

# FORUM LETTER

Volume 45 Number 11

November 2016

## A tremendous yearning

### Inside this issue:

Lutheran liturgy: a Mis-  
sourian's perspective 4

The Holy and Great  
Council 5

Missing Mary 6

*Omnium gatherum* 8



Why should our praise and glorification . . . mean anything to the saints? What do they care about earthly honors when their heavenly Father honors them by fulfilling the faithful promise of the Son?

What does our commendation mean to them? The saints have no need of honor from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them. But I tell you, when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a tremendous yearning.

Calling the saints to mind inspires, or rather arouses in us, above all else, a longing to enjoy their company, so desirable in itself. We long to share in the citizenship of heaven, to dwell with the spirits of the blessed, to join the assembly of patriarchs, the ranks of the prophets, the council of apostles, the great host of martyrs, the noble company of confessors and the choir of virgins. In short, we long to be united in happiness with all the saints. But our dispositions change. The Church of all the first followers of Christ awaits us, but we do nothing about it. The saints want us to be with them, and we are indifferent. The souls of the just await us, and we ignore them. . . .

When we commemorate the saints we are inflamed with another yearning: that Christ our life may also appear to us as he appeared to them. Until then we see him, not as he is, but as he became for our sake. He is our head, crowned not with glory, but with the thorns of our sins. As members of that head, crowned with thorns, we should be ashamed to live in luxury; his purple robes are a mockery rather than an honor. When Christ comes again, his death shall no longer be proclaimed, and we shall know that we also have died, and that our life is hidden with him. The glorious head of the Church will appear and his glorified members will shine in splendor with him, when he forms this lowly body anew into such glory as belongs to himself, its head.

—Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon 2* in J. Robert Wright, *Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church* (Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991), 496-497.

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

## The state of Lutheran worship



A few months ago I was looking through some old issues of *Lutheran Forum*, and I came upon a piece by the eminent liturgical scholar Frank Senn entitled "Our Liturgical Present, with Thoughts About

Our Liturgical Future." Senn's paper was originally presented to a 2000 theological conference sponsored by our publisher, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, considering the future of Lutheranism in the (then) new millennium. It got me to thinking about how things stand now with Lutheran worship in North America, and where things might be headed. I have my own ideas about

this, of course, though they are neither as well-informed nor as well-articulated as Dr. Senn's 2000 paper (which, if you are one who, like me, obsessively keeps a file of back copies of my favorite publications, you can read in the winter 2000 issue of *Lutheran Forum*).

I recently had a conversation with a colleague whose responsibilities take her to a variety of Lutheran congregations (mostly ELCA) on Sunday mornings. She was lamenting the state of Lutheran worship in her part of the country. It would be safe, I think, to say that what would satisfy her and what would satisfy me would not be entirely congruent; I tend toward the "high church" side of Lutheranism and I suspect she is more in the "low church" school that continues to predominate in the Midwest. And yet the examples she offered of problematic things she has seen in local congregations were all certainly troubling to me as well. Some of them reflected a pastor's wholly inadequate understanding of Lutheran theology (or at least a refusal to allow Lutheran theology to impact liturgical practice), while others were just, well, schlocky. I suppose one might lump most of them into the category of indecorous and undignified.

### Too unpredictable, or too predictable?

I don't get around much to Lutheran congregations these days, but when I do, my experiences are not unlike my colleague's. Long ago I pretty much gave up trying to find a Lutheran congregation for worship while on vacation; it's just too unpredictable. Or, maybe more accurately, it's too predictably unsatisfying. I really hate grinding my teeth during church.

This is one reason, of course, that we ended up in an Episcopal congregation when I retired (though that decision was made easier by the lack of

any nearby ELCA churches other than the one I had served for 29 years). I've hardly done a scientific poll and so this is simply an anecdotal observation, but I've been somewhat surprised, in conversations with other retired pastors, how many of them, like me, worship mostly in Episcopal congregations. I understand the reasons. The Episcopal Church certainly has its problems, many of them the same problems one finds in the ELCA, plus plenty of its own; but at least one can count on the liturgy being coherent in most congregations on most Sundays. (The preaching, maybe not so much; but then Lutherans have no shortage of problems there as well, at least in the ELCA.)

### What do you think?

As a result of these musings, I decided to ask a number of Lutherans to reflect on the theme taken up by Frank Senn in 2000: what, exactly, is our liturgical present, and what might be our liturgical future? I've asked folks representing several different perspectives, including some who are staff members responsible for worship in some different church bodies. I will share with you these responses over the next several issues — and I will also invite any of our readers who might like to respond to this question to send me their own thoughts for possible publication. Dr. Senn admitted, quoting Yogi Berra, that "it is very hard to predict, especially about the future," but he also referred to Abraham Lincoln's advice that "if we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it." So that's my question: When it comes to the liturgical life in our churches, where are we and whither are we tending? I think this could be an interesting and fruitful discussion.

—by *Richard O. Johnson, editor*

---

## Lutheran liturgy: a Missourian's perspective

by William Weedon



No question that from the liturgical perspective, Missouri has come through a rough patch lately. Who could have foreseen the recent "worship wars"? We've seen a massive challenge to the liturgical heritage posed by the twin influences of the charis-

matic movement (with its emphasis on the praise chorus and the theology that runs with that) and the church growth movement (with its emphasis on immediate accessibility and user-friendliness). Both touched two areas that had been historically prized quite highly in Missouri's DNA: the desire

for genuine piety and a strong mission impulse. And both directly challenged the liturgical *status quo* of Missouri at the middle of the 20th century. A third (and often unrealized) influence came from Vatican II's revision of Roman liturgical practice. Put these all into the mix and you begin to see the makings of a perfect storm for Lutheran liturgics.

The high hopes that attended the preparation and publication of *Lutheran Book of Worship* foundered in wide swaths of Missouri. We came into the 1980s a house very much liturgically divided. Some parishes adopted *LBW*, more went with the Synod's rather hasty revision of *LBW*, *Lutheran Worship*, and a quite solid and unyielding number backed off from the prospect of abandoning their trusty old *Lutheran Hymnal*. A very wise district president once said in my hearing that for all practical purposes, a Synod's unity is really found in its hymnbook. If so, Missouri had lost unity. Think what it means that we couldn't even say the creeds together anymore but said them three different ways!

### Liturgical disarray

With such liturgical disarray, it was all the more understandable that the influences of the charismatic and church growth movements would topple the preference for liturgical worship in numerous parishes, especially with the advent of the desktop publishing revolution and church publishing houses happy to sell subscription products that promised to simplify the liturgy and made everything "fresh and creative" — of course, at a suitable price.

Pushback there was, and so a ceremonial maximalism grew in response to the ceremonial minimalism being advocated. At one time, of course, Missouri had known such a critter as the Liturgical Society of St. James, dedicated to a revival of interest in liturgy. That, however, had long since faded from view and mostly from memory. At its height, it was still largely confined to a few parishes under the influence of a handful of towering intellects (Weidmann, von Schenk, Piepkorn) and had never been able to go mainstream.

But a new breed of liturgical conservative was arising in Missouri, epitomized by what some would call "the *Gottesdienst* crowd" — named for the journal of liturgical theology around which the growing movement centered. If, for those under the

influence of the charismatic and church growth movements, the desire for a simple and accessible service that was immediately user-friendly and, well, "American," had come to predominate in many places, the *Gottesdienst* folk placed the accent solidly on the reverence and awe befitting the actual presence of the God of the universe gathering his children together by his Spirit to serve them the gifts that his Son had purchased for them by his suffering, death and resurrection.

### The worship war

These two camps engaged in quite a lively worship war that raged through Missouri for some time. Does the church order her worship in order to evangelize, or does she order her evangelism in order to gain worshipers of the Blessed Trinity? It is significant, perhaps, that so very many parishes thought it was best not to answer the question, but to say a decided "*Jein*." Worship then came to be a rather smorgasbord offering: traditional, blended, or contemporary. You choose. That's still where many of the parishes of Missouri are to this very day.

It has come, I think, as something of a surprise to the folks who argued for styles-based worship, that many of the younger folk have gravitated toward the traditional and more maximal in ceremony. One at times got the feeling that traditional worship was being kept on life-support in some places for the benefit of those old folks who had grown up with it and couldn't imagine breaking from it. And while all this was unfolding, ever newer forms were showing up, where folks regarded the "contemporary" as itself a bit antique, and so we got "emergent" and all that follows from that.

### An impossible task

And into all this mix came a new hymnal with an impossible task. Was it possible to actually bring Missouri back into one book in most places? Could we restore that "practical unity" that the district president had once spoken of? No less than a synodical president expressed his skepticism and wanted assurance that we wouldn't print the thing only to have warehouses filled with unsold and unwanted copies. Was the day of worship from a hymnal a thing of the past? And if it would be appealing for use in a parish that favored the simpler and more accessible worship style, could it then possibly find

acceptance with the folks centered on reverence? And worse yet, might it end up as just another book option so that Missouri would be fragmented further, even among the places where books were used and valued?

Apparently the fears were unfounded. With an amazingly gifted and even hand, Dr. Paul Grime and team brought forth a resource that the Synod on nearly all sides was able to embrace: *Lutheran Service Book*. I've said before that the amazing thing to me about the book is that although I certainly would *not* have done everything the way it was done in that book, there is absolutely nothing in it that I cannot live with. Apparently the Synod overwhelmingly agreed. Over 85% of the parishes have adopted it in the ten years since its publication.

It has proven serviceable in parishes that value ceremonial maximalism and in those that value simplicity and accessibility. Granted, it is used quite variously, and its coupling with *Lutheran Service Builder* effectively wedded the desktop publishing (or power point!) revolution to the liturgical and hymnological goodies in the book.

### A cautious truce

The result of all this has been, it seems to many of us, a sort of cautious truce in the worship wars. Two instances from the last synodical convention are perhaps illuminating in that regard.

First, a resolution was passed, and passed quite overwhelmingly, that appealed to the congregations of the Synod to honor and observe the historic *ordo*. Now, there have always been those who hear *ordo* and think "text," but Lutherans historically have never done so. I in no way wish to denigrate the beauty of the Common Service tradition and the genius of those who forged it (a tradition which continues in Divine Service 3 in *Lutheran Service Book*), but we must simply note that Lutherans historically observed an ordered action that was distinct from ordered text. The hymn "*Allein Gott in der Höh' Sei Ehr*" was not regarded as anything other than the *Gloria in Excelsis* in German. Similarly with Luther's great credal hymn. It *was* the Creed to our spiritual forebears. The idea that you had to use a set *text* to observe the *ordo* and that this text had to be a prose vernacular rendering of the Latin Mass was simply foreign to the way Lutherans historically did their

liturgy. In the mid-20th century, a Missouri parish seemed invariably to sing the Scottish *Gloria*, since it fell in both the Order of Holy Communion and the Order of Morning Service; but here in the second decade of the 21st century, Missouri parishes will without hesitation sing one of any number of settings for that great canticle, from prose translation to poetic paraphrase, matched to music from a variety of centuries; in that way they reflect a true appropriation of the liturgical heritage at the time of the Lutheran Reformation.

### Liturgical within the great freedom

Secondly, and somewhat surprisingly to me, the president of Synod in a moment quite unscripted just asked the assembly to vote if the worship they'd experienced at convention (all of which was mostly straight from the hymnal) had been a blessing to them; if so vote yes, and if not so much, vote no. It was an overwhelming majority that voted that it had been a blessing indeed. Of course the extent to which a synodical convention actually is representative of the Synod at large is an unknown factor, but still, I can't think of another time where you'd assemble such a variety of folks from so many parishes to put the question to them.

I would think it might indicate that the cautious truce is actually in play among us. Liturgical? Yes—liturgical within the great freedom that comes with living in the *ordo* (the ordered action) and employing a rich variety of text and song so that the Word of God might dwell among us richly and the Holy Eucharist be administered according to our Lord's institution. Said another way: Missouri seems rather at peace that the modern equivalents of both *Formula Missa* and *Deutsche Messe* or even the simpler service that the latter contemplates have a legitimate place among us.

### Liturgical life without liturgical bondage

So where will all this leave us? Are we on a pendulum swing such that the more liturgical appreciation of the current moment will invariably be corrected in another direction in the coming years? My own sense, for whatever it is worth (I am certainly no prophet nor a prophet's son), is that the relatively peaceful transition we have enjoyed lately will likely continue. It has about it a flexible ap-

proach to the liturgical heritage that has all the hallmarks of what our current Synod president likes to call “joyously Lutheran.” Even a man like Piepkorn once remarked that “the responsible use of freedom is itself a catholic virtue,” and Missouri’s parishes are now testing the boundaries of that responsible use of freedom. They are probing how to live within the liturgical heritage freely, and with an equal rejoicing in the gifts of the past and a warm welcome to the new song that the Holy Spirit continually brings forth within the Body of Christ.

I’m hopeful. Cautiously hopeful. I think the future among us will belong to the liturgy, but it will be a liturgy that partakes of the freedom and the fullness of the way Lutherans have always approached these matters. As Charles Porterfield Krauth said it so profoundly, we are “possessing liturgical life without liturgical bondage.” May God grant it!

*William Weedon is an LCMS pastor currently serving as LCMS Director of Worship and International Center Chaplain.*

## The Holy and Great Council

by Donald McCoid



*[Editor’s note: Eastern Orthodoxy, so often in the West a neglected component of global Christianity, emerged briefly into the limelight earlier this year with the convening of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, held in Crete, June 19-26. We asked Donald McCoid, who was present as an observer, to share his experience.]*

Representing the Lutheran World Federation, I joined a very small group from Christian churches as invited ecumenical observers at this historic Holy and Great Council. When the opening session began with the patriarchs and other official representatives invoking the Holy Spirit with a Pentecost chant, I was deeply moved. After sixty years of planning, it was finally here. The strong image of the Orthodox Church in council is one that should inspire all Christians. It was a blessing to be present.

### You had to be there

While there have been other pan-Orthodox gatherings, many count this as the first official Council in 1100 years. The Holy and Great Council in Crete was attended by 220 Orthodox bishops and archbishops, as well as 70 official advisers. Many press releases highlighted the four of fourteen Orthodox churches who boycotted the meeting. That was unfortunate reporting. You know the phrase “you had to be there.” Well, I believe that is true in this case. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew addressed the absences directly and at the Council’s beginning. At the start of 2016, there were consen-

sus agreements on the content and substance of the Council. While the Council certainly was cautious and wanted faithfully to represent all fourteen churches, it was important to remember that conciliarity was highlighted as the reason for the way decisions and direction would be made for the Council. Those who were a part of planning and then did not attend were not practicing conciliarity, because their voice and presence were missing.

If the intent of those who were not present was to undermine the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch, they did not succeed in my estimation. The key priority of the Council was to “proclaim the unity of the Orthodox Church with a prophetic voice that cannot be silenced.” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew put it this way: “The voice of the Comforter calls us to unity and calls us to turn our attention and widen our heart toward all people, lovingly embracing the vital problems that concern them, preaching the good news of peace and love to those near and afar.”

### Orthodox ecumenism

At the conclusion of the Council, an ecumenical statement about relations and dialogues with other Christian churches was approved. While affirming dialogue, it is also a cautious statement that also well represents the Orthodox churches who were not present.

As the co-chair of the Lutheran World Federation/Orthodox dialogue commission, I know how

important this gathering in Crete was. It was timely that the Orthodox Church address the faithful and the world with how it sees its mission in the world and how it pledges to work toward the renewal of its people. With its statements of teaching and direction, I believe the Council was, in many respects, the Orthodox communion coming of age.

The Council also adopted joint declarations on Orthodox mission, diaspora affairs, church autonomy, fasting, and ties with other Christian churches, as well as a document on marriage (which said heterosexual unions are “an indispensable condition for marriage,” and barred church members

from “same-sex unions”).

I was blessed to attend this Council meeting. Lutherans would be well advised to study its statements and documents. While we are often tempted to highlight our differences, signs of unity and faith are very much evident in what was shared at this important Council.

*Donald McCoid, bishop emeritus of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA, was for several years the ELCA's chief ecumenical staff person. The documents of the Council, as well as additional information, can be accessed online at [www.holycouncil.org](http://www.holycouncil.org).*

## Missing Mary

by Eric M. Reisen



The paintings, which were to go on either side of the altar, were beautiful. A top-notch studio specializing in ecclesial art had drawn renditions of them. One painting depicted the descent from the cross, Jesus's limp body being moved into the arms of his grieving mother. The other depicted Mary and the Christ Child. Both would flank the statue of the Risen Christ that currently is mounted above the altar—a visual, and perhaps visceral, reminder to all who came to worship, of the central tenets of the gospel: Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection. The paintings were expensive, but they were to be paid for by a gracious donation. I thought it was a proverbial “slam dunk” decision. What's not to like?

### The Madonna is not pleased

I began to hear complaints: “It's not about Mary!” and “It's too Catholic!” Perhaps I was naïve, but the reactions against seeing Mary surprised me. We are Lutherans, and Luther's evangelical devotion to Mary is well known. Certainly, there are Marian abuses. When Catholics push for Mary to be named co-redemptrix, other Christians are rightly concerned. As Pope John XXIII warned, “The Madonna is not pleased when she is put above her Son.”

And when Catholics claim that all Christians, as a matter of salvation, must believe the late fully developed Marian dogmas in order to be saved, then both Protestant and Orthodox Christians leave the table. (This Lutheran pastor believes that both

the Assumption of Mary and the Immaculate Conception can be defended biblically, but they cannot be made dogmatic beliefs necessary for salvation.)

These pious Marian exaggerations have led most Protestants simply to reject any devotion to Mary at all. To my dismay, many Protestants have developed an “anti-devotion” to the Blessed Mother. The reaction against the paintings is a case-in-point. But can we have the Son without the Mother?

### Symbol and myth

The basis for most of our thinking about Mary is the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke. Even if these stories are rife with symbol and myth (which they are), it cannot be denied that Jesus was born of a real human mother. Paul, writing around 48 AD, simply notes that Jesus, the Son of God, was “born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4.4). There was a first-century Jewish woman named Mary who said “yes” to what God wanted to do in her and through her. Mary's “yes” to God (Luke 1.38) was a necessary condition for God's Son's entering the world. Yes, she could have said “no.”

Some Protestants immediately reject this. Mary was chosen by God. Consequently, she had no choice. All she could do was to submit to what God had preordained. This, so it is thought, will preserve us from Catholicism's Pelagian or semi-Pelagian leanings in which there is a synergistic cooperation between the divine and human

wills. Salvation is God's work, not ours. Mary is an example of God at work, but she herself is a cypher, a zero.

### The unresolvable paradox

The Protestant God is often portrayed as a sheer, awesome, and frightening Power who chooses some to do his will and rejects others. As Paul famously says in Romans, "Who resists his will?" It is in this theology that the anti-devotion to Marian devotion begins to take root.

Obviously, if you've read the Bible, then you know that there are many passages in the book of Romans and elsewhere to support such a view of God. However, there are many other passages that suggest just the opposite. For example, the God of Genesis is a God who can be bargained with. He can change his mind and human beings can help him do so. He's both infinitely powerful and forever playful. By divine decree he can harden hearts to reject his will. At the same time, he can call out to Israel like a forsaken lover trying to win back the beloved.

In other words, God is an unresolvable paradox. He controls all and frees all. He works his will in all and asks all to work his will. He tells us that we who have been overcome by sin must *strive* to overcome it (cf. Genesis 4.7). Robert Jenson wisely remembers a truth we are wont to forget: "If there is the biblical God, there can be free creaturely choices only and precisely because God's will is so entirely of another sort than ours that he ... can will [not only that we] choose this rather than that, but that our choice be in itself uncoerced by his."

### Uncoerced

Mary is the perfect example of this "uncoerced" choice. She is essential to our theology because she is the representative of our paradoxical position as human beings. Like us, she is saved by grace, and must by the same grace freely consent by faith to bear the Son. Humanly speaking, we cannot resolve the paradox by logically separating the points of the tension—God's will and our own. Nor should we try to do so.

This is why St. Paul can urge, without any apparent sense of contradiction: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work his good pleasure" (Philippians 2.12-13). We want logically to

separate God's work from our own, but God's work is "so entirely of another sort than ours" that our works remain uncoerced.

So when Protestants reject Mary, they run the risk of rejecting the paradox of the divine/human relationship itself. It is because Mary is *completely* a human being that she exemplifies all human faithfulness and openness to God. If Catholics run the risk of resolving the divine/human paradox in favor of human free will (co-redemptrix), Protestants run the danger of resolving the paradox in favor of divine decree (double predestination—man is a zero). Both of these options are made possible by ignoring parts of the Bible that disagree with our theology or by thinking that God's willing and the willing of humans are simply analogous. Mary is not the resolution of this paradox, but its first exemplar.

### An evangelical and catholic Mariology

The Gospel writer Luke gets at this truth when he recounts the story of the angel coming to Mary, greeting her as the "favored one." The root of the participle Luke uses is *charis*, meaning *grace*. It occurs only twice in the New Testament—here, and in Ephesians 1.6, where Paul writes that all Christians have been adopted as children of God through Jesus Christ and have been "blessed/graced" (same verb Luke uses with the root *charis*). We, like Mary, are "favored" in Christ. In other words, the same grace at work in Mary is at work in us.

Protestants need to recover a proper evangelical and catholic Mariology. We are her children in whom Christ is being formed spiritually, as he was formed physically within her womb. Like Mary, we are those who are "in the anguish of childbirth" until Christ be formed in us (Galatians 4.19). This is why we are all, whether we know it or not, "Marian" Christians. And if this is all true, then it seems very natural for us to say to our grace-filled mother, "Pray for us." It is unnatural *not* to do so, as it is unnatural *not* to have a devotion to our mothers.

*Eric M. Riesen is senior pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh, PA (NALC). He is a member of the NALC's Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine. His book The Christian Faith: A Catechism for the Curious was published last year by ALPB Books, and can be ordered at [www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org). This article first appeared on the First Things website, [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com).*

## *Omnium gatherum*



**Wise counsel** • Some readers, at least, will receive this issue before the dreaded November election. If you are still not sure what to do—or even if you think you know what to do—I would advise taking a look at Robert Benne’s article in the latest *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* at <http://elca.org/jle/articles/1181>. In “Lutherans and the Political Challenges of 2016,” Benne brings his usual clarity and wise counsel to all of us struggling to understand just how we should respond, as Lutheran Christians who are American citizens, to the unsavory choices (in the opinion of many of us) confronting us at the ballot box.

**The nut is gone** • Robert Logan is a “retired, somewhat” pastor who liked the piece in the May issue of *FL*, “He was a sinner.” It reminded him of a eulogy he once heard at the funeral of the “town rascal”: “Well, he wasn’t as bad as he usually was, and he wasn’t as good as he should have been. Here lies the ‘shell.’ The ‘nut’ is gone.”

**On RIC at Luther** • I’ve noted a couple of times that there has been discussion at Luther Seminary in St. Paul about Luther joining ELCA seminaries in Chicago, Berkeley, Gettysburg and Philadelphia in signing on to the “reconciling in Christ” designation sponsored by “ReconcilingWorks” (the old Lutherans Concerned crowd). Sources at Luther now tell me that it is “extremely unlikely” that the push for Luther to become RIC will go anywhere. “It was always a movement pushed by one group of stu-

dents,” reported one person, “and never had any real traction with the rest of the seminary. There are some around Luther Seminary who are opposed to the RIC designation altogether, while others don’t want to divide the community, or are worried about the political implications of such a move.” Some of those reasons, at least, are good.

**Well-deserved** • Having seen the ELCA through the discussions with Roman Catholics that led to churchwide assembly approval of *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist* (see “ELCA in New Orleans: a welcome new tone” in *FL*’s September issue), Donald McCoid is finally really retiring from his responsibilities as ecumenist-in-chief for the ELCA. Formerly bishop of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (and chair for four years of the conference of bishops), McCoid narrowly lost to Mark Hanson in the election for presiding bishop in 2001. When McCoid retired as synod bishop, Hanson appointed him to head up the ELCA’s ecumenical and inter-religious relations office. He has done a superb job in that role, and has earned a peaceful and relaxing retirement. Many of us still contemplate how different things might be today if Bp. McCoid had been chosen in 2001 over Mark Hanson.

**Christmas looms** • Can you believe how much postage is costing these days? No shipping costs at all if you give your distant friends and relations a subscription to *Forum Letter/Lutheran Forum* for Christmas this year. Order at [www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org). — 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