

# The State of Adult Catechesis/Confirmation in the LCMS

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**Abstract:** In the late 1980s, the LCMS confirmed around thirty thousand adults per year in its six thousand congregations.<sup>1</sup> Now the average is between two or three adult confirmations per congregation per year, about half of the level of the 1980s and as recently as fifteen years ago. This article explores the nature of and need for adult catechesis, examines obstacles and opportunities inherent in LCMS culture and U.S. society in general, and calls for a renewal of this vital ministry in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In the late 1980s, Synod officials opined that couldn't a great, doctrinally sound, mission-driven denomination like the LCMS—with its exceptional parochial school system, respected institutions of higher learning, and evangelistic auxiliaries—confirm more than five adults per congregation per year? The answer seemed self-evident in the affirmative. Fast-forward to today. The average is now between two and three adult confirmations per congregation per year, depending on the method of counting.<sup>2</sup>

Observations about the state of adult catechesis/confirmation, however, need to go beyond a discussion of the numbers or lack thereof. How did we get to this point? Is the church even raising the issue in its conversations? Are congregations asking how they can be more effective in sharing the crucified and risen Christ with those with whom they have contact? Is it even relevant to examine this issue, or is it an institutional relic in a post-denominational era?

Whether it is called adult confirmation or something else, the church's function of integrating new believers into the life of the church remains a central purpose as commanded by Christ Himself in Scripture. To begin the conversation, this article examines the nature, current state, need, and internal and external influences.

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## **What is Adult Catechesis?**

In the Greek, *κατηχεω* (to catechize) means to “‘sound from above,’ e.g., to address from a stage, . . . ‘to instruct someone.’”<sup>3</sup> It is used much more rarely in the New Testament than *διδασκω*, the more general word for “to teach.” Arguably, it connotes a more formal, intentional setting (instruction), although its use may be insufficient to define clearly. Examples of the use of the word in bold below include:

“Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to **instruct** others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Cor 14:19).

“Let the one who is **taught** the word share all good things with the one who **teaches**” (Gal 6:6).

“He [Apollos] had been **instructed** in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught<sup>4</sup> accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25).

For the purpose of this article, adult catechesis is used synonymously with adult confirmation. In its entirety, it is the process of the church by which the Holy Spirit, through the Means of Grace, takes a person from a state of unbelief to new life in Christ. This new life most definitely includes saving faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, but also includes repentance to a holy life according to the pattern described in Scripture (Rom 12:1; Gal 2:20, etc.). It includes adult baptism if the catechumen has not been baptized,<sup>5</sup> but also includes integration into church for those joining from other faith traditions, whether or not they were recently active.

Whatever it is called, the process by which former unbelievers become disciples of Christ is a Biblical mandate. The highly familiar *commissioning* passages of Scripture (Mt 28:18–20; Mk 16:15–16; Lk 24:46–48; Acts 1:8) make clear the essential task of the church in relation to the world is to bear witness (*μαρτυρεω*) to the Gospel. The Matthew 28 passage with the imperative (*μαθητευσατε*) “make disciples” clarifies that this proclamation has the unequivocal purpose of conversion and discipleship of the former unbeliever. The testimony of other places in Scripture (Jon 3:1–2; Ps 51:13; 1 Tim 2:3–4) and the repeated narrative of conversions in the book of Acts indicate that this process, whatever it is called and however it is practiced, is not an institutional relic.

While discipleship is a lifelong process, this article limits its focus to catechumens deemed by the church to have reached the point of sufficient understanding of and agreement with the doctrine of the church, as well as a lifestyle consistent with it, to be able to partake in the Lord’s Supper, that is, *communicant membership*.

## Do We Still Need Adult Confirmation?

This brings us to the “M” word, *m\_\_\_\_\_ship!* It probably does not surprise you that this term has fallen into disrepute. “People, especially young people, don’t become members of organizations today.” “This is an institutional, bureaucratic term.” This is all true enough. The term does not need to be defended. Yet the concept remains that a local congregation comprises people, people who have more or less formally entered into a mutual understanding with a local congregation that they are under its spiritual care. Certainly practices and expectations of that mutual covenant differ from congregation to congregation, but they exist. One pastor described this relationship as “those who call this church home.” “Membership” is a workable word among us, especially as it is used beyond the local congregation, even as we are aware of its limitations.

The same disagreement exists about the relevance of both the term and the concept of “adult confirmation.” Additionally, assertions are made that some churches don’t even practice adult confirmation anymore. This assertion usually refers, not to churches that are inactive in this area, but to churches that are assimilating large numbers of new people. The facts tell a different story. These congregations instruct new “members” in some manner and in fact are more likely to report them in the annual statistical report.<sup>6</sup> It is true that practices in regard to adult catechesis vary, but it still needs to be called something. The term, “member,” while imperfect, is as good as any.

Increase in “membership,” while imperfect, is also a valid measurement of outreach. A case is made that adult baptisms would be a better measurement to reflect actually reaching lost people, since adult confirmations include believers who join LCMS congregations from other faith traditions. The bottom line is that this ambiguity between Kingdom growth and migration within the Kingdom exists in every category of accession. For example, even people gained by transfer from another LCMS congregation may actually have been won back from unbelief, even though they had been listed on another congregation’s membership roll. An additional benefit of retaining the current categories is that it allows for comparisons to previous years.

These issues may deserve some attention for the sake of good order. However, there is a better reason why the traditional LCMS practice of adult confirmation is essential: It is most at home in LCMS theology. Many recall *Dialog Evangelism*,<sup>7</sup> a “Lutheranization” of *Evangelism Explosion*.<sup>8</sup> It was quite popular in the Synod in the 1980s. I am fan of this program in that it was a great discipleship tool that clarified the Gospel for participants and gave them confidence to be lifelong witnesses. I owe my love for evangelism today to this program from many years ago. However, for some there was always a bit of dissonance. While *Dialog Evangelism* never diminished adult instruction, the outline taught in this program sought a “confession

of faith” in someone’s living room. While our doctrine is that a person comes to faith instantaneously,<sup>9</sup> we are not overly concerned about that moment, which is often imperceptible, even to the new believer. We are more concerned with the process of catechesis and identification with the body of Christ, which takes place over time. This is why the practice that we have called adult confirmation has been present and needs to continue.

### **How is it going?**

It would be no surprise to most that the state of adult confirmation ministry is less than desirable. Taking the figures from the 1980s as a lackluster start—at least as it was perceived at the time—they have only continued to decline. This decline is more recent than many people think. For years 1995–1999, there were still nearly 30,000 adult confirmations each year. Since then the number has been declining. In the last year available at this writing, 2013, 10,789 adult confirmations were reported. Keep in mind that the change in the way that the Synod reported adult confirmations may account for a significant part of this decline<sup>10</sup> (See footnote 2). The practice of not carrying the number of adult confirmations forward for non-reporting congregations make the statistic sensitive to the percentage of churches reporting; 2013 was a particularly poor year.<sup>11</sup> However, any analysis would support that we are confirming half or fewer of the number of adults that were confirmed in the late 1990s.

The decline in adult confirmations also affects the number of child baptisms. The LCMS is baptizing many fewer children than thirty years ago, from about 60,000 reported in 1987 compared to 21,318 in 2013. Even adjusting for the change in the manner of reporting, which may account for about 12,000 of this decrease,<sup>12</sup> this number is halved. I have no quarrel with those who point out that current Lutherans are having fewer children and should have more. The biblical mandate of Genesis 1:28 to “*be fruitful and multiply*” does not have an expiration date. However, the low birth rate is only part of the reason for the decline in child baptisms. As pastors who confirm adults know, it is normal that their children will also be baptized. The decline in child baptisms is due in part to the decline of adult confirmations.

### **What is holding us back?**

The adage is “culture eats strategy for breakfast.”<sup>13</sup> Kraft noted, “Most of what we do and think is more habitual than creative. It is our regular habit to follow the cultural guidelines (roads) taught to us as we were growing up.”<sup>14</sup> Strong internal and external cultural forces affect the practice of adult confirmation in the LCMS.

Beginning with internal forces, we know that there is a commitment and love for missions within the LCMS, but there are behaviors and attitudes that dampen it. This culture finds roots at times in doctrinal issues, at times in our history and culture. Whatever the source, it manifests itself on the national, district, and local level.

The biblical doctrine that the Holy Spirit alone brings about faith through the Means of Grace no doubt adds nuance to the practice of adult confirmation. There are strong opinions on both sides of the issue on whether or not it is proper to set goals and expectations in the area of conversion. Since the Holy Spirit is the One who brings people to faith when and where He pleases, is it even proper to expect any level of accountability in this area?<sup>15</sup> Can we count? Some in the LCMS say yes and cite the numerous places in the book of Acts that counted that very thing (2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 11:24; 19:7). Others go so far as to refrain from inviting people to join the congregation after they have completed an instruction class lest an impression be given that they had a role in their conversion.

There is also the often-discussed false dichotomy between faithfulness and mission. While it would be an oversimplification to deny that there are conundrums at times as the Word meets the world, there is no mission if there is no message.<sup>16</sup> This issue deserves a full discussion and can only be raised as an issue here. Suffice it to say that, rightly or wrongly, it may dampen our efforts toward adult confirmation.

LCMS cultural manifestations find their influence as well. On the national level, it is safe to say that the story of adult confirmation is currently missing from the narrative of the church. For example, those congregations that actively confirm adults are not celebrated. Those that do not bear no stigma. For a time in the 1980s and 1990s, the Synod's publications listed congregations that confirmed more than fifty adults. It was later reduced to thirty-five. Then this "honor roll" was stopped altogether. In the same article, the percentage of congregations that did not confirm any adults was reported. While the report did not point to any one congregation, at least it sent a signal that this was not the way things should be.

What is true on the national level seems to be true on the district level as well. While the degree to which this observation is true is hard to quantify, most people would be hard pressed to cite many examples of districts that highlight the importance of adult confirmation. While there may be others, the only example I know of after many years of conversations around the church is the Wisconsin North district which has had the practice of giving *The Golden Sickle* award to congregations of various sizes who had the highest number of adult confirmations.<sup>17</sup> Is this record of outreach considered important in the election of district officers and the appointment of other leaders? Do district presidents highlight this issue in their presentations, celebrate those who are effective, or perhaps even (evangelically or otherwise) question a pastor about the lack of adult confirmations?

On the local level, as congregations are involved in the call process for staff, is the track record of adult confirmations of candidates considered? Do congregations hold their pastors accountable for outreach at the same level as they do for shut-in and hospital calls? Would members be willing to receive spiritual care from qualified lay members in appropriate circumstances in order that outreach can receive a higher priority for the called staff?

A key event in the life of a congregation is the installation of a pastor. As he stands before God and his congregation, he vows to uphold the teachings of the faith, to live a holy life, and to care for the existing flock. A stark omission is that at no point in this rite in the current or previous agendas do pastors vow to “seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). Such inclusion would seem appropriate according to the biblical commissioning passages mentioned above. The prophet Ezekiel scolded the shepherds of Israel for shirking this responsibility among others: “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, *the lost you have not sought*, and with force and harshness you have ruled them” [emphasis added] (Ez 34:4).

In March 2013, Lutheran Hour Ministries conducted a survey to inquire about local adult confirmation practices in one LCMS district. The purpose was to seek a fuller understanding of the differences in congregations that confirm adults and those that do not. Additional information was gathered through follow-up phone calls

Reasons for congregations not confirming adults included, as one would expect, pastoral vacancy and attempts that did not lead to fruition. Another common response was that the congregation was too small to attract members. Yet the most striking insight was this: congregations lacking adult confirmations often indicated that it was their practice to wait for people desiring adult confirmation to present themselves before scheduling a class. This was done instead of scheduling a class and then actively seeking participants.

Whatever factors cause a lack of priority has also led to a lack of innovation. Simply put, the church has not been “minding the store,” continually developing resources, skills, and institutional expertise in this area. If a pastor were about to begin a membership class for the first time, what curriculum would he use? While he could find traditional resources that use a printed curriculum and a classroom format, it would be difficult to find resources that take advantage of new, emerging technologies. (To the credit of Concordia Publishing House, it does offer a number of resources for new member ministry in the printed format.<sup>18</sup>)

The use of the Internet is so pervasive in our culture, and yet we lack digital and/or video resources available for this key ministry. Can social media and online education be used to foster adult catechesis? Can the church make use of distance education models, online meetings, Facebook and other digital tools to accomplish goals congruent with adult confirmation? Would these tools also allow the

catechumen to develop relationships and identification with the church outside the classroom setting? Why has the church not been investing its “mental capital” in this ministry? It is evident that LCMS practices around adult confirmation have not kept up with the changes in technology.

When Lutheran Hour Ministries has asked what it might provide to strengthen adult confirmation ministry, by far the most common response has been video or other electronic material. Lutheran Hour personnel researched electronic resources for adult confirmation, but found only locally produced material, usually recordings from the congregation’s membership classes. In response, LHM developed an online, digital course on Christianity called *GodConnects* ([www.lhm.org/GodConnects](http://www.lhm.org/GodConnects)), which was released January 2015.

External forces can also hinder our mission efforts. For the Christian who takes the Bible seriously, the changes in North American culture in the last decades have been disquieting to say the least. It seems that the seeds of change that were sown in the past have come to bear abundant fruit in the last few years. As the philosophical underpinnings of the West have shifted from modernism to postmodernism, the church faces great challenges to retool its ministry to the lost. This is most certainly true of adult confirmation ministry where the very purpose is to meet the culture.

In the recent past, Christian behavior was often consistent with and enforced by society. A man and a woman, when married, were expected to be faithful to each other and remain married for the rest of their lives. While sin has always abounded, sexual activity outside marriage was at least recognized as sin. Church attendance, to some degree, was expected. The concept of absolute truth was generally accepted, even if there was not always agreement on it.

Arguably much of the current curriculum and practice surrounding adult confirmation in our churches has not changed to meet this new reality. In the past, it was nearly enough to explain the differences between Catholics and Lutherans and receive assent to our view. Now the church needs to include in its strategy changing, not only doctrinal understanding of the catechumen, but worldview and lifestyle as well. The most common example is couples living together before marriage. Every pastor in ministry knows how difficult it is to deal with this issue in the context of church weddings and membership. Other examples include homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, and the like. Yet perhaps the most threatening is the rejection by postmodern thinkers of Christianity’s exclusive truth claims. The teaching that Jesus is the only way to heaven grows increasingly dissonant to postmodern ears.

### **What can move us forward?**

To be sure there are powerful elements within LCMS culture that encourage adult confirmation ministry. Perhaps the strongest is our conviction that there is no salvation without Jesus Christ. It is clear from Scripture that “There is salvation in no

one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

While the church and individuals may not always act in a way that reflects this belief, we nonetheless believe it. It is a part of our orthodox faith. If only the Bible taught the annihilation of souls, that would be easier to bear; but it doesn't. It teaches the eternal punishment of hell that is both unimaginable and just. Our orthodoxy on this issue, coupled with our love for others that they may avoid this fate, moves us to evangelize those across the dinner table and across the seas. It is an urgent task; we know it and believe it.

This urgency has been reflected in many ways. It is espoused by entities within the church from corporate Synod to local congregations. The mission statement of the LCMS includes “vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world.” The current three-part vision statement of “Witness, Mercy and Life Together” continues to emphasize witness. The tagline of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League is “Lutheran Women in Mission.” Concordia University–California was founded as the Great Commission University, and nearly every congregation that has a mission statement restates the Great Commission in some way for their context.

From this commitment to reach the lost, evangelistic efforts have arisen through the years. Preaching-Teaching-Reaching in the 1950s, Dialogue Evangelism and Witness Workshops in the 1970–80s, and, most recently, Ablaze are prominent examples. While each had its strengths and weaknesses—and came and went, as is to be expected—they nonetheless accomplished good in their time and demonstrated that within the LCMS culture is a sincere desire to evangelize.

As noted above, in any given year, only about half of the approximately 6,150 LCMS congregations report adult confirmations. If the names of these three thousand congregations were flashed **one per second** on a screen, it would take **53 minutes** to see them all. On the face of it, this is discouraging. However, perhaps we can be encouraged in that the LCMS has an amazing unused capacity for outreach. Not discounting the power of the Gospel, some congregations are in such a state that they would have difficulty attracting new members from a human perspective; however, hundreds, maybe thousands, of the churches are sufficiently healthy to add new members if they took a few simple steps to do so.

The LCMS is a large denomination with the capacity to have a major impact on our country and world. Think of it this way: The LCMS has nearly as many congregations (6,150) as the combined number of Walmart (4,540)<sup>19</sup> and Target (1,795)<sup>20</sup> stores in the U.S. Very few people in the United States do not have one of these department stores within a convenient distance. While, admittedly, LCMS congregations are not as strategically placed, their capacity to make an incredible impact on our country should not be discounted.

Another opportunity for outreach is to use our schools more effectively for evangelism. The scope of the opportunity is vast.

More than 2,300 early childhood centers and preschools are operated by congregations and Christian day schools within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. More than 129,000 children, ranging in age from infant/toddler to five years of age, are involved in these programs. Additionally, our congregations operate 945 elementary schools, which serve 107,000 students.<sup>21</sup>

Around 25% of the children that attend our churches are un-churched.<sup>22</sup> Imagine the ideal scenario for evangelism: (1) a long-term relationship, (2) an understanding that the Gospel will be shared with someone in the family every day, and (3) involvement in a critical aspect of life. That is the situation with un-churched children in LCMS schools. We have the time to patiently develop a relationship and share the Gospel. Who has not heard the stories of un-churched children going home and insisting to pray at mealtime? Terry Schmidt, Director of Schools for the LCMS, comments:

Many of our schools reflect the population demographic of their surrounding community. That creates many opportunities for mission and outreach. Last week 10 students at Concordia Pilgrim . . . were baptized. Baptisms at school chapel services are becoming quite common and are greatly celebrated. When the pastor engages his community through his Lutheran school the Holy Spirit works in powerful ways.<sup>23</sup>

While it is true that the *sitz im leben* in which we find ourselves in twenty-first-century America is not what the LCMS is accustomed to, it should be also recognized that these changes could in fact be opportunities.

To begin with, the new technologies that seem to be devised almost daily provide the church opportunities to communicate the Gospel in new and impactful ways. These media usually are not bound by geography and often have a global reach. Often new technologies allow access to a large number of people at a low or even no cost for the technology itself. While they are accessible and affordable, it is naïve to think that their uses do not require significant investment. Someone has to generate the content, monitor and analyze the activity, and follow up with those who are contacted. As we catechize adults, it is safe to say that new technologies have not been tapped as they could be. Can adult confirmation courses be taught online? Can we develop “flipped classrooms”?<sup>24</sup>

Beyond technology, the advent of postmodernism and the decline of modernism are not all bad. Modernism<sup>25</sup> was no great friend to Christianity. Its emphasis on the scientific method and the ability of people to solve their own problems runs directly counter to God’s ability to act outside nature, as well as to the biblical doctrine of the depravity of man. History has also given modernism a well-deserved shellacking.

Choose your twentieth-century genocide of over one million:<sup>26</sup> Communist China, Nazi Germany, Congo, Communist Soviet Union, WWII Japan, Ottoman Turkey, Communist Cambodia, North Korea, Ethiopia, Biafra (Nigeria). Progress? While those who were raised in this modern milieu will find it comfortable, many aspects of it are incompatible with Christianity, and perhaps we should not grieve its passing as “those who have no hope.”

Postmodernism, while no particular friend of Christianity either, especially in its deconstruction of the concept of truth, gives room to some elements that are not completely alien to a biblical perspective.

Alasdair MacIntyre, a Scottish philosopher, proposes forms that may find effective use by the church today: (1) community, (2) narrative, and (3) practices.<sup>27</sup> This perspective has been advocated by Dr. Joel Bierman as well.<sup>28</sup>

A community is a distinct group with which one may identify. The church is a community. In fact, the definition of the word *ἐκκλησία* as “called out” demonstrates the unique identity of the church. The book of Acts records the story of the nascent church as community to the point of adopting the concept of communal property (2:44–45) and intimate daily life: “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46–47a).

The church as community is a powerful force, both for the believer and the one yet to believe. For the believer, the community helps establish the identity of the individual: “This is who we are; this is who I am.” The unbeliever may become a part of a Christian community by social association before theological confession. This concept is articulated in different ways: “They *belong* before they *believe*” or “The church loves them to Christ.”

Secondly, narrative is the story of the community, whether large or small. The use of narrative is consistent with the Bible. In fact, one can argue that the Bible is in essence the narrative of God’s interacting with His people. It is the story (in the non-fictional sense) of the events and people who share their identity of God’s people from the creation. You can take your pick: the story of creation, the history of the people of Israel (especially how the narrative of the Exodus is recounted in the Passover), the parables of Jesus, and the like.

Narrative is like culture; it is present whether realized or not. A story is told. Unintentionally, congregations may develop an unwanted narrative. The treasurer’s standing before the congregation on Christmas Eve and imploring a large offering to cover a financial shortfall tells a story. The clergy scandal of the Roman Catholic Church is an unfortunate part of their narrative. If attention is paid to the narrative, it can become a powerful tool to establish the identity of the congregation.

Finally, practice is the third component. Practice is how the community lives out its narrative. Practices are specific activities observed on a daily basis. Again, these

are intrinsic to the church, which, through the centuries, has been an advocate of particular practices, at times called rites or rituals. Sunday worship, liturgy, the monastic offices, meal prayers, and the so-called “quiet time” are but a few examples.

These are not new concepts that MacIntyre suggests. They have never been absent from the church. Perhaps it is time to discerningly wipe away that layer of dust that may have accumulated on them during the modern era and put them to good use again.

## Conclusion

As we look at the current state of adult catechesis/adult confirmation in the LCMS, the following issues merit our conversation:

1. *A call for the renewal of adult catechesis*—This essential activity of the church has fallen out of our collective consciousness and receives insufficient attention. The trend lines are alarming. Membership in the LCMS is declining by about 100,000 baptized members every three years. More importantly, the number of people disconnected from Christ in the United States growing is by about one percent per year<sup>29</sup>—about three million souls. Adult catechesis/confirmation deserves to be on the agenda of the church at the local, district, and national level.
2. *A call for increased investment*—God willing, conversation about adult catechesis and renewal of the same will result in proposed new strategies and activities, which will require investment of human and financial resources. As best practices for adult confirmation are gathered and new technology deployed for the promulgation of the faith, choices will be faced regarding how to invest resources. Investment in this area is vital.
3. *Rebalance our approach for a new age*—The shift from modernism to postmodernism may require the rebalancing of the rhetoric used in adult catechesis. We at least need to inquire about how the rhetoric we use to present the faith to catechumens connects with them. How can we customize our approach to our specific audience?
4. *Create a catechetical culture with accountability*—We need to once again emphasize the importance of this ministry. In the same way that congregations create a culture by “telling the story,” the church at large needs to do the same at all levels. When we tell the story of how *Shepherd of the Local Geographic Formation* confirmed a good number of people, it is the story of all of us. At some point, can accountability (or some dissonance) be created for those who do not confirm adults?

Is there hope? Do we have reason to believe that our beloved LCMS has the willingness and strength to be renewed to fulfill the Great Commission? There are

many, both within the church and outside of it, who may say that it is nearly impossible. However, a Barna study sponsored by LHM in one LCMS district uncovers a reason for hope and identifies our people as amazing indeed.

Perhaps you have heard the statistic from Barna's polling about the discouraging number of Christians who are able to identify the way of salvation. They asked those surveyed what they believe will happen when they die. The survey choices are either works-righteousness, universalistic, or this "right" answer: "*When you die you will go to heaven because you have confessed your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior.*"

This question was asked in a survey commissioned by LHM as well. (The question about salvation was reworded to remove the word "accepted" to be more theologically accurate.) What was the percentage of lay members who chose the correct answer? **97 percent!** We should be truly amazed and encouraged by the finding!<sup>30</sup> The Gospel is the essential power of mission (Rom 1:16); our people get the Gospel! What could be better? The good news continues. When asked if they had a personal responsibility to share the Gospel, **91 percent** either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

The people of the LCMS are theologically sound and willing to witness; that makes them an amazing people. We have reason, not only for hope, but for the expectation that God will do great things through His people by the power of the Gospel.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Lutheran Annual 2013* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House), 759. Throughout the article, statistics are taken from the *Lutheran Annual* of the appropriate year.

<sup>2</sup> After 1999, the Synod changed the way it counted adult confirmations. Previously, if a congregation did not submit an annual report, numbers from the previous year were included in the next year's report. Today, if there is no report, these numbers are reported as zeros. The method also applies to child baptisms, junior confirmations, and "total gains from outside."

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittle and Gerhard Friedrick, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 422.

<sup>4</sup> Note that in the Greek the word for teach here is not a form of *εκκλησια*, but *διδασκω*.

<sup>5</sup> Those who are familiar with the annual statistical parish report for the Synod know that there is no distinct category to report adult baptisms. They are included in adult confirmation, based on the assumption that any adult that is baptized has been catechized.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Larson, "Thirty-four Congregations Top the List for Adults Confirmations" (*The Lutheran Layman*, Lutheran Hour Ministries, May-June 2013), 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> W. Leroy Biesenthal, *Dialog Evangelism* (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Board for Evangelism, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> “Conversion proper, that is, the creation of faith in the grace of God takes place in the moment in which the Holy Spirit kindles a spark of faith in the heart of a sinner.” Frances Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House), vol II, 461.

<sup>10</sup> The change in the manner of reporting adult confirmations occurred between 1999 and 2000. The decrease in reported adult confirmations between those years was 7,973.

<sup>11</sup> For statistical year 2013, only 59% of congregation reported; <http://blogs.lcms.org/2014/2013-statistics>, accessed April 23, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The change in the manner of reporting child baptisms occurred between 1999 and 2000. The decrease in reported child baptisms between those years was 12,076.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Drucker is credited with this saying. It was made famous in 2006 by Mark Fields, president of Ford Motor Company. Torben Rick, “Strategy or culture: Which is more important?” accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.torbenrick.eu/blog/culture/organisational-culture-eats-strategy-for-breakfast-lunch-and-dinner/>.

<sup>14</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1996), 31.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps we could say in a few words that this process could be compared to farming, an apt analogy since the Bible compares the Word of God to seed. When a farmer sows seed, he does not know how the seed grows, but he knows something. He knows that the soils should be tilled and fertile. He studies and experiments on the ideal planting depth and spacing. There must be moisture and warmth for the seed to sprout. After it sprouts, the faithful farmer continues to cultivate the crop, always waiting and looking toward the harvest. Is he assured of a harvest? By no means! Hail, drought, disease, and the like may rob even a diligent farmer of the harvest.

Christians sow the seed of the Word of God. They know the seed is good and produces fruit according to the Lord’s will. Are there ways to more effectively scatter this seed and cultivate the field for a harvest? Are many congregations simply not scattering this seed outside their current membership? In the end, we do what we know to do, but rely on the Holy Spirit for the harvest.

<sup>16</sup> For a further discussion on this issue, see Dr. Robert Kolb’s article in the *Concordia Journal*, Summer 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. Dwayne Lueck, district president, Wisconsin North District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, e-mail, May 9, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Concordia Publishing House, “New Member Education,” accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.cph.org/c-1172-new-member-education.aspx?REName=Education&plk=1319>.

<sup>19</sup> Walmart, “Our Locations,” accessed April 23, 2015, <http://corporate.walmart.com/our-story/our-business/locations/>.

<sup>20</sup> Target, “Corporate Fact Sheet,” accessed April 23, 2015, <http://pressroom.target.com/corporate>.

<sup>21</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Educating Our Children,” accessed April 23, 2015, <http://www.lcms.org/schoolministry>.

<sup>22</sup> Terry Schmidt, Director of Schools, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, e-mail, May 1, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> “The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed. Short video lectures are viewed by students at home before

the class session, while in-class time is devoted to exercises, projects, or discussions.”

<http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eli7081.pdf>, accessed April 23, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> [http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Postmodernism and Its Critics](http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php?culture=Postmodernism%20and%20Its%20Critics), accessed April 23, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.scaruffi.com/politics/dictat.html>, accessed April 23, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Joel Bierman, *Knowing Right from Wrong*. Lecture delivered at Lutheran Hour Ministries, St. Louis, MO. April 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Pew Research Center, “Nones on the Rise,” accessed April 23, 2015,

<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

<sup>30</sup> There are a couple of caveats to keep in mind. First, the survey was answered by people who regularly attend church. They were either at worship or a church meeting when the survey was administered, or they were committed people who cared enough to respond when asked. That would likely make the salvation response higher than, say, conducting a phone poll where respondents would self-identify as Lutheran, notwithstanding any connection to a congregation. In addition, the question was reworded to be more accurate theologically to Lutheran ears.