall that in response to complaints that Thrivent dollars were going to Planned Parenthood, Thrivent suspended all contributions to both "pro-choice" and "pro-life" groups. Michael Schuermann is an LCMS pastor who has been following the Thrivent Choice controversy. He reports on his blog that Thrivent has quietly reinstated about three-

quarters of the banned pro-life organizations to the "approved list."

**A sad story** • Bruce Burnside was the ELCA bishop of the South Central Synod of Wisconsin. Last year he was involved in a hit-and-run accident that resulted in the death of a jogger. He has now pled guilty to second-degree reckless homicide and first-

offense drunken driving. It seems that in addition to having been drinking, he was texting and exceeding the speed limit. At this writing he has not yet been sentenced, but he is definitely looking at some years in prison. A tragic story from any perspective.

**Our readers respond** • Quite a few emails came in response to the articles on gay marriage in the May issue. As usual, they were all over the map. Some of them accused me of being hopelessly behind the times (not all that different, come to think of it, than the criticisms of the previous month's article on liturgical chaos, though perhaps less vehement). One pastor from Minnesota wrote, "Another insight I have is that this under 25 demographic is very supportive and/or don't care about this issue. I didn't have a one of my 20 confirmation students voice any opposition to gay/lesbian marriage." I resisted the temptation to ask what other theological/moral issues are up for a vote by his middle school students. Another accused me of being an alarmist in raising the possibility of lawsuits against pastors or congregations refusing to marry same-sex couples. I hope he's right, and I think such a suit would ultimately go nowhere, but I still suspect it's going to happen sooner or later; we live in litigious times, and lawsuits are filed about all sorts of silly things. If photographers and bakers can be sued, why not pastors? On the other hand, the ELCA Witness committee of Lutheran CORE thinks that I am unduly pessimistic. "When the Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade*," they note (in a response that went through four drafts before they sent it; you've got to love committees!), "commentators claimed that unlimited abortion would soon be widely accepted. They were wrong. When the article claims that same-sex marriage will soon be widely accepted, we believe that it is mistaken. Same-sex marriage was defeated in 30 consecutive state votes, including California, before being approved. Only time will tell whether it will be widely accepted. Very inaccurate is the statement that 'Probably most congregations and pastors identifying with position one, and many of those identifying with position two [opposing recognition of same-sex marriage], have withdrawn from the ELCA.' Many pastors and congregations identifying with position one remain in the ELCA. Similarly, we doubt that a majority of ELCA congregations would support same-sex mar-

riage if it were put to a congregational vote. Public opinion polls do not predict how a congregation will vote on a religious issue involving Biblical authority." True enough, and as someone recently observed, "present trends never continue." Of course sometimes things get even worse. But I find pessimism, humanly speaking and in the short term, to work pretty well for me when placed in the context of utter optimism about the triumph of God. If you want to know more about the ELCA Witness committee, check them out at [www.lutherancore.org/elca-witness/](http://www.lutherancore.org/elca-witness/).

**More prayers** • Another writer of fine prayers of the people for each Sunday is Linda Kraft, who sends hers out weekly via email. If you'd like to receive them, she'd probably be glad to send them to you. Her address is [kraftlynx@gmail.com](mailto:kraftlynx@gmail.com).

**More recognition, or not** • Last time we gave kudos to all the Lutheran media receiving recognition by the Associated Church Press for their 2013 work, but we missed five awards (two awards of excellence, one award of merit, and two honorable mentions) earned by two Women of the ELCA publications, *Gather* and the website Bold Café. Blame this on their not having "Lutheran" in their titles, so when I did a word search of the lengthy awards booklet, they didn't show up. I learned about these awards from *The Lutheran*, which, as has been their practice lately, featured "ELCA publications" which won awards, figuring that their readers wouldn't be interested, I guess, in the broader Lutheran press. Besides, *The Lutheran* is an ELCA house organ, so they're only interested in ELCA stuff. OK, I can understand that reasoning, though I find it a little parochial. But also a little inconsistent, since they did manage to mention the awards given to *Metro Lutheran*, which describes itself as "an independent, pan-Lutheran newspaper serving the Greater Twin Cities area." So how *The Lutheran* classifies it as "an ELCA publication" is somewhat mystifying. *Forum Letter* and *Lutheran Forum* are "independent, pan-Lutheran" publications serving a much greater area than the Twin Cities, after all. But maybe whoever wrote the article in *The Lutheran* just did a word search on "Lutheran" and so missed *Forum Letter* (though they should have picked up *Lutheran Forum*). More likely, maybe they're just snubbing us.

We, you may rest assured, will continue to give kudos to *The Lutheran* when they deserve it, whether they return the favor or not.

**And they do deserve it** • Or at least ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton does. I almost skipped her column in the June *The Lutheran* because of the headline: “Shout-out for Team ELCA.” But I’m glad I read it. The bishop offered an engaging and clever reflection on “the concept of church as the body of Christ,” criticizing what she calls “Transactional Whoville Ecclesiology.” It’s worth a read, whatever your church body or your feelings about it.

**Metro Lutheran** • Speaking of the *Metro Lutheran*, I was saddened to hear that they have ceased publication as of April. For more than 29 years, this Minneapolis/St. Paul independent Lutheran newspaper has been an interesting source of news in the Lutheran community, and one of the few pan-Lutheran publications remaining. I always enjoyed reading it when a copy would come my way. Editor Bob Hulteen has become Director of Communications and Stewardship with the ELCA’s Minneapolis Area Synod. We wish him well, even as we lament the demise of *Metro Lutheran*.

**Trigger warnings** • *The New York Times* reports that universities and colleges are dealing with a movement to require “trigger warnings” on literature or other assignments that might be upsetting to students. The term, apparently, means that some depictions of violence, sexual abuse, racism, etc., might “trigger” strong reactions in people who have

suffered trauma from these things, and so they need to be warned ahead of time (kind of a “spoiler alert,” if you will). The paper quotes Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, who opposes the movement. “Frankly it seems this is sort of an inevitable movement toward people increasingly expecting physical comfort and intellectual comfort in their lives. . . . It is only going to get harder to teach people that there is a real important and serious value to being offended. Part of that is talking about deadly serious and uncomfortable subjects.” Pastors know this inevitable movement too; plenty of people nowadays demand that they not be offended by potentially traumatic subjects like, say, original sin or the call to discipleship. Pretty soon we’ll probably be asked to put “trigger warnings” on sermons and Bible studies. (*The New York Times*, 18 May 2014)

**Save the date** • The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau is celebrating its centennial year. Originally begun by some Missouri Synod Lutherans who thought their church needed to get out of its ethnic ghetto and find better ways to engage with American culture, the ALPB eventually became one of the most significant advocates for Lutheran unity, as well as a gadfly for a wide variety of causes. It’s a distinguished history, well worth celebrating. Plan to join us October 12 from 5 to 9 p.m. at Fogarty’s in Bronxville, NY. Yours truly and Prof. Robert Benne will look back and ahead at the ALPB’s history and future. The cost for dinner and program will be \$40. More information about reservations will be forthcoming, but put it on your calendar now. —roj

Address Service Requested

DELHI, NY 13753-0327  
POST OFFICE BOX 327

LUTHERAN FORUM / FORUM LETTER  
AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU

NON-PROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
MASON CITY, IA 50401  
ALPB