

Church Fellowship is Altar and Pulpit Fellowship

Calov Conference, Sept. 28-29, 2025

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Introduction:

That church fellowship is both altar and pulpit fellowship should not be a surprising assertion to anyone. What it means for life together in the church may be where some surprises will surface. These surprises are not because we in the church are striving to introduce new and strange philosophies about church fellowship. Rather, with the ever-changing winds of the spirit of the age, church fellowship continues to be an ever-present challenge that differs little from the challenge of closed communion. In other words, while the truth is not changing, upholding truth in the face of a “judge-not” culture and many times even church, continues to be a battle.

Church fellowship in the reality of the Trinity:

To confess that there are three persons, yet one God, expresses the biblical reality that those three persons are an undivided unity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are never independent contractors fulfilling part of a construction job. These three persons are in perfect fellowship with one another. This communion, or unity, is expressed in the Bible’s teaching that God the Father is the source of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, that the Son was sent by the Father to redeem the world from the power of sin and death, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son to sanctify those who are justified by grace through faith in Christ.

A denial of the Trinity is already a denial of Christianity itself, and therefore, of being in fellowship with the One God. ...*There is no God but one (1 Corinthians 8:4)*. Jesus’ command to make disciples (pupils and learners of Jesus) comes from the fellowship that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have, both in baptism, and in teaching (Matthew 28:19). To be baptized into the Trinity means that one will also be taught the Trinity. The apostle Paul also makes clear the fellowship that exists in the Godhead: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)*.

The Father begets the Son from eternity and the Son is begotten of the Father from eternity. ...*You are my Son; today I have begotten you (Psalm 2:7)*. The Holy Spirit from eternity proceeds from the Father and the Son. *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Galatians 4:6)* The necessity of this Trinitarian fellowship teaches us what fellowship is and should be in the church. Since Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in fellowship, and if we are to be in fellowship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then it follows that fellowship with other churches is first and foremost determined on a true confession of the Trinity.

With this as the foundation, we can discuss church fellowship in general, and more specifically also in the LCMS.

Church fellowship in the early Christian Church (the Epistles):

Fellowship in the early church is, not surprisingly, centered on the person and work of the God-Man Jesus Christ: *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9)*. Being called into the fellowship of the Son is also what Luther clearly identifies as the gospel calling us to faith in Christ in his explanation of the 3rd Article of the Creed. This is why we confess that we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, or come to Him. The Holy Spirit must call us by the gospel...the gospel of his Son, which is fellowship in the Trinity.

The apostle's clarity regarding fellowship with God's Son on the positive, is just as true in his teaching regarding fellowship in the negative: *Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons (1 Corinthians 10:20 NKJV)*. This is part of the apostle's wider teaching on fellowship being both a matter of fellowship in the body and blood of Jesus, and fellowship in and with the church. Paul admonishes that no offense be given to Jew, Greek, or the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). He notes the divisions that exist in the church of God in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:18), and later exhorts the Corinthians to come together, but not for judgment (1 Corinthians 11:34). The Bible makes it clear that communion reflects the fellowship that already exists, before coming together.

In the section in Philippians where Paul counts all those things he once believed were a gain to him, as a loss for the sake of Christ, he notes a kind of fellowship that one finds to be true both in the communion, and in the church that preaches Christ crucified: *...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...(Philippians 3:10 NKJV)*. He goes on to speak of this pressing toward the goal of eternal life and the reality of a heavenly citizenship because of that fellowship.

John, in his Spirit-inspired way, speaks of our fellowship as it relates to the fellowship that the Son has with the Father: *...that which we have seen and hear we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3)*. In a similar way that Paul taught the positive and negative aspects of fellowship in 1 Corinthians, John does the same, just 3 verses later: *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth (1 John 1:6)*.

Church fellowship in the Apostolic Fathers:

In his letter to the Magnesians, Ignatius speaks of the fellowship that the Son has with His Father, the apostles with Christ, and the Church with Christ and the bishops and presbyters: *Therefore, as the Lord did nothing without the Father, either by himself or through the apostles (for he was*

united with him), so you must not do anything without the bishop and the presbyters. Do not attempt to convince yourselves anything done apart from the others is right, but, gathering together, let there be one prayer, one petition, one mind, one hope, with love and blameless joy, which is Jesus Christ, than whom nothing is better. Let all of you run together as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from one Father and remained with the One and returned to the One. ⁱ

We know that the apostle Paul encountered much opposition in Ephesus, as detailed for us in Acts 19. After spending three months speaking boldly in the Ephesian synagogue (Acts 19:8) concerning the kingdom of God, Paul withdrew from there when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief (Acts 19:9), speaking evil of the Way in the presence of the congregation. When an evil spirit overpowered the sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, who thought they could cast an evil spirit from a man, many who were now believers came and confessed and divulged their practices (Acts 19:18). They burned their magic arts books in the sight of all...and the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily (Acts 19:20).

That was not the end of the fray. A riot later arose in Ephesus when Demetrius, who was making silver shrines of Artemis, accused the apostle Paul of taking away the wealth of the business through saying, among other things, that *gods made with hands are not gods* (Acts 19:26). A multitude rushed together, seizing Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's Macedonian companions (19:29). Confusion reigned, as those who had assembled (ἐκκλησία) didn't know why they had come together (19:32). The town clerk made his appeal, that everyone knew that the city of Ephesus was the temple keeper of the great Artemis, the great image that fell from the sky (19:35).

The chaos in Ephesus shows what fellowship in the truth does not look like, but also clearly explains why Paul writes what he does in his letter to the Ephesians concerning the revelation of the gospel, and unity in the body of Christ. After Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be imitators of God as beloved children (Ephesians 5:1), and to walk in love as Christ loved us in the fragrant sacrifice of Himself to God (5:2), he warns them what to avoid. These include fornication, which is idolatry (πορνεία), uncleanness, which is impurity (ακαθαρσία), covetousness, which is avarice (πλεονεξία) (5:3). These things exclude people from the kingdom of God inheritance (5:5). This is why Paul then exhorts: *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather even reprove them* (5:11).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius picks up the apostle's exhortation regarding fellowship: *For if I in a short time experienced such fellowship with your bishop, which was not merely human but spiritual, how much more do I congratulate you who are united with him, as the church is with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is with the Father, so that all things may be harmonious in unity. Let no one be misled: if anyone is not within the sanctuary, he lacks the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two has such power, how much more that of the bishop together with the whole church! Therefore whoever does not meet with the congregation thereby demonstrates his arrogance and has separated himself, for it is written: 'God opposes the arrogant.' Let us, therefore, be careful not to oppose the bishop, in order that we may be obedient to God.* ⁱⁱ

With that last part concerning not opposing the bishop, I am reminded of God's words in Hebrews 13:17: *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Luther rightly includes this in the Christian Table of Duties under "What the Hearers Owe Their Pastors." It is interesting to note the fellowship principle employed both by Paul and Ignatius, that fellowship runs from the Father through the Son, from the Son through the apostles, from the Son through the church and her bishops/presbyters/pastors. It is an unbroken cord. This fellowship is ultimately divine.

Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries:

In his book, *Eucharistic and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, Werner Elert discusses the term *κοινωνία*: *Κοινωνία*, the principal word of our phrase, appears in combinations of considerable variety. Already in the New Testament, especially if we take into account its verbal forms, we find various possibilities for its combination with a genitive of things. It is clear at the outset that its combination with *τὰ ἅγια* does not mean the extending of sympathy, liberality, or benevolence, as is usually the case in contexts of charity. ⁱⁱⁱ

Elert's point about the *κοινωνία* of 1 Cor. 10:16 is revelatory. The *κοινωνία* of the body and *κοινωνία* of the blood of which Paul speaks separately are combined in the Creed in what is then a dual form to be understood with Paul's statement. It is in the Creed that we (the church) confess faith in the *κοινωνία* of saints. There is a place for talk of fellowship between and among those who partake of the body and blood of Jesus in the Supper, as a kind of comradeship. Not, however, in the discussion of 1 Cor. 10:16, Elert argues: *There are modern exegetes who have understood Paul as speaking of "a fellowship which is first of all among those who go to the Lord's Supper together," or of "a comradeship of the body and blood of Christ." We may defer for a moment the question whether that is in fact what Paul means. He is quite certainly not so understood in early Greek theology. Κοινωνία is never understood in this modern sense of comradeship, nor does communio in the West ever mean a company or mere society.* ^{iv}

In a later chapter, *The Lord's Supper, not the Christian's Supper*, Elert pushes the point home regarding 1 Cor. 10:16 being a partaking: *Greek theology understood the koinonia of 1 Cor. 10:16 as metalepsis, as partaking, and we can see now how right this is and how much depends on it. This interpretation combines the Pauline and the Johannine. The individual communicant is included as is all that John 6 says concerning the eating of the bread, which is Christ and His flesh (John 6:51), as it applies to the individual who receives it.* ^v

When Elert discusses the topic of altar fellowship between churches, he notes a modern development in interconfessional relations as being one in which the laity may mutually receive the Sacrament but the clergy may not mutually celebrate it... "incomplete church fellowship." *Such gradations and distinctions in church fellowship have absolutely no connection with the*

regulations of the early church, except that a distinction as such is made between receiving the Sacrament and officiating at it.^{vi}

Church fellowship in the Lutheran Confessions:

The issue of fellowship in the Book of Concord can be seen most clearly in its teachings on doctrine, and the importance of preserving, defending, and remaining in the true doctrine, as a manifestation of fellowship. In the conclusion of the preface to the Book of Concord, the confessors speak of not wanting to create something new or to depart from the truth of the heavenly doctrine, of which they say: *We mean the doctrine that, having been taken from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, is contained (a) in the three ancient Creeds; (b) in the Augsburg Confession, presented in the year 1530 to the Emperor Charles V (of excellent memory); (c) in the Apology, which was added to this; (d) in the Smalcald Articles; and lastly in both the Catechisms of that excellent man, Dr. Luther. Therefore, we also determined not to depart even a finger's breadth either from the subjects themselves, or from the phrases that are found in them. But, the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, we intend to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement.*^{vii}

In the introduction to the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, a similar statement is made regarding these symbols: *As announced above, all teachings are to be conformed in this way. What is contrary to these confessions is to be rejected and condemned, as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith. In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and all other writings is preserved. The Holy Scriptures alone remain the judge, rule, and norm. According to them – as the only touchstone – all teachings shall and must be discerned and judged to see whether they are good or evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22), right or wrong.*^{viii}

To further demonstrate the consistency with which the confessors insist that doctrinal unity is necessary for fellowship, there is also this from the introduction to the Solid Declaration: *For thorough, permanent unity in the Church, it is necessary, above all things, that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form of teaching. The common doctrine must be brought together from God's Word and reduced to a small circle of teaching, which the churches that are of the true Christian religion must confess. They must do this just as the Ancient Church always had its fixed symbols for this use. Furthermore, this should not be based on private writings, but on the kind of books that have been composed, approved, and received in the name of the churches that pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion. Therefore, we have declared to one another with heart and mouth that we will not make or receive a separate or new confession of our faith. Instead, we will confess the public common writings, which always and everywhere were held and used as such symbols or common confessions in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession before the disagreements arose among those who accept the Augsburg Confession. We will confess them as long as there are on all sides, in all articles, a unanimous adherence to and maintenance and use of the pure doctrine of the divine Word, as the sainted Dr. Luther explained it.*^{ix}

Without coincidence, the confessors exalt God's Word above all things. They follow this by pointing to the symbols used by the Ancient Church, along with what has already been confessed in the Augsburg Confession. Private writings do not receive weight, but on books composed, approved, and received in the name of the churches pledging themselves to one doctrine and religion. In other words, the confessors do not take a new approach to fellowship, but follow in the train of the apostles, apostolic fathers, and early church fathers.

Church Fellowship in the LCMS:

I begin the LCMS church fellowship discussion with Thesis IX from Walther's Church and Ministry: *To obtain salvation, only fellowship in the invisible church, to which alone all the glorious promises regarding the church were originally given, is absolutely necessary.*^x

This thesis does still have some qualification to it, regarding the distinction between the visible and invisible church. Walther writes: *Whoever, therefore, binds salvation to any visible church subverts the article of the justification of a poor sinner before God alone by faith in Jesus Christ. It is indeed true that also outside the visible church there is no salvation, if by visible church we mean not a particular church (Partikularkirche) but the assembly of all the called. For outside the assembly of the called there are no elect. This means that without the Word of God, which is proclaimed only in the assembly of the called, there is no faith and so also no Christ and salvation. "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."* (Rom. 10:13-14, 17).^{xi}

In other words, the question of salvation and fellowship with the Church is not based on membership at Elevation Lutheran Church, instead of membership at Goodwill Lutheran Church. If one of these particular churches have the Word of God taught in its perfect purity and the sacraments administered altogether according to the institution of Jesus Christ, and the other does not, one can still be a member of the invisible church and therefore be saved. Walther is making this point in Thesis VIII, while simultaneously charging the Christian to flee all false teachers, heterodox congregations, and sects, at the peril of losing his salvation: *Although God gathers for Himself a holy church of elect also where His Word is not taught in its perfect purity and the sacraments are not administered altogether according to the institution of Jesus Christ, if only God's Word and the sacraments are not denied entirely but both remain in their essential parts, nevertheless, every believer must, at the peril of losing his salvation, flee all false teachers, avoid all heterodox congregations or sects, and acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and their orthodox pastors wherever such may be found.*^{xii}

Though fellowship in the invisible church is maintained, at the risk of losing one's salvation, the Christian is duty-bound to flee heterodox and heretical churches, even where there are children of God, and the true church made manifest by the pure Word and sacraments that still remain.^{xiii} The

danger is that salvation could be lost where the word is not preached and taught in its purity and the sacraments not altogether administered according to Christ's institution.

In relation to the formation of the LCMS, August Suelflow, then Director of the Concordia Historical Institute, wrote in a 1964 article in the *Springfielder*: *After the first few synods had been hesitantly organized, the concept of state-synods became quite prevalent. This tended to create a multiplicity of synodical organizations which in many instances coincided with state boundaries, and in others with natural barriers, such as mountains, rivers, and lakes. Almost all of the original synods formed in this period came into being, not because of theological factors (the Tennessee Synod is a notable exception), but because of physical barriers, limitations of travel and communication. It is also within this environment that the Missouri Synod had its origin in 1847. It had been hoped that the General Synod (organized in 1820) might become the embracing federation of independent synods. In fact, it was fairly successful in federating the synods. Just prior to the opening shot on Fort Sumter, it embraced approximately two-thirds of all Lutheran synods in America.*^{xiv}

Suelflow writes about the roots of the Missouri formation being attributed to the Ohio Synod, an extension of the off-shoot of the Pennsylvania Ministerium. He describes that Wilhelm Loehe emissaries had joined the Ohio (1818) and a few the Michigan Synod (1840). *But neither one of these two synods met the theological or confessional standards with which the Loehe men had been ingrafted.*^{xv} When the confessional demands of the Loehe men were not met, which included ordinands being required to pledge themselves to the Lutheran Confessions, they drew up a "Document of Separation" revealing their position. The two reasons which made it a matter of conscience for them were: 1) *Clearly ecclesiastical and confessional...The integrity and determination of the Synod appears doubtful with reference to its ecclesiastical disposition and tendency and its lack of decided resistance against the false union of our time.*^{xvi} 2) *The group demanded the Ohio Synod subscribe to all the Symbols of the Lutheran Church, to bear testimony against the false doctrine of the Sacrament of the General Synod, to inaugurate a thoroughgoing reform of the system of clergy examinations, to pledge candidates to all the symbols of the Lutheran Church at their ordination, and to discontinue serving Reformed-Lutheran congregations.*^{xvii}

When these things did not come about, the Loehe emissaries turned to the Lutherans in Missouri for fellowship, thus abandoning their Ohio Synod membership. The second preliminary meeting toward organizing the Missouri Synod was held in May 1846, in St. Louis, where the first draft of the Synodical constitution was adopted. The third preliminary conference was held in July 1846, in Fort Wayne, which culminated the following April in the formation of the Missouri Synod.

In the early years of the Missouri Synod, the formation of the General Council in 1866 caused waves in other synods. *Ultimately the Council's vague position on chialism, secret societies, and pulpit and altar fellowship caused several other synods to gravitate towards Missouri.*^{xviii} Suelflow notes that there was an interesting polity and fellowship correspondence between Walther and Charles Porterfield Krauth. When Walther took the Pittsburgh Synod to task for having adopted a resolution on the Augsburg Confession which could be variously interpreted, Krauth wrote

Walther concerning the intent of the resolution, supplying details on its background. After Krauth explained, Walther quickly withdrew his earlier misgivings, which had been published in *Der Lutheraner*, making it public a month later in *Der Lutheraner*. Walther expressed his great joy at its receipt and gladly gave his “public admission that he had been in error.”^{xix}

There is more that could be said about church fellowship in the early years of the LCMS but suffice it to say from what has been said, there were challenges right from the outset, as there are also in our day.

What is required for Church Fellowship:

A Trinitarian confession is required for church fellowship, as we heard earlier. It is not the only doctrine required for church fellowship. The question of what is required for pulpit and altar fellowship (church fellowship) sometimes devolves into least-common denominators, based on a view of the gospel that goes something like this: Agreement in the doctrine of the gospel (narrow sense...i.e. justification and the forgiveness of sins) and the right administration of the sacraments is all that is required for church fellowship.

In a 2014 CTQ article, Roland Ziegler highlights 4 differing views of Augsburg VII. *Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints (Psalm 149:1) in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. As Paul says, ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all’ (Ephesians 4:5-6).*^{xx}

The first view is that espoused by Albrecht Ritschl in the 19th century. Ziegler notes that Ritschl wants to emphasize the *evangelii* of AC VII over and against the *doctrina*. *For him, the confession and the word of God are not to be equated.*^{xxi} He says Ritschl sees the doctrine of the gospel as a human effort to speak the gospel, that is, the divine, gracious will, and that this is the mark and foundation of the church. Besides being supported also by Karl Barth and Gustav Aulen, in North America it is found in Eric Gritsch and Robert Jenson, Gerhard Forde, and David Truemper, a late professor at Valparaiso.^{xxii}

The second view of AC VII sees the necessity of a doctrinal consensus, restricting it to a consensus on what the gospel (in the narrow sense) and the sacraments are. This view dates to the Prussian union and much later, the Leuenberg Agreement (1973). *The Leuenberg Agreement was also influential in the ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and churches of the Reformed tradition in North America.*^{xxiii} This view is found in the ecumenical dialogues of the ELCA, which eventually led to fellowship with denominations from the Reformed tradition. The document: *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today* (1993).

The third view highlighted by Ziegler says that AC VII states that the required consensus consists in *recognizing the Holy Scriptures as the norm and standard of teaching and in regarding the Lutheran Confessions as the correct exposition of the Scriptures – that much and not more.*^{xxiv} Therefore, other questions not addressed in the confession should not be divisive, which was the position of the old United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) expressed in a 1920 document, “The Washington Declaration.” This position was later continued by the Lutheran Church in America (LCA, but ultimately differing from what became the ELCA.

The fourth view of AC VII, Ziegler writes, is that *the consensus necessary for the unity of the church consists in everything that the Scriptures teach.*^{xxv} This view was supported by Franz Pieper in his 1888 essay at the convention of the Synodical Conference, “On the Unity of the Faith.” Pieper quoted both AC VII and Article X of the Solid Declaration of the FC (par. 31). This view has been continued by Robert Preus, Ralph Bohlmann, and Kurt Marquart, who also take FC SD X 31 as a commentary on AC VII.^{xxvi} This position was later attacked by David Truemper of Valparaiso.

In his book, “The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance,” from the Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics series, Kurt Marquart exposes the impossibility of creating such a dichotomy between AC VII and FC X regarding church fellowship: *It is sometimes suggested that “doctrine of the Gospel” in the Augsburg Confession is not the same thing as “the doctrine and all its articles” in the Formula of Concord (Ep.X.7; SD X.31). Instead, the AC supposedly sees “the gospel as one article among those making up “the doctrine and all its articles.”*^{xxvii} The folly of such a claim Marquart backs up with an historical reality: *No sixteenth century Lutheran could have thought of the Gospel as one among many other articles! Such a trivialization rests entirely on modern misconceptions. One begins by assuming that the Gospel is simply the article of justification, and ends up rather quickly and painlessly with a few harmless slogans thought to document “agreement in the Gospel” and so to provide a “sufficient” excuse for any desired church-fellowship.*^{xxviii}

After going on to say that to preach the Gospel purely is to preach it correctly in all its constituent articles, in harmony...with all the doctrinal articles of the Confession, Marquart asks the question we are probably already thinking about: *...Otherwise what would have been the point of confessing them all?*^{xxix}

If justification is not the article that integrates all the articles of the faith into one organic whole, so that to deny any one of them is to distort justification itself, we would end up with the problem highlighted by Herman Sasse in his “Theses on the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession:” *The article of justification cannot be rightly taught where the great articles of the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creed are not kept. The denial of the Virgin Birth leads to a false doctrine of the incarnation. A false doctrine of the incarnation leads to a false understanding of justification and of the sacraments. Thus the article of the standing and falling of the church keeps together all articles of the Christian faith and illuminates them. For Lutherans the consensus required should always be regarded as the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord.*^{xxx}

Where does this leave us?

The distinction in AC VII is not between the Gospel and all the other articles of doctrine, but between all the Gospel and human traditions (rites and ceremonies). This is blatantly obvious in the confessions, where the confessors repeatedly make it abundantly clear that human rites and ceremonies must not be taught as though meriting justification (i.e. forgiveness of sins...Gospel in the narrow sense). At the same time, the confessors repeatedly say that rites and ceremonies are necessary for 2 other reasons: 1) The biblical principle of good order in 1 Cor. 14; 2) To teach the people what they need to know of Christ.

Pieper, Sasse, Preus, Bohlman, and others show themselves to be prophetic. Creating a dichotomy that does not exist between AC VII and FC X ultimately leads to a Trinitarian overthrow, as Sasse demonstrates. We've seen this play out in the ELCA and elsewhere, with various creedal abominations arising, whilst claiming to still believe the gospel in the narrow sense. While this is a rather obvious fellowship boondoggle, there are more subtle problems which the LCMS needs to pay special attention to. What of the church body in pulpit and altar fellowship with the LCMS that also maintains membership in the LWF, for example? Is such a fellowship still tenable for the sake of being charitable to needy neighbors? If doctrine also determines what the law of love is, which it does, we need to be mindful of not overthrowing adherence to the 1st table of the law in the name of the 2nd table of the law. We love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). The love that God has for us concretely defines how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. No dichotomy can be created between the two tables of the law (commandments 1-3; commandments 4-10), just as it cannot be created between AC VII and FC X.

For various reasons, God has seen fit for confessional Lutheranism to abound in countries other than ours. At the same time, fellowship concerns have not diminished in our day in the LCMS. Much like the ancient biblical, historical, and confessional practice of closed communion is getting ever-more challenging due to the multiplication of generations living under the false assumption that open communion has always been the practice of the church, so also church fellowship issues are ever-more challenging in places where things such as women's ordination, same-sex sin affirmations, and unionistic church relations exist.

I do understand those who tire of continuous doctrinal disputes and fights. While it is true that a utopian church on earth is not possible, including the LCMS, that does not mean that we should not ever-more strive for greater unity and honest and confessional-integrity-driven fellowship. We can, we should, we must. Every pastor's ordination vow to the Scriptures and Confessions of our church demands this. Likewise, every congregation has in its constitution its devoted statement to faithfulness toward both the Scriptures and the Confessions of our church. Cases of ignorance on a quia subscription to both the Scriptures and Confessions need to be met with patient, gentle, but resolute corrections. Cases of apathy need to be met with stronger admonitions. Cases of negligence and outright denial of a quia subscription need to be met with a call to repent, or else. Even in the previous two cases, repentance needs to sound forth, but each case will have its own

circumstances and details. Nonetheless, because the confessions manifest the truth of the Scriptures themselves in all points of doctrine, compromise is untenable.

Conclusion:

There can be no dichotomy between truth and love. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephesians 4:25).

Church fellowship can never be boiled down to a “you and me are in fellowship” ideology. Church fellowship is also not political. Let the hearer understand, however. There is always politics in church relations, but politics must not drive fellowship determinations. Fellowship decisions must rest upon the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, the Confessions of our church, which also includes a robust confession of the Trinity.

In moving forward, politics and money will always play a part in church relations. But the one thing that endures forever is the Word of the Lord. Darkness has no fellowship with light. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. All articles of doctrine are key to establishing and maintaining a robust church, as well as fellowship with other churches. This needs to be just as true today as it was in the early days of the LCMS. The Lord grant us steadfast hearts, and courageous words, as we strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Our Lord is always faithful...may we be faithful to His word, and the confession of His holy word.

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- ⁱ The Apostolic Fathers: Michael W. Holmes; 2006; Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Mich.; p. 105. Ignatius' reference to there being nothing better than Jesus Christ comes from John 16:28..."I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."
- ⁱⁱ The Apostolic Fathers: Michael W. Holmes; 2006; Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Mich.; p. 97-98. Ignatius references John 6:33 on the bread of God: "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Regarding those who separate themselves from the congregation and thereby also from the bishop, Ignatius cites Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries: Werner Elert; CPH 1966; p. 15: Elert cites Rom. 15:26, 2 Cor. 9:13, Gal. 6:6, and Phil. 4:15 in cases where fellowship concerns charity toward the neighbor. Additionally, he cites the Didache, and Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Chrysostom.
- ^{iv} Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries: Werner Elert; CPH 1966; p. 16. From Elert's Excursus on Communion in Early Church Usage: "The Creed's sanctorum communio should therefore mean that we possess the sacraments together and are thereby bound to one another. In a confession of faith this would be a rather insignificant point to make. The situation is different when mention is made of a communio of the body and blood of Christ. Here communio does not refer to a joint possession of things in the way other things are possessed but to a participation in them such as could have meaning only in a confession of faith.
- ^v Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries: Werner Elert; CPH 1966; p. 36. Elert notes a congruency with John and Paul, also noting that when 1 John 1:6-7 says that fellowship with Christ is impossible without fellowship with one another, he cannot be setting himself in opposition to Paul, even though not speaking in this passage of the Sacrament and koinonia has another significance.
- ^{vi} Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries: Werner Elert; CPH 1966; p. 164. Elert notes that there was either complete church fellowship or no church fellowship, which then was the determining factor in communion practices among laity receiving and clergy officiating.
- ^{vii} Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: Reader's Edition; CPH 2005; p. 11.
- ^{viii} Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: Reader's Edition; CPH 2005; p. 474; par. 6-7.
- ^{ix} Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: Reader's Edition; CPH 2005; p. 506; par. 1-2.
- ^x Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry): Dr. C.F.W. Walther; LCMS 1987 (CPH); p. 21
- ^{xi} Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry): Dr. C.F.W. Walther; LCMS 1987 (CPH); p. 149-150. Walther links fellowship with Christ and His Church, based on the spiritual fellowship with the believers and saints.
- ^{xii} Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry): Dr. C.F.W. Walther; LCMS 1987 (CPH); p. 20-21.
- ^{xiii} Kirche und Amt (Church and Ministry): Dr. C.F.W. Walther; LCMS 1987 (CPH); p. 21. Walther makes this point under Thesis VIII, while maintaining that the believer must flee all false teachers, avoid all heterodox congregations or sects, and acknowledge and adhere to orthodox congregations and orthodox pastors, where he can find such.
- ^{xiv} Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism: The Springfielder; Spring 1964; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1: August R. Suelflow.
- ^{xv} Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism: The Springfielder; Spring 1964; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1: August R. Suelflow. The Loehe men sought a resolution condemning the General Synod for its lax confessional emphasis. The Ohio Synod's formula for the administration of Holy Communion had a definite Reformed flavor through the insertion of the word, "Jesus said."
- ^{xvi} Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism: The Springfielder; Spring 1964; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1: August R. Suelflow.
- ^{xvii} Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism: The Springfielder; Spring 1964; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1: August R. Suelflow.
- ^{xviii} Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism: The Springfielder; Spring 1964; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1: August R. Suelflow.

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- ^{xix} Church Polity and Fellowship in American Lutheranism: The Springfielder; Spring 1964; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1: August R. Suelflow.
- ^{xx} Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: Reader's Edition; CPH 2005; p. 34; par. 1-4.
- ^{xxi} Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship: Roland F. Ziegler; Concordia Theological Quarterly; July/October 2014; CTS. Ritschl did not see AC VII to mean agreement in all articles of the Augsburg Confession for true unity of the church.
- ^{xxii} Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship: Roland F. Ziegler; Concordia Theological Quarterly; July/October 2014; CTS. Ritschl sees the later Melancthon as the reason for his position, based on the Torgau Articles, and not the Schwabach Articles and the list of articles of faith enumerated there.
- ^{xxiii} Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship: Roland F. Ziegler; Concordia Theological Quarterly; July/October 2014; CTS. Ziegler notes that a document entitled "The Church of Jesus Christ," (1995) by the Leuenberg Fellowship, clearly sees the gospel as understood in the narrow sense.
- ^{xxiv} Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship: Roland F. Ziegler; Concordia Theological Quarterly; July/October 2014; CTS. Ziegler notes that it was John Tietjen who wrote about this position in "Which Way to Lutheran Unity? A History of Efforts to Unite the Lutherans of America", 1966.
- ^{xxv} Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship: Roland F. Ziegler; Concordia Theological Quarterly; July/October 2014; CTS. Franz Pieper proposed this view in his essay, "On the Unity of Faith," at the 1888 convention of the Synodical Conference.
- ^{xxvi} Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship: Roland F. Ziegler; Concordia Theological Quarterly; July/October 2014; CTS. AC VII has "the teaching of the doctrine of the gospel," and FC SD X "in teaching and all the articles of faith."
- ^{xxvii} The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance: Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics; Vol. IX; Robert Preus, Editor; Kurt E. Marquart; The Luther Academy, 1990; p. 50-51.
- ^{xxviii} The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance: Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics; Vol. IX; Robert Preus, Editor; Kurt E. Marquart; The Luther Academy, 1990; p. 51. Marquart goes on to say that the Reformation knows no such "mini-gospel," and that AC VII is based largely on the 12th of the Schwabach Articles (1529), which has this language: "This church is nothing else than believers in Christ, who hold, believe and teach the above-mentioned articles and parts, and for this suffer persecution and martyrdom in the world; for where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments used aright, is the holy Christian church..."
- ^{xxix} The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance: Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics; Vol. IX; Robert Preus, Editor; Kurt E. Marquart; The Luther Academy, 1990; p. 51
- ^{xxx} The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance: Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics; Vol. IX; Robert Preus, Editor; Kurt E. Marquart; The Luther Academy, 1990; p. 51.