

FORUM LETTER

Volume 45 Number 7

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This is our sentence

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My God, how blind and how mad we Christians have become! When, heavenly Father, will this anger cease? That we make fun of, curse, and judge the sorry state of Christendom, which we gather in the church and at Mass to pray for, comes from our stupid minds. When the Turks devastate towns and the countryside with their inhabitants and destroy churches, we think immediately that huge damage has been done to Christendom. We complain and force kings and the princes into battle. When, however, faith disappears, love becomes cold, God's word is neglected, and all kinds of sins gain the upper hand, no one steps forth to fight them. Even though pope, bishops, and priests ought to join the spiritual battle as generals, captains, and commanders against this far worse spiritual 'Turk.' They are themselves this 'Turk' and the princes and leaders of the devil's army, just as Judas was for the Jews when they arrested Christ. To initiate the process of putting Jesus to death, it took one of the best: an apostle, bishop, and priest. In the same manner, Christendom must be brought to ruin by those who should be guarding it. They remain so deluded, however, that they want to devour the Turk while they set their own houses and sheepfolds on fire and let them burn along with the sheep and everything in them. Nonetheless, they are still worried about the wolf in the bush. This is our sentence; this is our reward for the ingratitude we have shown for the endless grace that Christ has freely acquired for us with his precious blood, his arduous labor, and his bitter death. — Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, trans. Timothy J. Wengert in *The Annotated Luther, Vol. 1: The Roots of Reform* (Fortress Press, 2015), 319-320.

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Headed for the Big Easy



The 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church will convene in New Orleans August 8. This is the first time since the ELCA's founding that there has been a three-year gap between assemblies; the 2011 assembly approved a change from a biennial to a triennial meeting, but it takes a while to make such a shift (advance booking of facilities, the effect of the transition of terms of officers, etc.) so the 2013 confab went on as originally planned. The event in the "Big Easy" will no doubt *be* fairly easy, as churchwide assemblies go, for it's not likely that there will be any headlines coming out of New Orleans — certainly nothing to compare to the election of a new presiding bishop (2013) or a sexuality statement (2009). Still, there will be some significant stories, and some interesting non-stories as well.

All eyes on Eaton

Let's start with the non-stories. This will be Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's first shot at running a churchwide assembly. Eaton has gotten lots of kudos for her performance during her first three years in office; she is articulate, theologically responsible, and generally popular. She isn't the celebrity that her predecessor fancied himself, but for many that is a most welcome change.

Presiding over the assembly, however, shines a different kind of light on a bishop. For a good number of voting members, this will be their first exposure to Eaton, at least in person. They will be watching to see whether she handles this task with grace, humility and skill. They will want to feel that she is capable, obviously, but also that she is fair, firm when necessary, and genuine in her understanding that the foremost responsibility of the presider is to help the assembly accomplish what it wants to do. Having been a synodical bishop for some years, she's not a stranger to this task. My guess is that she will get good marks and the assembly will sense that those who gathered in Pittsburgh three years ago made a good choice.

That study of Eucharistic hospitality

Another non-story, at least on the surface, is the push three years ago for the ELCA to embrace "radical hospitality" at the Lord's Table by welcoming the non-baptized to receive the Eucharist. This proposal came before the assembly in 2013 in the form of a memorial from the Northern Illinois Synod, asking for "a process to review current documents concerning administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion." The subtext here was an effort to push the ELCA toward altering its current standard, articulated in *The Use of the Means of Grace*, that "Admission to the Sacrament is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized." Many of a traditionalist bent feared where this might lead.

But the movement to change official policy seems to have come to a quiet end. There was some research and conversation in response to the assembly's action (though it doesn't seem to have gotten a lot of publicity). An initial survey of some 1,000 randomly selected ELCA congregations asked them to provide a copy of whatever statement of invitation to the Eucharist they typically use; just under half responded. The ELCA worship staff grouped them

into several categories, and the results were rather startling. Only about 27% of the statements seemed to articulate the standard suggested by *The Use of the Means of Grace*, while 44% overtly welcomed "all people" (not just the baptized) to the Eucharist. The rest were ambiguous or restrictive in one way or another but without basing the restriction on baptism (e.g., expecting a particular view of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist).

The ELCA's worship staff then produced a study guide ("Table and Font: Who Is Welcome?") and invited congregations and individuals to participate in a study. Only a few actually responded (134 individuals and 138 congregations or groups). Executive for Worship Kevin Strickland reported to the Church Council last fall that he sensed "anxiety that the discussion itself will cause divisions in the church and produce a divisive 'vote' on the sacraments of the church."

No further research needed

As a result, he informed the Church Council that the worship staff "sees no further need to research the practices of congregations with respect to 'The Use of the Means of Grace' and sees this report as the conclusion of its work" on the 2013 memorial. The Church Council accepted this report, and so apparently there will be no recommendation for further action coming to New Orleans.

I guess that counts as a victory for the *status quo* — though what kind of victory it might be is a pretty major question. When the ELCA's official policy is overtly embraced by slightly more than a quarter of its congregations, that would seem to be an issue. Probably "policy" is too strong a word, of course; *The Use of the Means of Grace* is more like a recommendation, or a suggestion — for many, apparently, just an opinion. Admission to the Eucharist is not the only aspect of that document that is widely ignored; quite a few congregations still do not celebrate the Eucharist weekly (though, as *Forum Letter* noted recently, we don't really know how many since the ELCA doesn't keep track of this).

Pr. Strickland's report to the Church Council noted that "We are a church that centers itself on the central things of our faith — Water, Word, and Meal; central things that point us to Christ who is our center." It appears, though, that these central things are so central that we don't want to talk about them — don't even want to think about them, really. Certain-

ly a churchwide assembly is not the place to have this discussion, or to make decisions about matters of sacramental practice, and one can be grateful that the 2013 action will turn out to be a “non-story” in 2016. But if the ELCA really “centers itself on the central things of our faith,” somebody really needs to consider just how central it can be if every congregation does its own thing on something as significant as “who is welcome” at the Eucharist.

Choosing a vice-president

Now on to the actual stories. There will be elections, of course, as there always are. The only high-profile one this year will be the election of a new vice-president – “new” for sure, because the incumbent, Carlos Peña, has asked that he not be considered for another term. The position of vice-president is filled by a lay person, and is considered the “top lay position” in the church. The veep’s most significant task is to preside at meetings of the ELCA Church Council, but of course he or she has an influential role behind the scenes concerning a good number of matters.

The vice-presidential election is conducted by ecclesiastical ballot, which is to say that there are no “nominations” *per se*; the voting members in New Orleans will simply write a name on their first ballot, and then those dozens or hundreds of names will be winnowed down quickly over the next few ballots. It’s a process that actually doesn’t work so well for a lay position. When it is used for presiding bishop, there are only a few thousand eligible names (all ELCA clergy). For vice-president, the possibilities run to the millions.

So this means that a *de facto* process arises for “identifying” possible candidates; something similar happens in most synods with potential bishop candidates. As of June, some 16 persons had been “suggested” by someone or other and had received and returned biographical forms – which don’t really tell you much about them that’s important, but at least you get a flavor of who’s being talked about.

What qualifies you?

I confess that I didn’t recognize a single name among the sixteen, even the one from my own synod (which may say more about what it’s like to be a retired pastor than about the individual). I expect most voting members in New Orleans will be in

the same boat.

Still, interesting patterns can be observed. Of the 16, nine are currently vice-president of their synod. This is not unexpected; synod veeps have something of a network, and it’s natural that they believe that position is the best training for a churchwide vice-president. The last two ELCA vice-presidents had previously served as synod vice-presidents. Two others of the persons of interest are current ELCA Church Council members, and two more are former members. Most of the rest have at least some synodical or national ELCA experience.

The biographical forms also provide subtle clues about matters that are supposed to be irrelevant but loom large in voters’ choices. You can read between the lines and see who might be of one ethnic background or another, who might be gay or at least a strong advocate of “full inclusion.” At the assembly itself, it will quickly become apparent who is being supported by various interest and identity groups. One can expect an effort particularly to push a candidate who is openly gay or lesbian.

The sleeper: ministry changes

The biggest substantive debate is likely to be on an issue that has been a bit of a sleeper, though it is one which keeps raising its ugly head in the ELCA in a variety of contexts. It has to do with our doctrine of ministry. This year the question will focus particularly on what has (oddly) been called the “lay rosters” – i.e., those “lay professionals” who are officially rostered as church workers in the ELCA, including deaconesses, associates in ministry, and diaconal ministers.

The controversy over these vocations goes back to the beginnings of the ELCA (well, arguably a lot farther back than that, but 1988 will do for our purposes). The merging bodies had different views of ministry; the biggest complicating factor was the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, which, following its Missouri Synod heritage, regarded parochial school teachers as ministers, even though they were not ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America had certified lay professionals, but it was clear that they were *lay* people. The Commission for a New Lutheran Church tried to work something out, but finally threw up its hands and left decisions about this to

the new church; for the immediate future, lay professionals would be called “associates in ministry” (a term they essentially made up). Deaconesses would also continue to exist, a concession to the long and revered tradition of that office within Lutheranism.

First try at a solution

The ELCA promptly set up a task force to study the question of ministry and make recommendations. The task force outlined three options: a threefold ministry of ordained bishops, pastors and deacons (the latter group including all those then considered lay professionals); a twofold ministry consisting of an Office of Word and Sacrament (ordained pastors and bishops) and an Office of Word and Service (all lay professionals); or a single office of ordained ministry (bishops and pastors), with lay professionals being clearly understood to be laity who happened to work for the church.

The task force ultimately opted for a version of the second option, and also recommended that those in the Ministry of Word and Service be ordained to that office and called “diaconal ministers.” There was a good bit of unhappiness about this direction in some quarters. By the time the recommendation got to the 1993 Churchwide Assembly, it had morphed into a proposal that associates in ministry and deaconesses be retained, in addition to the new “diaconal ministers,” who would be ordained. But the assembly balked; they approved the concept of diaconal ministers, but refused to ordain them. This left the ELCA with ordained ministers who are pastors or bishops, and three categories of lay ministers (associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses) who are not ordained, and who are included on three different lay rosters.

Are you confused yet?

Bringing some coherence

Now to the present. There’s been a task force working for some time to try to bring some coherence to these three “lay rosters.” It is their proposal that will be coming to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly. The gist of it is a recommendation that the three rosters be unified, and that the title “deacon” be applied to all those on all three existing rosters (and, of course, those who might be added in the future). This essentially echoes what the task force back in

the 1990s originally wanted — a twofold office of ministry consisting of Ministry of Word and Sacrament (pastors and bishops) and Ministry of Word and Service (deacons).

But there is one important difference. Ministers of Word and Sacrament would continue to be ordained, while Ministers of Word and Service would be . . . well, they aren’t quite ready to say yet. There is an “Entrance Rite Discernment Group” that will make a final recommendation about that. (I’m not kidding, that’s what it’s called.) Until they make a proposal to the next churchwide assembly in 2019, people will come into this office by “consecration” — the term currently in use for deaconesses and diaconal ministers.

In many respects this is a step in the right direction. Having three independent rosters of lay professionals has never made much sense, and is something of an ecumenical embarrassment. Generally those currently on one of the three rosters are supportive of this proposal to varying degrees, with the associates in ministry (who, while the most numerous group, often feel like second class citizens for several reasons) the most enthusiastic and the deaconesses (who have a special kind of community and tradition that they don’t want to lose) the most hesitant. There is a good argument that “deacon” is the best possible term for this ministry for Biblical, historical and ecumenical reasons.

What will be controversial

There are at least two aspects of the recommendation, however, that are likely to spark debate. The first is the continued ambiguity about an entrance rite. There are those who will feel, with some justification, that we haven’t done very well trying to deal with ministry questions in fits and starts. The question of how people enter this office is much bigger than just a word; it boils down to the fundamental issue of whether deacons are to be understood to be clergy or laity. If they are ordained into the office of Word and Service, then they are clergy (unless, in its Alice-in-Wonderland way, the ELCA decides to completely redefine “ordination”). There will likely be some voting members who would like to know where this train is going before they step on board.

The proposed constitutional amendments to accomplish the proposal are themselves filled with

the same ambiguity. The word “layperson” has been consistently struck out in favor of “Minister of Word and Service.” In other words, the new constitutional language does not specify that deacons are laypersons. That seems to be a clear signal, or at least a subtle indication, that we are moving toward the concept that those we have considered “lay professionals” will now be seen as something other than laity. If that is true, why not just say so?

Denigrating ordination?

But those constitutional amendments also embody a second potential sticking point. Not only do they remove all references to “laypersons,” they remove all references to “the ordained.” Every place the constitution has referred to “ordained ministers” or “clergy,” it would now refer to “ministers of Word and Sacrament.” One can only draw the conclusion that the word “ordained” is being eliminated because the expectation is that “ministers of Word and Sacrament” will soon no longer be the only ministers who are “ordained.” To some of those currently ordained, that may raise all kinds of red flags. It may feel as if there is a deliberate fuzzing of the meaning of ordination. Many pastors, particularly those of a certain age and of LCA heritage, are still smarting over the decisions back in 1988 to give laity the majority vote in assemblies and councils of the ELCA and to eliminate or restrict retired pastors’ right to vote in synod assemblies. But then those whom we currently call “ordained ministers” will be a substantial minority among voting members, so who cares if it hurts their feelings?

These constitutional amendments, should you be interested, run to some 41 pages of changes. Even the model constitution for congregations would be altered, with, for example, Chapter 9 no longer entitled “Pastor” but (ugh!) “Rostered Minister.” Maybe that’s a small advance over “Rostered Leader,” but *very* small.

A fully-baked proposal would be better

In its report, the task force admits that there are some other issues that will need to be addressed (a polite way of saying “we don’t want to address them yet lest it sink the ship”). One is the representational principle. In the quota-burdened ELCA, will these new deacons have representation at a synod assembly? If so, will they be laity, clergy, something

else? And how will that impact the requirement that 60% of voting members be laity?

Another unaddressed issue is what to do about a variety of other situations in the ELCA where there are deacons whose job description isn’t the same as that of these “rostered ministers.” Some synods have a “synodical deacon” program – basically lay people who get some training to do certain kinds of tasks in their own congregation. Then there are congregations that use the term for certain officials within the congregation. Is the ELCA going to say, in these situations, “OK, you’d better find a different name, because now in the ELCA this is what a deacon is”? Not likely, but you can see the confusion that is brewing.

And then of course there is the unique problem of deaconesses, who continue to see themselves as a vibrant and special ministry and community; some of them, at least, are quite proud of being deaconesses, thank you very much, and don’t want to give up the historic term. The task force allows with a sigh that, even though such feminine suffixes are being phased out everywhere (no more stewardesses), we might just have to allow the deaconesses to keep calling themselves that until the last of them either die out or get with the program, even if we technically turn them into deacons.

See, lots of unanswered questions. So expect this proposal to generate a good deal of discussion. It is, as I said, a good step toward eliminating an incoherent aspect of the ELCA’s understanding of ministry, and maybe it’s the most that can be done at this moment; Lutherans do have a predisposition toward unseemly ambiguity on matters of ministry. But how much better if a proposal fully baked were being brought; then at least voting members could make an informed decision about how they want their church to understand ministry.

So much for goals

There will be other interesting issues, of course. There is a recommendation to finally set aside the ELCA’s unrealistic goal to reach a membership figure of 10% people of color and/or primary language other than English. It was put in there back in the beginning, with the optimistic expectation that the goal would be reached in ten years. Ten years has come and gone a couple of times now, and we’re no nearer the goal than we were in 1988. In its place

the Church Council proposes that we say “this church commits itself to ethnic and racial diversity,” and instructs “each expression of this church” to “annually assess its ethnic and racial diversity when compared to the demographic data of its community or territory.”

“Each expression” means congregations (as well as synods and national), and that seems just about as unrealistic as the 10% thing, but you know what will happen. A question will go on the annual congregational report form; in some synods, the bishop may hector congregations to do a formal annual assessment. It’s not that hard to download the demographic information, but it is just one more thing, and pastors will generally probably just make something up that sounds right. It might be more useful to add a question about whether the congregation has the weekly Eucharist; that one could be answered pretty quickly, and it might even spark a pastor or two to think, “Yeah, we need to do that.”

Monkeying with synods

It is proposed that synods be given permission to meet triennially. The requirement was changed a few years back from annually to “at least” biennially, but apparently people are coming to the realization that most synod assemblies are a waste of time and money. No doubt the latter waste is the stronger motivator, as synods continue to have to tighten their belts. It does make one wonder, though, about just how much “walking together” entitles a bunch of congregations to call itself a synod.

There’s a proposal to make synod vice-presidents automatically part of the synod’s group of voting members to the churchwide assembly – reducing even further the number of voting members actually elected directly by synod assemblies. In larger synods that doesn’t make much difference; smaller synods may balk a bit at one more rule telling them whom they have to send to churchwide. (In fairness, the proposed language does provide a mechanism by which synods can decline to do this;

that seems unlikely in most cases, however.)

Radical hospitality for snowbirds

Another proposed change to the model constitution for synods sets up a new category of members called “seasonal members.” This seems to be aimed at snowbirds – those good Lutherans from up north who swell the worship attendance of Sunbelt congregations for about five months of the year. Seasonal members would have “limited voting rights” in the Sunbelt congregation – i.e., they could vote on pretty much anything other than pastoral calls or disaffiliation from the ELCA; they couldn’t be elected to serve on the congregation council, a call committee, or as a synod assembly voting member.

Seems a little odd to me, but then I’m neither a snowbird nor a Sunbelt congregation member.

Grace gathering

I should say something about the “Grace Gathering,” sort of an ELCA pep rally that will overlap with the churchwide assembly and to which all ELCA members are invited. Funded in part by Thrivent, the event will include some activities in common with the assembly itself; participants will join the assembly for some worship, and they get to be present in the session when Presiding Bishop Eaton gives her report. At other times participants will be involved in workshops, experiential learning, and some other gatherings with a keynote speaker. Several of the workshops are on themes related to the coming 500th anniversary of the Reformation. You can access more information at www.elca.org/gracegathering/. It will be interesting to see how many this attracts.

We’ll be offering live coverage of the assembly over at Forum Online. No doubt there will also be live streaming of the plenary sessions, if you’re really desperate for entertainment the second week of August. And of course we’ll have a complete wrap-up, probably in our October issue.

– by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Omnium gatherum



Babylon Bee • It’s a clever name, and a clever site, if you can handle “Christian satire.” Here’s a recent example:

“LOUISVILLE, KY – While some college campuses

have established safe spaces where the disenfranchised can avoid the pressures, biases, and judgment of the world, mainline Protestant denominations are taking it one step further. The entire um-

brella group has now been designated a safe space for those who would otherwise be offended by the gospel, sources confirmed Wednesday. Speaking on behalf of a plethora of denominations including the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Methodist Church, a spokesperson issued the following statement: 'We are in agreement that there is a great need for churches to rise up and create spaces that are safe for questioning and accepting our identities, doubts, fears, failures, and blatant sins. Effective immediately, we are declaring all mainline Protestant churches safe spaces, where there are no judgments, conviction, repentance, or gospel presentations whatsoever.' The statement listed elements that safe space churches should remove from their premises, including 'crosses, Bibles, pulpits, organs, hymnals, systematic theologies, and sermons exhibiting any form of triggering micro-aggression. Be considerate.' Words like 'sin,' 'hell,' 'death,' 'wrath,' 'propitiation,' and 'substitutionary atonement' are also on the ban list. On behalf of all of mainline Protestantism, the spokesperson expressed heartfelt joy that they were able to make such a major step toward accepting — and not judging — anyone who may be on a path toward God's judgment. 'Our congregations are now spaces that are safe from the freeing power of God in the gospel, where each person is free to construct their own narrative. That's worthy of celebration.'" Lots more can be found at www.babylonbee.com.

Lutheran satire • Speaking of satire, I can't believe I've never mentioned this before, but if I have, I can't seem to find it now. One great place for fun is lutheransatire.org. Its self-description: "Lutheran Satire is a project intended to teach the Lutheran faith through comedic videos, music, writings, industrial welding supplies, and other forms of media. Created in 2011, Lutheran Satire is currently the United States' most popular satirical Lutheran multimedia project and is the United Arab Emirates' third most popular satirical Lutheran multimedia project." The creation of LCMS Pastor Hans Fiene, Lutheran Satire offers videos and other stuff that will make you roar with laughter (unless, of course, it offends you). My all-time favorite is the video "St. Patrick's Bad Analogies." I always use it in my early church history class when we're learning about the

Trinitarian controversies. But there are a lot of other good ones, too. If you've never seen any of them, you really owe it to yourself to pay them a visit.

Dizzy • Of course these days most satire can't really compete with real life. If you had gone to the Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly in Reno in June, you could have taken part in a workshop entitled "The Story of Gender." You would have learned that "gender is no longer just male and female," and that "as a church we need to know and understand the language around gender identities and be able to include this language in our liturgy." And you would have gotten the good news that "now that many people are getting the language needed to help them understand who they are, such as transgender, people are now able to live into authenticity." Still, "many of us who do not consider ourselves to be a gender nonconformist don't understand completely the complexities around the ministry needs of this population." And of course, "we are called to welcome everyone, so in doing so we need to understand, educate and change how we operate to accommodate and really welcome all." I don't know about you, but I'm getting a little nervous around all of this. It makes one long for the good old days when the only question was around whether God should be referred to with masculine pronouns. It's positively dizzying.

I guess I'm not that surprised • I attended a funeral at my former parish recently and picked up a Sunday bulletin that someone had left in the pew rack. I couldn't help but notice the instructions regarding communion. Despite *The Use of the Means of Grace*, plenty of pastors — maybe even most — aren't going to let anything stop them from doing what they want to do. In the new regime, there's no mention of the Eucharist being for the baptized. It begins "All who believe that Jesus Christ is truly and really present in the bread and wine of Holy Communion are invited to gather with us at our Lord's table." In its favor, I guess, is a sort of affirmation of the real presence (if that's how we can take "truly and really present," which seems like an odd locution to me, really and truly it does). So interpreting that in the kindest way, they ask for a belief in the real presence, even if you're not baptized. I did note that after the Lord's Prayer, the pastor offers a verbal invitation to com-

munion which says “Everyone is welcome at the Lord’s table,” which I guess only means everyone who really and truly believes Christ is truly and really present, but maybe it really and truly means everybody. Then it goes on to give all the directions for what to do if you want grape juice, what to do if you want a “gluten-free wafer” – you know, all that stuff. At least it isn’t as bad as a bulletin invitation that was quoted some years back by my predecessor at *Forum Letter* which explained that “grape juice is in the five glasses closest to the server’s tummy.” But back to baptism: I kind of like what my current parish says in their instructions. It makes clear that all the baptized are welcome to receive, and then notes that if you would like to be baptized, you can talk to Father Seth after the service. I wish I had thought of that when I was writing communion instructions.

Some diverse examples • One of the resources in “Table and Font” (mentioned elsewhere in this issue) offered more than a dozen “examples of communion invitations among ELCA congregations.” Diversity hardly begins to describe what you will find there. Let me share a handful: “Participation in Holy Communion is open to baptized members of this and other Christian congregations.” “Everyone who believes in Jesus is welcome at Christ’s table.” “All baptized Christians who have been instructed in the sacrament and believe Christ is present for the forgiveness of sins are invited to commune.” “The only people excluded from our communion table are those that Jesus himself would exclude and that is nobody. All are welcome.” (That last one at least has the honesty to admit that it’s “our communion

table”; one usually thinks of it as Christ’s.) You can read the rest of them at http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Examples_of_Communion_Invitations.pdf. Some Roman Catholic dioceses have language about who is welcome that is used uniformly throughout the diocese; there might be some wisdom there.

Regional variations • In the survey about Eucharistic invitations, there was significant regional variation, turns out. In Region 2 (that’s the Pacific Southwest) nearly 2/3 of congregations responding welcome “everyone” to the Eucharist. Only slightly behind are Regions 1 and 3; it would seem the West in general is more in favor of a wide-open Table; or, to put it another way, the West is less interested in or tolerant of Eucharistic discipline. Region 8 (the Mid-Atlantic region) is at the other end of the spectrum, with only about a quarter of responding congregations saying they welcome everyone, baptized or not. I wonder whether LCMS congregations in the West are similarly more open – not to the unbaptized, to be sure, but to non-LCMS communicants? But they probably wouldn’t risk responding to a survey about it.

Snark in moderation • Reader John Kulma comments on the Associated Church Press contest judge’s comment that in *Omnium gatherum* we are sometimes a little snarky. “With the state of Lutheranism in the US today,” he writes, “there is a demand for ‘big snarky.’” But I don’t want to overdo it; I’ll try to maintain moderation in my snarkiness. Some days, I grant you, it’s harder than others.

– roj

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