

# FORUM LETTER

Volume 45 Number 4

April 2016

## Inside this issue:

Missouri's ecumenical  
spring

*Omnium gatherum*

## This heavenly medicine



I come to You, O Lord, so that things may be well with me through Your gift, and that I may rejoice at the holy feast You have made ready for me through Your great goodness. In You is all that I may or should desire, for You are my salvation and my redemption, my hope, my strength, my honor and glory. . . .

My soul desires to receive Your Body, my heart desires to be made one with You. Come to me, Lord, and it is sufficient, for without You there is no comfort. Without You, I cannot be. Without your visitation, I cannot live. Therefore, it behooves me often to go to You and for my health to receive You, lest, if I were deprived of this heavenly meat, I should perhaps fail in the way. So You Yourself said, most merciful Jesus, as You were preaching to the people and healing them of their sickness: I will not let them return to their houses fasting, lest they fail by the way. Do with me, therefore, in like manner, You who have left Yourself in this glorious Sacrament for the comfort of all faithful people.

You are, in truth, the true nourishment of the soul, and he who worthily receives You will be partaker and heir of eternal glory. It is necessary for me, who so often offends, who soon grows dull and slow, to renew myself by frequent prayers and confessions, and to purify myself and kindle myself to alertness and fervor of spirit, lest perhaps by long abstinence from the Blessed Sacrament I fall away from such a holy purpose. The mind of man and woman is, from youth, proud and prone to evil, and unless this heavenly medicine gives help, they may soon fall from worse to worse. Therefore, Holy Communion draws a man away from evil and strengthens him in goodness. —Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, ed. Harold C. Gardiner (Image Books Edition, 1955), 174-175.

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 © 2016 by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau.  
ISSN 0046-4732

## My Eucharistic journey



I received my first communion when I was perhaps 8 or 9 years old in my grandparents' Methodist congregation. We didn't really go to church much in my family — Sunday School off and on, but not church. I was vaguely familiar with the story of the Last Supper, but didn't know anything about its reflection in Holy Communion. But it was Holy Week, school was out, and we were spending the week with my grandparents. It was Maundy Thursday, and church was on the agenda that night. My grandmother was upset when she discovered I didn't know anything about the Sacrament, but she wasn't really equipped to explain it, so that task passed to my cousin, 18 months older than I. I don't really remember a lot about the service itself, except

that I liked it. It touched me in some deep place.

As I got into adolescence, I started attending the Methodist congregation where we had gone to Sunday School. It was a university town and these were, I suppose, what passed for “high church Methodists,” which is to say they had Communion monthly rather than quarterly. I always looked forward to the first Sunday of the month; to this day I can’t smell grape juice without a nostalgic wave of Eucharistic piety washing over me. (Cubed Wonder Bread doesn’t have quite the same effect.)

### *Lex orandi, lex credendi*

As for my Eucharistic theology, I’m a good example of *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the rule of prayer is the rule of belief). My congregation used the Communion liturgy straight out of the book, and the official Methodist liturgy was essentially that of the *Book of Common Prayer*. It was, in good Anglican fashion, open to a range of interpretations from “real presence” to “memorialist.” I leaned in the former direction, encouraged by the *United Methodist Hymnal*, which sat on our piano and which I loved to explore. I was especially taken by hymns which had a haunting medieval tonality — “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” was a favorite, as was Horatio Bonar’s “Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face” (set in that hymnal to the plainsong tune *Adoro te devote*). I would play and sing them over and over, along with the John Merbecke *Agnus Dei* (which was tucked away in the back of the hymnal).

When I started studies at Yale Divinity School, I was thrilled to learn that there was a Eucharistic service in the chapel four days a week at 5:15 p.m. Each was “hosted” by a different faith community, but it was made clear that each was open to any student. Thursdays it was the Roman Catholics, Wednesdays the Episcopalians, Tuesdays the Lutherans, and Mondays everyone else under a generic title of “Reformed” (including my Methodists, who really don’t belong in that category).

I started going to them all, though I eventually skipped Mondays; nothing very important seemed to be happening there. As Flannery O’Conner put it, “If it’s just a symbol, to hell with it.” What was important for me, though, is that I began to embrace the Eucharist as a very regular part of my life, not just a “once a month special.”

At the first Methodist congregation I pas-

tored, a happy circumstance was that we shared our building with an Episcopal Church mission. We had the coveted 11:00 hour, while they worshiped earlier. “Swell,” I thought, “I can go to church early and be fed.” I doubt that I specifically thought “sacramentally fed,” but of course that was the reality. For those years, I was again able to receive the Eucharist weekly.

### **Moving rapidly?**

When I was received into the American Lutheran Church in 1984, I was aware that Lutherans were sort of in transition in their Eucharistic practice. The Lutheran doctrine was great, and I confessed it freely and joyfully; the practice was all over the map. I had the impression that congregations were moving rapidly toward weekly Eucharist. That impression, I will confess, came largely from reading *Lutheran Forum* and *Forum Letter*. But at least the ALC and the LCA had both officially encouraged congregations to move in that direction.

The reality, though, was that not every congregation was doing so. When I accepted the call to Peace Lutheran Church in Grass Valley, I discovered that they had made only baby steps, despite several years of pastoral encouragement to offer more frequent opportunities for Holy Communion. They were still officially a “first Sunday of the month” congregation (though of course if, God forbid, Easter fell on the first Sunday, the Eucharist would get bumped to the second; too many visitors, you know). My predecessor had instituted what he called “quiet communion” on the third Sunday of the month, which is to say that if you really, really needed it, you could stay after church and he would commune you at the altar. One of my first acts of pastoral authority was to say, “No, I’m not going to do that. Let’s just make it a full communion service twice a month.” (I explained it a little more pastorally than that, of course.) There were a few complaints, but not many, and soon it was accepted as the norm.

If I had it to do over again, I’d move the congregation toward weekly Eucharist sooner. As it was, we took more baby steps. We added communion on fifth Sundays. That was a little sneaky, actually; fifth Sundays were normally set aside as “Youth Sundays,” and so I convinced the kids (rather easily) that this would be a good idea. They were all for it

because they could use the *Chicago Folk Liturgy*. Then we added communion on festivals, no matter what Sunday of the month. We took advantage of every festival imaginable. Then it was “festival seasons” – so all through Easter and Christmas, and we cheated a little bit and included Lent and Advent.

We got to the point where we had the Eucharist on about 35 or 40 Sundays a year. I remember distinctly the “non-communion” Sunday when I reached my own personal tipping point and felt the oddness – and the sense of loss – in a Sunday without the Eucharist. Finally, in a Council discussion about frequency, a lay person said, “Oh, let’s just do it. No more conversation, just do it.” We never looked back.

### **An emptiness, a longing**

When I retired and we had to find a new congregational home, the very top of my list of criteria was “weekly Eucharist.” It is a great joy that the congregation we joined has a Thursday morning Eucharist, and so most weeks I am able to commune twice. When I have to miss either Thursday or Sunday, I feel an emptiness, a longing. I desperately need to receive Christ in the Sacrament. It is the most wondrously profound of blessings.

What astonishes me, however, is that Lutherans are still not unanimous in their embracing of the weekly Eucharist. This has been a central goal of the Lutheran liturgical movement for decades, and it still has not come to pass. I think there is some variation in this geographically; here in Northern California, my sense is that the great majority of congregations have the Eucharist at each Sunday service. But in many other parts of the country, that does not seem to be the case.

### **Sorry, we don’t really know**

I have to say it that way because I recently learned, much to my surprise, that neither the ELCA nor the LCMS actually tracks this. I contacted the head worship people in both church bodies and was told, “Well, no, we don’t actually keep that statistic.” We certainly keep lots of other statistics; the ELCA Secretary’s office could probably tell you how many Pacific Islanders are members of the ELCA, and how many congregations use Augsburg/ Fortress’s Vacation Bible School curriculum. But something as central to the heart of who we are as a

church as Eucharistic practices? No, we don’t really know.

Of course there’s a lot more to a renewal of Eucharistic piety than mere frequency. I’ve worshiped in some churches that have weekly Eucharist, celebrated and/or served in a way that makes one wonder why they bother. And other issues have come up. The LCMS seems more concerned about fencing the altar; maybe from their point of view less frequent communion reduces the number of Sundays that ushers and pastors have to obsess over the wrong person communing. In the ELCA, we’ve moved past frequency to communing pretty much anybody, baptized or not, in many places.

But a lot of congregations are still stuck in the “once or twice a month” mode, and there doesn’t seem to be any effort from Chicago or St. Louis, or from synod or district offices, to encourage them in the joy and blessedness of the weekly Eucharist. On my list of “things I’d like to research” is the question of how the Episcopalians moved so easily and quickly from a typically monthly Eucharist to an invariably every Sunday Eucharist. It must have involved encouragement from the national church. But our worship staff are apparently too busy hawking new hymnals, on-line resources, and whatever the latest thing might be to pay attention to what, liturgically speaking, is the one thing needed.

### **Explain it to the Lord of the Church**

The publications of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau have advocated for the weekly Eucharist for many decades. Not long ago I came across an editorial in a 1964 issue of the *American Lutheran* (predecessor of *Lutheran Forum/Forum Letter*), with this interesting comment: “Many a Lutheran congregation should make a ‘Sunday Night Confession’ and explain to the Lord of the Church why it chose not to make use of the Means He provided to receive His grace and power to come into communion with Him. Lutherans the world over need to recognize the Sacrament of Holy Communion for what it is: the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation for which they should hunger and thirst as they do for daily food and not some special dessert for use on select occasions.” That was more than 50 years ago, and it still deserves a loud “Amen.”

– by Richard O. Johnson, editor

## Missouri's ecumenical spring



It seems the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is having something of an ecumenical spring. Back in January we reported on the LCMS's conversations with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod – two bodies with whom Missouri had been in fellowship until the breakup of the old Synodical Conference fifty years or so ago. Actually, that is overstating it a bit; these were really more like informal chats between the leaders of the three synods. Still, we'll support Lutheran unity however and whenever it happens.

But now comes word of another dialogue, this one more official, involving the LCMS, its Canadian counterpart the Lutheran Church – Canada (LCC), and (are you ready for this?) the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). The dialogue has apparently been going on for some five years, and now has issued an official "interim report" entitled *On Closer Acquaintance*. They even use the word "ecumenical" in describing the dialogue, a word that some have thought didn't exist in the LCMS lexicon.

### Why bother?

The ACNA is the conservative group that has broken away from the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada, in part over issues of sexuality. Comprising some 112,000 members in 1,000 congregations, the group is led by Archbishop Foley Beach. While it hasn't been formally recognized by the authorities of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Beach was invited as a guest to the recent meeting of Anglican Primates in Canterbury. The Primates of the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, the organization established primarily by African and other Global South bishops some years ago to contend for orthodox Anglicanism, has recognized ACNA as "a province of the global Anglican Communion."

The interim report makes for fascinating reading. It begins by asking the question, "Why bother?" Noting that the ELCA and the Episcopal Church have been in full communion for decades (and implying that this relationship is nothing to celebrate), the report acknowledges that some might

"question the wisdom" of these conservative churches pursuing a relationship – and especially since "neither side of our dialogue expects to achieve altar and pulpit fellowship with the other in the foreseeable future."

### Kissing cousins

Still, the report offers three reasons for the ongoing conversation. First, it notes that "Lutherans and Anglicans are the closest ecumenical cousins in Christendom." That will come as no surprise to the ELCA, which has long used language like that to describe Episcopalians. *On Closer Acquaintance* offers some interesting points to defend the assertion, however. It notes that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lutherans and Anglicans "aimed few if any direct shots against each other" – certainly true and, as I recall, a point made earlier in the ELCA/Episcopal dialogues. More quirky is the proud note that "the Lutheran George Frederick Handel composed his church music mainly in England." True again, though a rather odd way to justify 21<sup>st</sup> century dialogues. But the upshot is that the LCMS/LCC/ACNA folks are willing to call each other, not "sister churches" but "ecclesial first cousins." Whatever.

The second reason is a little elastic. It speaks of the "significant internal divide within world Anglicanism and Lutheranism." By this they seem to mean that both these Lutheran and Anglican groups are alienated from other churches in their respective communions – sort of a "misery loves company" justification for talks. Then it drifts into a seemingly unrelated observation about *lex credendi, lex orandi* (that phrase generally goes the other way, but never mind). The point seems to be that Lutherans have been good on *lex credendi*, Anglicans on *lex orandi*, so let's help each other out here.

The third reason is the much more mundane observation that Christ prayed that his followers might be one.

### No *satis est*

*On Closer Acquaintance* then offers an interesting comparison of the two churches' respective views of what is required for fellowship. On the

Anglican side, the “olive branch” of the Lambeth Quadrilateral is noted. That was an Anglican ecumenical proposal that church unity should be based on four points: the Holy Scriptures as the “ultimate standard of faith,” the Nicene Creed as the “sufficient statement of the Christian faith,” the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and a ministry possessing “the authority of the whole body” (you know, like bishops). This is contrasted, interestingly enough, with the Formula of Concord’s call for agreement “in doctrine and in all its articles” rather than the *satis est* of the Augsburg Confession. That does put a spin on ecumenical dialogue different from that of the ELCA!

The document then goes on for several pages with a mostly interesting comparison of doctrine between Lutherans and Anglicans, pointing out agreements (of which there are many) and disagreements (of which there are several). But in the end, as the participants in the LCMS/WELS/ELS conversations noted, they were “somewhat surprised to have discovered the deep common bonds between us in the Body of Christ, and to have registered a large

measure of consensus.” The upshot is a recommendation that Lutherans (well, at least LCMS and LCC Lutherans) and Anglicans (at least ACNA Anglicans) “remember each other in prayer, embrace one another in Christian love . . . encourage each other to confess Christ boldly in our ever darkening times, and . . . support each other in mission and outreach in faithfulness to Him who has laid the same Great Commission on us all.”

All good things, certainly, and we applaud them. As we said with regard to the LCMS/WELS/ELS conversations, talking with and listening to one another is a salutary thing, as is longing for the unity for which Christ prayed. One might wish the net were cast a little wider, that there might be such constructive dialogue between the LCMS and the ELCA. That probably won’t happen in the foreseeable future; still, it’s gratifying to see the LCMS dipping its toe in ecumenical waters. Who would have thought of such a thing? – besides the Lord of the Church, of course.

– by Richard O. Johnson, editor

## Omnium gatherum



**Lutheran journals** • *Currents in Theology and Mission* has now become an online, open access journal. The first issue in the new format is January 2016, and its theme is “Lutheran Journals for Church and Academy: Learning from the Past, Envisioning the Future.” There are interesting articles on the history and mission of several significant contemporary Lutheran journals, written in most cases by the editor of each. Those included are *Currents* itself (naturally), *Dialog*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, *Word and World*, and (ahem) *Lutheran Forum/Forum Letter*. Congratulations to the folks at *Currents in Theology and Mission* on the new incarnation, and a fascinating first issue. Access it at [www.currentsjournal.org](http://www.currentsjournal.org).

**LQ joins JHUP** • By the way, our friends over at *Lutheran Quarterly* have announced a new partnership with John Hopkins University Press. The latter, among other things, serves as publisher for a diverse collection of academic journals, to which *LQ* will now be added. *LQ* is a fine publication with a long

history; its current incarnation continues an earlier *Lutheran Quarterly* (edited for many years by Theodore Tappert), the earlier *Evangelical Review* which began in 1849, and a couple of other Lutheran journals as well. I’ve been a subscriber since its inception, and look forward to each issue.

**Religion Watch** • That’s the name of a very interesting newsletter that’s been written and published by Richard Cimino for several years, with objective and insightful coverage of news in the world of religion. As you can imagine, it’s not a publication that finds it easy even to break even financially. The good news is that the newsletter has been “adopted” by Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion. Now to be known as *Baylor ISR Religion Watch*, the online newsletter will be offered at no charge. You can subscribe at [www.religionwatch.com](http://www.religionwatch.com).

**A bishop with a spine** • An interesting brouhaha in Calgary, Alberta, where a Roman Catholic bishop with a spine has taken a stance against the prevail-

ing winds regarding accommodation to “trans-gender children.” The province of Alberta’s Education Minister released a set of “Guidelines for Best Practices” in “creating learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions.” Among other things, the guidelines asked schools to allow students to choose bathrooms that reflect their gender identities. Bishop Frederick Henry says that Catholic schools won’t be following these guidelines. “[Catholic] teaching is rather simple and direct,” he wrote. “In [God’s] plan, men and women should respect and accept their sexual identity.” He said that the guidelines “smack of the madness of relativism and the forceful imposition of a particular narrow-minded anti-Catholic ideology.” In response, a representative of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services said that “the only madness that Bishop Henry describes is his lunacy.” A spokesperson for Edmonton’s Pride Centre found it “shameful that he would put students in a position where they have to choose between being schooled in their faith and having a safe place.” Gosh, one would think that “being schooled in their faith” would probably include what their faith and its leaders regard as true rather than what the educational bureaucracy and its minions might think is best for Catholic students. Nonetheless, the mother of a transgender girl (apparently in the lexicon of sexual diversity that means a boy who is now identifying as a girl) who was denied use of the girls’ bathroom at a Catholic high school in Edmonton has filed a complaint with the provincial Human Rights Commission. The bishop’s statement and policies, she said, have “nothing to do with the Catholic faith.” Again, one would think that the bishop might have a better handle on that than she. It will be interesting to see what the Human Rights Commission thinks. Interesting, and, if I were a betting person, I’d wager on discouraging.

**We don’t need no blinkin’ theologians** • Still another Facebook conversation among ELCA clergy, this one about a church in Massachusetts (Unitarian, unsurprisingly) offering “second baptisms” for transgender people. To be honest, I had no idea that Unitarians even did first baptisms. Anyway, the person who posted the story wanted to “talk about the theological implications” (and asked people to “take care not to be transphobic in discussing this”). One

comment: “Does it help the individual claim the name ‘child of God?’ Then what theologians think is valid or not doesn’t matter. The rules we have been conditioned to accept because of our own journeys only serve to make us judgmental.” Theology does tend to make one judgmental, I suppose, with all those rules and everything, and we really must find some way to avoid getting “conditioned to accept” them.

**Raging informality** • No, I’m not talking about worship, though I could be. I’m talking about the obnoxious informality that seems to have invaded our political discourse. When exactly did presidential candidates start referring to one another by their first name in public? Watching the Republican debates (I know, I’m a masochist), it’s “Donald this” and “Marco that” and “Ted the other.” About the only one who was occasionally (before he dropped out) referred to more formally is “Dr. Carson.” The Democratic primary candidates seem to refer to each other more formally (maybe because Secretary Clinton and Senator Sanders are both elderly). But it isn’t just the Republicans, or the candidates. My teeth were set completely on edge by a video of President Obama (see, that’s how you’re supposed to do it) saying nice things about his friend Angela (that would be Chancellor Merkel). Can anyone imagine Nixon and Kennedy referring to one another as “Dick” and “Jack” in public discourse? Of course not. They would be “Vice-President Nixon” and “Senator Kennedy.” How are we supposed to regard our political leaders with respect when they don’t show the most basic respect to one another? Of course the chatty faux familiarity is hardly the most grievous indicator of lack of respect in this race. Still, would someone please remind them they’re running for President of the United States, not of the senior class?

**Where’s the editor?** • I had to chuckle in reading the February issue of the *Lutheran* magazine. There was this aggravating article about how various Lutheran agencies and institutions are “re-branding” — you know, like Lutheran Social Services of the South changing their name to “Upbring.” (The reason, said the “chief mission officer,” is that “We want people to know who we serve in one word.” Yeah, that works, doesn’t it?) The article didn’t mention it, but

of course some congregations are doing the same thing—eschewing the word “Lutheran” and becoming . . . well, something else like “New Life Church” or “The Gathering Place.” Then, in the very same issue, Presiding Bishop Eaton lamented that ELCA Lutherans seem determined to downplay their Lutheran identity. “Other people in this country and around the world,” she observed, “value who we are as a church and the work we do in Jesus’ name.” She spoke of being at a refugee camp in Jordan where the Syrian refugees “knew what is Lutheran.” She spoke admiringly of California Lutheran University, whose president has said that “‘Lutheran’ is the school’s middle name.” I guess not everyone is all that keen on re-branding. Nor should they be.

**Lutherans and politics** • An interesting poll from the Pew Research Center shows political affiliation by members of various U. S. churches. Not surprisingly, the LCMS is one of the “most Republican” of denominations, with 59% identifying with the GOP, 27% with the Democrats, and 14% independent or other. For the ELCA, the comparable figures are 43% GOP, 47% Democrat, 10% independent or other. The “most Republican” churches are the Latter Day Saints, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Southern Baptists (LCMS comes next); the “most Democratic” are two predominantly black churches, the AME Church and the National Baptist Convention. Another black denomination, the Church of God in Christ, comes in at number four. The Unitarian/Universalists slip in there between the NBC and CGC.

**Lutherans in politics** • In an election year, this might be particularly interesting. The Lutheran Historical Conference, a pan-Lutheran group (one of the few remaining), has its biennial meeting at Texas Lutheran University in Sequin, TX, October 13-15, and the theme will be “Lutherans and American Political Life.” If you’re interested in history, and if you’re interested in politics, and especially if you’re interested in both, you should consider attending. For information, go to [www.luthhist.org/](http://www.luthhist.org/).

**Christians in the minority** • Also well worth considering is the annual conference sponsored by the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology. This year it will be June 6-8 at Loyola University in Balti-

more. The theme is “The Emerging Christian Minority”—a consideration of the dwindling influence of Christians in today’s America. “It is difficult to see clearly how to understand our present situation,” the sponsors write, and “to diagnose how we got here, and perhaps most of all to see how best to proclaim the Gospel and to claim the freedom to do so—in short, how best now to act faithfully.” To learn more about the schedule and speakers, visit [www.e-ccet.org/conferences](http://www.e-ccet.org/conferences).

**Um, no** • Normally we don’t pay much attention to congregational fights; too depressing. But this one has an interesting twist. There was a split in St. John’s Lutheran Church in Summerfield, FL; it made the local press in an article by the Ocala *Star-Banner’s* top flight staff writer. The schism appears to have taken place when the then-pastor, Dave Connell, was removed from the ELCA roster for sexual misconduct and did not go gently—you know, court order demanding that he leave, that sort of thing. But what really got my attention was the *Star-Banner’s* explanation: “Connell had been disrobed by the ECLA years earlier following a disciplinary hearing in front of the ECLA’s Florida-Bahamas Synod.” That really can’t be done under the ELCA’s sexual harassment policies, can it? Pr. Connell and his supporters have formed a new congregation, Christ Lutheran, which is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Conference & Ministerium of North America. That’s one of those micro-synods, one that seems to have nearly as many words in its title as it has congregations; it has also received Pr. Connell into its ministerial ranks. We’re happy to report that we found a video of a service at Christ Lutheran on YouTube, and Pr. Connell was fully clothed.

**Is this where it all leads?** • From the headline, I thought at first it was an article about Ebenezer Lutheran in San Francisco (“herchurch”), but it turned out to be something else. The *Arizona Republic* reported that the leader of the Phoenix Goddess Temple had been convicted of conspiracy to commit illegal enterprise, operating a house of prostitution, in addition to several other charges. The Goddess Temple offered “spiritual and touch-based healing services to ‘seekers’ in exchange for donations.” “We have the freedom of religion,” the leader was quoted as saying. “To us, our religion and our belief, the

body is the temple. The body is sacred. That may include the genitals. In fact, I'm pretty sure it does."

**In addition to which** • Speaking of Phoenix, they've been having a brouhaha there about opening the City Council meetings with prayer. It seems that the local Satanic Temple (they sure do have a lot of temples in Phoenix) had asked to be included in the rotation for offering the routine prayer, so the Council voted to ax the prayers and instead have a moment of silence. But some people said that was just caving in to the Satanists, so now they've decided to restore the prayers. Instead of a rotation of local clergy, the prayers will be offered by police and fire department chaplains. I suppose that will work until the Satanists press for admission to the chaplain corps.

**In case of emergency** • Meanwhile, the Arizona state legislature is also having a dispute over prayer. (Too much sun down there?) In their House of Representatives, legislators take turns leading the opening prayer. A Democrat who is a self-proclaimed atheist was invited by the Republican leader to take his turn. He offered a few words which, of course, did not invoke the God in Whom he doesn't believe. The Republican Majority Leader then decreed that it wasn't really a prayer, and called on a Baptist minister who just happened to be there to offer a genuine prayer. The Democrat complained that he had been set up because (a) they knew ahead of time he wouldn't invoke God and (b) they had the Baptist minister ready to step in. The Republicans replied

that the legislature has a minister on the premises every day, just as they have a medical doctor, in case of emergencies. They do take their praying seriously in Arizona, don't they?

**Praying, seriously?** • Meanwhile, the ELCA's "Sundays and Seasons" continues to offer prayers (supposedly models, though a lot of congregations just use them as they are) that make one wonder about how seriously we pray. A recent one that engendered a lot of amusement online was: "For polluted oceans and rivers, we seek your healing, creative Lord. Restore the homes of manatees and sea turtles. Teach us to love the earth as you do." On Facebook and elsewhere there was a flood of verbal and pictorial comment – my favorite being the photo of a tiny girl staring at a huge manatee in an aquarium tank, with the caption being "We deeply appreciate the Lutheran prayers." My first thought is that the ELCA is finally catching up; back in 2010 we published an item about a new-agey group of some kind that had a liturgy which actually prayed *to* manatees ("I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I love you.") I suppose just mentioning manatees in the prayers of the people, while odd and a little silly, isn't completely unreasonable. I was actually more offended by the next petition: "For conflicts between political parties, we ask for your discernment and wisdom, merciful Lord." Grammatically speaking, I just couldn't figure that one out. Were they asking God to send *more* conflicts? Were they hoping that we'd have conflicts that were discerning and wise? Is there an editor in the house? – roj

Address Service Requested

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

NON-PROFIT  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
MASON CITY, IA 50401  
PERMIT #429