

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference



The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century

Article III.

The Holy Spirit

TO THE READER

The third triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) was held April 20-22, 1999 at Winter Haven, Florida. During the convention, seven essays were presented and discussed, each advancing the theme, "Come Holy Spirit, God and Lord."

Rev. W. Wesphal (WELS) presented the essay: *The Holy Spirit Is God*; Dr. G. Herrmann (Germany) *The Holy Spirit Is the Giver of Faith*; Rev. F. Chinyama (Malawi) *The Holy Spirit Uses Word and Sacrament to Carry out His Work*; Rev. S. Hedkvist (Sweden) *The Holy Spirit Comforts the Church*; Rev. S. Kawiliza (Zambia) *The Holy Spirit Sanctifies and Preserves the Church on Earth*; Prof. D. Haeuser (Peru) *The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Gifts to the Church*.

The CELC Commission on Theology edited the seven essays into a unified document which was presented to and approved at the 2005 convention, held in Narita, Japan. The result of the Commission's labor is before you, produced under the co-chairmanship of Rev. Wilhelm Petersen (ELS) and Rev. Lyle Lange (WELS), with the able assistance of Rev. Egil Edvardsen (Norway), Rev. Salimo Hachibamba (Zambia) and Rev. Gottfried Herrmann (Germany).

We are happy to present the *Holy Spirit*, Article III in the series, *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*.

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THE ETHERNAL WORD: A LUTHERAN CONFSSION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

ARTICLE III

THE HOLY SPIRIT: HIS PERSON AND HIS WORK

Some have called the Holy Spirit the forgotten person of the Trinity. Those who make this statement have observed that the church festival of Pentecost does not receive the same attention which Christmas and Easter enjoy. In light of the explosion of Pentecostal and charismatic groups in the twentieth century, the Holy Spirit could rather be called the misrepresented person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit's work is to point to Christ, not to obscure him. When people focus on gifts of the Holy Spirit while losing their focus on the vicarious atonement of Christ, souls are robbed of the comfort of the gospel and people's salvation is jeopardized. It is the aim of this doctrinal statement to review again what Scripture has to say about the Holy Spirit and his work. The Holy Spirit is true God with the Father and the Son. His work is to bring us to faith in Christ, our Savior. May the Holy Spirit guide us as we consider:

The Holy Spirit: His Person and His Work.

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Bible tells us he is true God, together with the Father and the Son, equal in glory and majesty, uncreated, infinite, almighty, Lord, proceeding from the Father and the Son (Galatians 4:6; Athanasian Creed). The Bible ascribes to the Holy Spirit personality. He is the third person of the Godhead, not a power or force in the universe. He is distinct from the Father and the Son. He is God, for the Bible ascribes to him divine names, attributes, works, and honor.

The Bible ascribes personality to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead. He is not a power proceeding from a unipersonal God. He is not an impersonal force at work in the universe. He is the third person of the Triune God who has personal traits and characteristics. The Holy Spirit displayed his personality in the creation of the world. He "was hovering over the waters." The same Hebrew verb (*rachaph*) is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 to describe an eagle as it "hovers over its young." Thus, the verb indicates the hovering is "protective" in nature, indicating personal care and concern. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, hovered over the waters with the care and concern only a person has.

The Holy Spirit equips God's people for service. This is evident in both the Old and New Testaments. He equipped Joshua (Numbers 27:18), Othniel (Judges 3:10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14), Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 11:6), and David (1 Samuel 16:13) to serve as leaders of God's people in the Old Testament. He gave these people the gifts they needed to

serve the church. In the New Testament he enabled the disciples on Pentecost to speak in languages they had never previously spoken (Acts 2). Paul indicated that the Holy Spirit is the one who equips the saints for service by giving them spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). This work of equipping the saints for service indicates the Holy Spirit is a person of intelligence and purpose.

The Holy Spirit possesses personal traits and characteristics. He speaks (Acts 13:2), is grieved (Ephesians 4:30), gives spiritual gifts as he determines, loves (Romans 15:30), shows wisdom (Isaiah 11:1-2), and has a “mind” (Romans 8:27). He “contends” with mankind, attempting to reprove him of sin (Genesis 6:3). He “testifies” of Christ (John 15:26), guides into all truth, speaks what he hears and tells what is to come (John 16:13). People can lie to him (Acts 5:3-10).

The Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is God. Yet, he is not the Father and he is not the Son. Each person of the Trinity is distinct from the others. Each is other than the others. On Maundy Thursday Jesus said to his disciples, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14). Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as “other” than himself. He also spoke of the Father as distinct from both of them (verse 26). Paul also distinguished the three persons of the Trinity from each other. He wrote, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, *Abba, Father*” (Galatians 4:6; cf. also John 15:26). As we confess in the Athanasian Creed, “For each person – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – is distinct, but the deity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one.” When we consider the internal workings of the Holy Trinity we say that the Father is **unbegotten** (John 1:14), the Son is **begotten** (Psalm 2:7, John 1:14), and that the Holy Spirit **proceeds** (John 15:26). The Father and the Son send out the Holy Spirit so that He proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:26, Romans 8:9, Galatians 4:6, and I Peter 1:11).

The Holy Spirit is God, because the Bible calls Him God.

There are many passages in both Old and New Testaments which call the Son, God. There are fewer passages which directly state that the Holy Spirit is God. Yet, Scripture is so reliable that a single passage, even a single word, is reliable enough to establish a doctrine. There are more passages than one in Scripture which testify to the deity of the Holy Spirit. The most direct passage is recorded in Acts 5:3-4: “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men but to God.” Paul wrote, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Besides these passages, the Holy Spirit is also called “God’s Spirit” (1 Corinthians 3:16), the “Spirit of God” (Genesis 1:2, Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3), the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13), “Spirit of life” (Romans 8:2), the “Spirit of glory” (1 Peter 4:14), and the “Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” (Romans 8:11). The Holy Spirit is God because the Bible calls him God.

The Holy Spirit is God because the Bible tells us He does the work of God.

It is appropriate here to use the syllogism to display the truth of Scripture. “God alone created the world. The Holy Spirit created the world. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is God.” We read at the very beginning of Genesis that the Holy Spirit was present at creation, forming and fashioning the world. Job stated, “The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). The Psalmist also declared the world was made “by the breath (*ruach*) of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6). Since the divine work of creation is ascribed to the Holy Spirit, it is clear that he is God.

The Holy Spirit is responsible for the divine work of inspiration. David asserted, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me” (2 Samuel 23:2). Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Spirit when she greeted the mother of her Lord (Luke 1:41-42). Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke the words of the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67). Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would inspire the apostles to write what he had taught them (John 14:26, 16:12-15). Peter declared that “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Since the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God (1 Corinthians 2:11), and since he makes known to us the revelation of God (1 Corinthians 2:13), he is God.

The Holy Spirit is responsible for the divine work of bringing us to faith and keeping us in the faith. As Luther stated, “He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC). Paul speaks of baptism as the “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). He declares that no one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). “The sanctifying work of the Spirit” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14) is the cause of our salvation. The Holy Spirit is also responsible for the divine work of preserving us in the faith. Paul wrote, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16). Since the Holy Spirit carries out the divine activity of bringing us to faith and preserving us in the faith, he is God.

The Holy Spirit is responsible for the divine work of creating a new life within us. Paul wrote, “You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:9-11).

Finally, the Holy Spirit was responsible for the divine work of equipping Christ for his work as our Redeemer. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit equipped Christ’s human nature with every gift necessary to carry out his work of redemption (Isaiah 11:1ff, John 3:34). He who distributes spiritual gifts as he determines gave the human nature of Christ every gift needed to equip him to be our Substitute and Savior.

The Holy Spirit is God because He has the attributes of God.

There is one God who has one divine essence. He is one in the exclusive sense. There is no one like him. Paul wrote, “There is no God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4). God is also one in the absolute sense. He is not capable of division. Moses said, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Jesus repeated these words when he said to the Jews, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Since the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, he also possesses the fullness of the divine nature. As we confess in the Athanasian Creed, “What the Father is, that is the Son, and that is the Holy Spirit”.

The Holy Spirit is present everywhere. There is no place where one can flee from him (omnipresence – Psalm 139:7). The Spirit is eternal (Hebrews 9:14), omnipotent (Psalm 33:6), holy (Psalm 51:11), gracious (Hebrews 10:29), love (Romans 15:30), and knows all things (omniscient – 1 Corinthians 2:10). These are attributes which belong to God alone. Since they belong to the Holy Spirit, he is God.

The Holy Spirit is God because He deserves divine honor.

The Lord says, “I am the Lord: that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols” (Isaiah 42:8). God will not share his glory with any one else. Thus, when the Bible gives the Holy Spirit the honor due to God alone, it is calling the Holy Spirit God. Scripture warns us not to grieve or offend the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 16:14; Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10; Hebrews 10:26-30; Ephesians 4:30-31). The threefold “holy, holy, holy” of Isaiah 6:3 gives glory to the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The naming of the Holy Spirit in the Aaronic (Numbers 6:24-26) and the Apostolic (2 Corinthians 13:14) benedictions give him the glory that is due him. Paul tells us that sanctified living honors the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Holy Spirit is worthy of our praise, as we sing in that great Pentecost hymn, “Creator Spirit, by whose aid”:

Immortal honor, endless fame,
Attend the almighty Father’s name;
The Savior Son be glorified,
Who for all humankind has died;
And equal adoration rise
To you, O Spirit in the skies (CW 188:4).

We reject the following errors:

1. **That the Holy Spirit is not a person but a mode of operation of a unipersonal God.** This error, known as *Modalistic Monarchianism*, was developed at first by Praxeas (A.D. 190) and later by Sabellius (early third century A.D.). They taught that God, the absolute monad, reveals himself

successively in three *prosopa* (faces): the Father in creation, the Son in the work of redemption (patripassianism), and the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification.

2. **That the Holy Spirit is not a person but a power emanating from God.** This error, known as *Dynamic Monarchianism*, was developed first by Theodotus the Fuller (A.D. 190). He taught that Jesus was a mere man whose deity was only a miraculous power which, in the form of the Holy Spirit, descended on Jesus at the time of his baptism. This error was later promoted in a similar form by Paul of Samosata (ca. A.D. 260-272). This error was condemned by the Augsburg Confession:

They also condemn the Samosatenes, old and new, who contend that there is only one person and craftily and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Spirit are not distinct persons since “Word” signifies a spoken word and “Spirit” signifies a movement which is produced in things (AC 1:5-6).

3. **That the Holy Spirit is subordinate to, or, less than the Father and the Son.** This view was held by Origen of Alexandria, Egypt (185-254). He taught that all three persons of the Trinity have the same essence but not the same existence. The Arians (A.D. fourth century) held a similar view. They maintained that the Holy Spirit was the first creature of the Son, and was subordinate to the Son as the Son is subordinate to the Father. The Arian trinity then consisted of the uncreated God and two created demi-gods. The subordinationist view was also held by the Arminians (A.D. 17th century). Their argument was that, since the Son is of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, the Son must be inferior to the Father and the Holy Spirit inferior to both the Father and the Son.

4. **That the Holy Spirit is not a person but a substance, quality, or power.** The following promulgated this error:
- a. Mormonism, founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, denies the personality of the Holy Spirit;
 - b. Christian Science, founded in 1866 by Mary Baker Eddy, teaches the Holy Spirit is Christian Science;
 - c. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), often called the founder of modern Protestant theology, taught that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the believing community (*Gemeinschaftsgeist*);
 - d. Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) taught that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal power emanating from God and dwelling in the church;
 - e. Robert Jensen (twentieth century author and editor of *Christian Dogmatics*) teaches that the Holy Spirit is a dynamism that gripped the church as it expected the future return of Jesus;
 - f. Jehovah’s Witnesses, founded in 1872 by Charles Russel, teach that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force or power.

5. **That the Holy Spirit is female in gender.** The Ebionites, an extreme Jewish sect of the second century A.D., and also one branch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, have taught that the Holy Spirit is a female person of the Trinity. Feminist theology of today prefers to worship God as *Sophia*, a goddess.

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE GIVER OF FAITH

Sin separates us from God.

As human beings we are able to accomplish many things. God our Creator has equipped us with an intellect of which we may and ought to make use. We have amassed much knowledge as a result of man's scientific curiosity and quest for discovery. And that knowledge is always growing. We learn how wisely the Creator has organized the world. God has also given us the freedom to decide many of the questions in our lives on our own.

There is one thing that we human beings are not able to do: we are not able to put our relationship with God in order by our own strength. Ever since our first parents fell into sin the relationship between God and us has been broken. In disobedience we have turned away from our Creator. Since then God and man have been separated (Isaiah 59:2). Sin has made us into enemies of God. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). When the apostle in Romans 8:7-8 speaks of flesh, he means our entire essence that has been alienated from God. Through sin we have cut our own lifeline. We are spiritually dead. That means we are no longer capable of any life before God (Ephesians 2:1). Not only the earthly death at the end of this life awaits us, but also eternal death in damnation. That means an existence without joy, apart from God, in eternal punishment.

The Holy Spirit opens our eyes.

The terrible thing about this is that we humans do not even notice what kind of situation we are in. We do not want to acknowledge how hopeless our actual situation is. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

If anything in this situation was going to change, something on the other side would have to happen. God himself intervened. He sent his Son Jesus Christ to this earth as the Savior. Jesus died on the cross on Golgotha, so that all people would be set free from their sin and guilt before God. The heavenly Father accepted the vicarious sacrifice of his Son as sufficient. Whoever believes in Jesus as his Savior receives pardon before God. He may live forever.

However the people must first of all realize that they are in need of such a Savior. For that purpose God sent messengers (prophets/apostles) to the people. They proclaimed to the people what God demands in his law. The Holy Spirit then brought about through the law that the people recognized both their guilt and the wrath of God that their guilt brought about. For, "through the law we become

conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20). The Holy Spirit opened their eyes, so that they could comprehend their true situation before God.

The Holy Spirit brings people to faith.

From what God has created we are able to recognize that there is a Creator. Nobody is able to excuse himself on account of ignorance (Romans 1:20). Moreover, God has written his law on every person’s heart (Romans 2:15). The law confronts us with the demands of the Almighty and terrifies us.

Religions of this world include some idea of the natural revelation of God. However, at the same time they misuse this knowledge and use it instead for their own idolatry. And above all they do not know of Jesus Christ, who is the only path on which the gracious God can be found. Jesus says about himself, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). And the apostles testify, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Through his act of redemption Jesus Christ has attained for us the forgiveness of our sins. Whoever holds on to this Savior in trust is saved. He does not need to fear the wrath of God anymore. God has mercy on him.

God effects such a believing trust through the Holy Spirit. “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Spirit of God opens our hearts through the gospel (the saving message about Jesus) so that we set all of our confidence and hope upon the Savior. Martin Luther writes to that end in his Large Catechism:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation. Therefore to sanctify is nothing else than to bring us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, which we could not obtain by ourselves (LC II:38f).

Through faith the Holy Spirit makes us God’s children. He sanctifies us and makes us pleasing before God through the merit of Christ (LC II:36f). God “has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (2 Timothy 1:9).

The Holy Spirit works conversion through means.

When God deals with us he employs outward means. That also pertains to the conversion of people. Conversion also does not take place without outward means. The Holy Spirit does not come into our hearts in some kind of indefinable way. His coming ought not be confused with emotional

excitement (cf. Pentecostals and Charismatics). The Holy Spirit could also come without means if he so wanted. However, he has bound himself to outward means. He does this for our sake, so that we do not have to first set out on a long search after him. Instead, we know where he works.

The means through which the Holy Spirit effects a person's conversion is the gospel in the Word and baptism. The good news of salvation through Jesus (the gospel) is able to break open our proud hearts and kindle the light of faith in us. In holy baptism the forgiveness that we receive on account of Christ is conveyed to us in a very personal way.

Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). And in James it is expressed, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (James 1:18).

Paul says about holy baptism, "We were therefore buried with him (Christ) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4). And the apostle Paul writes to Titus, "But when the kindness and love of our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:4-6).

The Word is the decisive factor also in baptism. Therefore our Lutheran Confessions say:

Prior to man's conversion there are only two efficient causes, namely the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as the Holy Spirit's instrument whereby he effects conversion. Man should hear this Word, though he cannot give it credence and accept it by his own powers but solely by the grace and operation of God the Holy Spirit (FC Epit. II:19).

Conversion remains a mystery and a miracle of God.

We certainly know the means through which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and brings us to Jesus (the gospel in the Word and baptism). However we do not know in detail how he effects our conversion. That remains a mystery.

The Holy Scriptures describe this occurrence with different pictures. Most often they speak about a "second birth." This means that through conversion we are born again as spiritual people (Titus 3:4-6). Jesus says to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). The comparison with a birth shows that something happens to us through conversion. The child (the fetus) plays a passive role as it is being brought into the world.

In the same way we are able to contribute nothing to our second birth. It is alone the work of the Holy Spirit. What Jeremiah says is true, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God" (KJV Jer. 31:18). [The KJV makes clear the passive sense (compare the original Luther

translation: “Bekehre du mich, so werde ich bekehrt, denn du, Herr, bist mein Gott.” The NIV translation is not literal: “Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God.”] There have always been people in the course of the history of the church who have either wanted to make the decision of man’s will into a prerequisite for conversion or have viewed faith as a necessary work that must be done beforehand. However all of these attempts are in error. They lead to the conclusion that in the end the person has himself to thank (at least in part) for his conversion. With such attempts they also contradict the clear testimony of Scripture. The Formula of Concord holds fast to the teaching of Scripture:

We believe that in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of unregenerated man cannot by any native or natural powers in any way understand, believe, accept, imagine, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate, but that man is entirely and completely dead and corrupted as far as anything good is concerned. Accordingly, we believe that after the Fall and prior to his conversion not a spark of spiritual powers has remained or exists in man by which he could make himself ready for the grace of God or to accept the proffered grace, nor that he has any capacity for grace by and for himself or can apply himself to it or prepare himself for it, or help, do, effect, or cooperate toward his conversion by his own powers, either altogether or half-way or in the tiniest or smallest degree ... (FC SD II:7).

Although a person is not able to contribute actively to his conversion, that does not mean that he is made into a machine at his conversion. A person is able to stand in the way of the work of the Holy Spirit. God does not force him to follow his call. Jesus laments over Jerusalem and its inhabitants, “How often have I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37). To how many people does that also apply today!

Faith is the work of God alone.

Because man is by nature spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) faith can not be his own work. It is impossible for a sinner to hold onto his Savior in believing trust, if the Holy Spirit does not bring this about in him.

Nevertheless when calls to faith occur in the New Testament (gospel imperatives; e.g. Acts 16:31), they must be understood correctly. They stand there not as demands of the law, but as evangelical promises. God grants through them the ability to believe together with the call to faith. The gospel is not only an invitation to believe, it awakens even the faith itself wherever it is heard.

Where infant baptism and the ability of infants to believe are rejected (e.g., Baptists), a misunderstanding of faith is most often involved. Faith is made into a work that the person must do either before or at conversion. According to the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, however, faith involves more than an intellectual recognition and an ability to express that which is believed (John 17:3). “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Where the Holy Spirit leads a heart to faith, there he awakens trust and confidence in the Savior. Such faith is also – even especially – possible for children. Jesus says to his disciples, “Unless you change and become

like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 18:3). Adults should learn from children what it means to hold onto the Savior with unconditional trust.

The Holy Spirit preserves us in the faith.

The Holy Spirit does not only bring us to faith. He also preserves us in it. It is of no use to a person if he only believed once earlier in his life. “But he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). However, the standing firm does not have to do with a human work. God promises us in his Word that he will also complete that which he has begun in believers.

The apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, “... our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:6-8). And he adds in another place, “... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

Because the Holy Spirit comes through means and the preservation of faith does not rest upon human efforts, we are urged to use the means of grace. For that reason the promise is made at confirmation to remain faithful to Word and sacrament. Only through these means has the Holy Spirit chosen to do his work in us and preserve us in faith to the end.

We reject the following errors:

1. That people have a free will in spiritual matters by which they can cooperate with God before or during conversion (Decision for Christ Theology);
2. That the main work of the Holy Spirit is found in the giving of the gift of tongues or the gift of healing;
3. That faith is a work of man by which he accepts and thus completes the redemptive work of Christ;
4. That faith cannot exist without an intellectual comprehension of the gospel or that infants cannot believe;
5. That conversion is irresistible (Calvin);
6. That preservation in the faith is the work of man, or, that good works preserve faith.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT USES WORD AND SACRAMENT TO CARRY OUT HIS WORK

The importance of the Holy Spirit.

The importance of the Holy Spirit is expressed in these words of the apostle Paul, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b). Without the work of the Holy Spirit none of us would be children of God. From the Bible we know that our Savior’s work of redemption is complete, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation have been won for all people. In order that we may

know and believe in Christ and his redemptive work God has sent the Holy Spirit to carry out the important work of creating and sustaining saving faith in our hearts, and this work will continue until the Lord returns on the last day. The apostle Paul sums it up clearly when he writes, “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

Jesus often spoke of the Holy Spirit during His earthly ministry.

Jesus often spoke about the Holy Spirit whom he would send after he withdrew his visible presence from them. In the 14th chapter of John we read these words of Jesus, “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:25-26). Again: “But I tell you the truth: It is good for you that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because men do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned” (John 16:7-10). And again: “But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). And then on Pentecost Day there was a special out-pouring of the Holy Spirit, graphically described in the second chapter of Acts, where we read of the disciples that “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (languages) as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4).

Our purpose now is to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church, namely that he uses Word and sacrament to carry out his work of bringing to faith and preserving in the faith. This is so important because we are by nature totally unable to believe. In the Third Article of Luther’s Small Catechism we have a clear and concise explanation of the necessity of the Holy Spirit and his work: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to him because we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), and again in Romans, “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7). We sing in one of our hymns,

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded
Till Thy Spirit breaks our night
With the beams of truth unclouded
Thou alone to God canst win us
Thou must work all good within us (ELH 1:2).

Because of this sinful condition there is nothing we can do of ourselves to change this sad situation. We need a change of heart and are unable to produce it and that is why we need the Holy Spirit. He alone can work saving faith in our hearts and he does this through the Word. Luther points out that the Holy Spirit could do this without the Word, but it pleased him to work through the Word:

It has thus pleased God to impart the Spirit, not without the Word, but through the Word, so as to have us as cooperators with him (1 Corinthians 3:9) when we sound forth outwardly what he himself alone breathes inwardly wherever he will, thus doing things that he could do of course without the Word, though he does not will to do so. And who are we that we should inquire into the cause of the divine will? It is enough to know that God so wills, and it is becoming for us to reverence, love, and adore his will, putting a restraint on the rashness of reason (LW 33:155).

Our Lutheran confessions also point out the necessity of the Spirit's work in these words:

Just as little as a person who is physically dead can by his own powers prepare or accommodate himself to regain temporal life, so little can a man who is spiritually dead in sin, prepare or address himself by his own power to obtain spiritual and heavenly righteousness and life, unless the Son of God has liberated him from the death of sin and made him alive. Thus Scripture denies to the intellect, heart and will of the natural man every capacity, aptitude, skill, and ability to think anything good or right in spiritual matters, to understand them, to begin them, to undertake them, to do them, to accomplish or cooperate in them as of himself (FC SD II:11, 12).

As the Holy Spirit carries out his work through the Word he does this through the law and the gospel. "Through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20). The law also makes us feel guilty and reveals God's wrath against sin. Therefore, the law does not bring us God's grace, but serves to show us our desperate need. The gospel, on the other hand, is a powerful and precious means of grace. It both offers and bestows the forgiveness of sins and works the faith to accept what it offers. Bishop Laache in his devotional book, *Book of Family Prayer*, sums it up as follows: "The law demands love, demands it by right and with authority; but it can only demand, not give; it can give nothing at all. But the gospel can; it shows forth the grace of God in Christ. He has fulfilled the law in our stead; and God has ordained that all who believe this and trust in Christ shall be partakers of the benefit of his fulfillment of the law and of his suffering. The gospel says: All is finished, and all things are given you. Thus faith is born in the heart that has been troubled by the law; and we then take refuge in Jesus, are covered by the mantle of his righteousness, and in him we stand justified before God" (p. 67).

The Word has power, then, because the Holy Spirit works through it. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). From other passages such as "Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17), it is clear that the Spirit works in and through the Word. Conversely, where the word is absent, there can be no conversion to faith. The Holy Spirit uses the Word, as a tool, or instrument, in carrying out his work of bringing people to faith.

The danger of separating the Holy Spirit from the Word.

Many churches today continue the teachings of the Enthusiasts (Schwärmer) in Luther's day who separated the Spirit from the Word in conversion. They say that the Spirit comes alongside of the Word, yet is not in and with the Word. Those who separate the Spirit from the word often look to their own feelings and emotions for the certainty that they have faith. They say, "I know I'm saved because I feel saved. I'm saved because I have made a decision for Christ and experienced this peace within," and they love to sing "I have decided to follow Jesus." Those who separate the Spirit from the Word foster the idea that they can do something to help in their own salvation. The apostle Paul emphatically states that we receive the Spirit not by works of the law but by faith, which comes from hearing the gospel (Galatians 3:5). Our confessions state that "whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil" (SA III, VIII:10).

Luther points out the danger of separating the Holy Spirit from the Word in these words:

Do you not see here the devil, the enemy of God's order? With all his mouthing of words "Spirit, Spirit," he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you, but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind. They do not tell you how or when, whither or what, but you are to experience what they do (LW 40:147).

Luther correctly observes that "without the Holy Spirit hearts are either hardened in sin or they despair. But both are contrary to the will of God. By the Holy Spirit the godly navigate between this satanic Scylla and Charybdis and cast themselves upon the superabundant and infinite mercy of God. They confess their sins, but at the same time they also confess the immeasurable mercy of God" (Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*: 662). Luther also says that "the Word is the only bridge and path by which the Holy Spirit comes to us" (*Ibid*, p. 663).

The power of the Word is not irresistible.

While it is the Holy Spirit who works faith through the Word, and he desires to do this in the hearts of all people, yet many can and do reject his will to save them, and this saddens the heart of the Lord. Jesus said to the people of his day, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37). And Stephen said to the people stoning him, "You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: you always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

Rather than frustrating the work of the Holy Spirit by stubborn resistance, let us rather be thankful that the Holy Spirit uses the Word to work and sustain saving faith in our hearts, and to that end may our prayer be,

O Holy Spirit, grant us grace
 That we our Lord and Savior
 In faith and fervent love embrace
 And truly serve Him ever,
 So that when death is drawing nigh
 We to His open wounds may fly
 And find in them salvation (ELH 25:1).

The Holy Spirit also uses the sacraments to carry out his work.

We refer to the sacraments as the “visible Word” because in the sacraments there are visible elements connected with the Word which makes them such. In baptism we see water and in the Supper we see bread and wine, but the Word connected with the elements makes it a sacrament. The sacraments are precious means of grace through which the Holy Spirit carries out his work by offering and bestowing the forgiveness of sins.

Baptism is a means of grace.

Baptism is more than just water because the water in baptism is connected with God’s Word when it is applied “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). In his sermon on Pentecost Day Peter says that in baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). To Nicodemus Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:5). In his letter to Titus the apostle Paul writes, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

Baptism puts to death the old Adam and gives life to the new man. In his letter to the Romans the apostle also writes, “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:3-4).

Baptism also clothes us in the spotless robe of Christ’s righteousness. “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). Using the analogy of marital love Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives just as “Christ loved the church and gave himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word” (Ephesians 5:26). Yes, baptism makes us holy in God’s sight. And the apostle Peter referring to the world-wide flood in Noah’s day says, “And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

In short the blessings of baptism are so boundless that “if timid nature consider them, it may well doubt whether they could all be true. Suppose there were a physician who had such skill that people

would not die, or even though they died would afterward live forever. Just think how the world would snow and rain money upon him! Because of the pressing crowd of rich men no one else could get near him. Now, here in Baptism there is brought free to every man's door just such a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of men" (LC IV:43).

The Lord's Supper is also a means of grace.

On the evening before his death our Lord Jesus Christ instituted a sacred meal commemorating his atoning death. This meal is known as the Sacrament of the Altar, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, Communion, the Breaking of Bread. This sacrament has been, and continues to be, a great blessing to Christians, because those who partake of it receive much more than mere bread and wine. Luther states in his Small Catechism what we receive in this sacrament in these words: "The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink."

We know this from the writings of the holy evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, together with St. Paul who wrote: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take eat, this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup after supper, gave thanks and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; this cup is the New Covenant in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" The apostle Paul adds, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

From these words we learn that under the earthly bread and wine Jesus gives us his true body and blood which were broken and shed for us on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. He says of the bread, "This is my body" and of the wine, "This is my blood." He does not say that the bread and wine are merely signs or symbols of his body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16). Nor does he say that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, but they are so intimately united with them that he can say that the bread and wine are his body and blood.

From the same words of institution we learn the benefit we receive from this sacrament, namely, "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the sacrament and from it flow other blessings, namely, life and salvation.

In the Supper of our Lord the gospel is personalized. The Lord takes each one of his children aside from the noise and pressures of life, and knowing their desperate need for assurance and strength as they battle against sin, Satan, and their own sinful flesh, he says, "Take, eat; take, drink for the *forgiveness of sins*."

As we ponder the beautiful purpose of the Supper may we say with Luther, "I am very fond of the precious, blessed Supper of my Lord Jesus Christ in which he gives me his body and blood to eat and to

drink even bodily with my own mouth along with the exceedingly sweet and kind words, ‘given for you, shed for you’” (LW 38:227).

The enduring comfort of the means of grace.

The doctrine of the means of grace is indeed a wonderful comfort for the believer. It is through these means that the Holy Spirit continues to carry out his work of serving our spiritual needs and preparing us for a blessed eternity in heaven. Since he is present and active in the means of grace we do not have to run around looking for God’s grace and forgiveness; rather the Holy Spirit comes to us right where we are and through the audible, legible, and visible Word offers and bestows upon us the blessings of Christ’s redemptive work. Bishop Laache has put it this way: “Come to him where he has made an appointment with you, namely in the gospel, that is, the Word and in the sacraments of baptism and the altar. When he says to you: You, who are baptized unto me have put on my righteousness; you, who eat and drink my body and blood abide in me and I in you; you are free, and you have power to believe and power to serve me, then he is near to you, nearer than anything else whatsoever; for what he speaks comes to pass” (Laache, *Book of Family Prayer*, p. 61).

Our Lutheran Confessions sum up the work of the Holy Spirit in these words:

Creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries on his work unceasingly until the last day. For this purpose he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all his work. For he has not yet gathered together all his Christian people, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness. Therefore we believe in him who daily brings us into this community through the Word and imparts, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins. Then when his work has been finished and we abide in it, having died to the world and all evil, he will finally make us perfectly and eternally holy. We now wait in faith for this to be accomplished through the Word (LC: II:61-62).

In the meantime as we await that glorious day may we continue to sing with the church of God,

O grant that in Thy holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord;
And when our journey endeth here
Receive us into glory there (ELH 511:9).

We reject the following errors:

1. That the Holy Spirit works faith and produces sanctification apart from, or along side of, the gospel and sacraments (Enthusiasts; Calvinists);
2. That the gospel is merely historical information which is to be accepted by one’s own personal decision for Christ;

3. That the sacraments are mere acts, or sacrifices, which we perform in obedience to God rather than being means of grace by which God gives life and salvation to sinners;
4. That the certainty of our salvation is to be found in our feeling about God rather than in the means of grace.

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMFORTS THE CHURCH

When Jesus promised to send the Spirit to his disciples, he used the name “comforter” (*parakletos*). This name of the Holy Spirit (used also as a name for Christ in 1 John 2:2) is found in the Bible only in the three chapters of John’s Gospel, which record the farewell speeches of Jesus to his disciples on the night before his death (John 14-16). Still it has become a very common name for the Spirit in the language of the church. As we shall see, it is the Holy Spirit who makes the comfort of the gospel live in our hearts by bringing us to faith in Christ. It is he who gives us the assurance of forgiveness for all our sins and the certain hope of everlasting life in the glories of heaven. This is truly the only real and lasting comfort that sinners can find in this vale of tears. The Holy Spirit is the divine Comforter of all the believers.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us in a language we understand.

Man is created with the ability to hear and to understand the meaning of God’s Word. God has given man linguistic ability (Exodus 4:11-12). Both God and man spoke the same language, and were able to communicate with each other. Even before the woman was created, God and Adam communicated in a common language. The linguistic ability therefore had a function and a purpose before there was another human with whom to speak. God gave man divine truth through his Word (Genesis 1:28-29; 2:16-17) and man answered with words that were expressions of his faith in him and his obedience to him (Genesis 2:20, 23).

After the fall into sin, there was a dramatic change within man. The linguistic abilities were still there, but Adam no longer expressed love for God with his words. Instead his words were full of fear, foolishness, excuses, and accusations (Genesis 3:10, 12). But God continued to speak to man after the fall in a language he could understand. The first promise of the Savior, God gave in a human language (Genesis 3:15).

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the prophets and the apostles.

All three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, cooperate in this work of giving us divine truth. The divine works performed by God outside the Deity cannot be divided (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*). But nevertheless Scripture ascribes this work of giving divine truth chiefly to the Holy Spirit. We confess according to the Nicene Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit ... who has spoken through the prophets.” Both the words of the prophets in the Old Testament and the words Jesus spoke to the apostles in the New Testament are ascribed to the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 7:12, 2 Peter 1:21, Acts 1:2, John 16:12-15). The apostle Paul claims to speak spiritual truths with words he has received from the

Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). Also, when the divine inspiration of Scripture is described as a direct revelation by the glorified Christ to his apostle John as his penman, these words are ascribed to the Spirit. On Christ's command John wrote in the letters to the seven churches: "He who has an ear, let him hear what *the Spirit* says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17).

Holy Scripture is unique and sufficient as a revelation of divine truth. Although it does not reveal all divine matters (1 Corinthians 13:12, Romans 11:33-34), we have no spiritual or divine truth or revelation from God apart from the words of Scripture. "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony!" (Isaiah 8:19-20). We agree with the axiom of the old theologians who stated: "New revelations in regard to the Christian doctrine either coincide with the doctrine contained in Scripture, and then they are superfluous, or they offer something else than is recorded in the Word of the Apostles and Prophets, and then they are to be rejected" (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I: 210).

The Holy Spirit comforts only through the Word and sacraments.

The work of Scripture and the work of the Spirit are indivisible. Scripture has a divine effect because the Holy Spirit works through the word of Scripture as his instrument.

Since Scripture is divided into two parts – the law and the gospel – finding the comfort of the Holy Spirit is a matter of separating law and gospel. Through the law the Holy Spirit gives knowledge about sin (Romans 3:20) and convicts man about his guilt (John 16:8). This work of convicting the world of sin the Lutheran Confessions call the "foreign work" (*opus alienum*) of the Holy Spirit. But this work of reproving and convicting of guilt will end either in hardening or in despair, unless the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the gospel, also brings the sinner to the assurance of forgiveness through Christ. The "real work" (*opus proprium*) of the Holy Spirit is therefore to comfort the sinner and give him peace (John 14:25-27). Through the gospel he works new birth, faith and salvation (Romans 1:16-17, I Peter 1:23).

Therefore the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also through the office of the Law reprove the world of sin (John 16:8), and thus must do in the New Testament, as the prophet says (Isaiah 28:21), *opus alienum, ut faciat opus proprium*, that is, He must do the work of another (reprove), in order that He may [afterwards] do His own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace (FC SD V:11).

The Holy Spirit works through the gospel in the Word and sacraments. These are the means which God has instituted in Scripture to be used regularly in his church. What is true about the words of Scripture is also true about the sacraments. The work of the sacraments is identical to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Through *holy baptism* the Spirit works new birth, as Jesus said to Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). And

Paul calls baptism “the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). By the daily remembrance of our baptism the Holy Spirit strengthens us in the faith, that in Christ all our sins are forgiven, and that we are the children of God (Galatians 3:26-27).

The Holy Spirit also comforts us through the *Lord's Supper*, which is to be celebrated often in the church. In the Lord's Supper we receive assurance that we belong to the new covenant, which means that God has forgiven us our wickedness (Jeremiah 31:34; Luke 22:20, Exodus 24:8). In this sacrament we are assured by the Holy Spirit that Christ's body and blood, which are truly present in the sacrament, were given and shed for us for the remission of our sins.

The biblical doctrine of the means of grace is of great comfort to the believers. It teaches us where to go when we need comfort and help against sin and all the consequences of sin. We are to turn to the gospel in Word and sacraments, in which God the Holy Spirit deals with us and gives us faith.

To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merits of Christ, when we believe this (AC V: 1-3).

Since the ministry of the gospel will be upheld on earth until the end of time, the Holy Spirit will continue to comfort us until the end of time. “‘As for me, this is my covenant with them,’ says the Lord, ‘My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,’ says the Lord” (Isaiah 59:21). God's covenant with his people implies that the church of God will exist until the last day. This church exists where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. Through this preaching of the Word and administering of the sacraments the Holy Spirit will continue his work of comforting until the end of time.

The Holy Spirit comforts the church with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the center of the comfort of the Holy Spirit is the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Savior. The Spirit comforts the church with the testimony of Christ who, by his perfect obedience of God's law in our place and his suffering and death for all our sins, has reconciled us with God. We find comfort against sin and all its consequences in Christ and his work.

The comfort of the Holy Spirit is the gospel of Jesus Christ. But not only does the Holy Spirit show us Jesus Christ as our Savior; he also gives us faith in him through the gospel, and in this way he brings comfort all the way into our hearts, as we also confess in Martin Luther's Large Catechism:

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him, and obtain him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel (LC II:38).

We need comfort from the Holy Spirit.

Because of the consequences of the fall we need a comfort and help that no man can give us. We need divine comfort from the Holy Spirit.

Because of the fall into sin, Adam and Eve were filled with a fearful expectation of judgment. The true knowledge of God and the perfect love for God were replaced by fright and fear (Genesis 3:7-13). Scripture teaches that the sin of our first parents has been passed along to all their descendants (Genesis 5:1, 3; Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3). Therefore all men have this fear of judgment. In spite of all religious endeavors natural man's personal relation to God is and remains a relation of fear and despair. Because of his transgressions he has an evil conscience and can do nothing but flee from God. He lives without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). In his hopeless situation man himself can not find any real and lasting comfort.

Also all other consequences of sin continue to plague all men throughout their lives. In spite of great progress in medicine, childbearing continues to be painful for the mother (Genesis 3:16). Work can still be tiresome and difficult (Genesis 3:17-19). Death has passed to all people (Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12). Because of sin all people are separated from God (Genesis 3:22-24; Ephesians 2:12).

In his spiritual blindness after the fall man does not even realize how hopeless his situation is. Before the Holy Spirit can comfort, he must therefore convict fallen man of sin. God reproached and exposed the fallen Adam when he said: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Genesis 3:11). Speaking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus said: "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Before the Holy Spirit can comfort the afflicted, he must afflict the comfortable.

To our first parents God gave the promise of a Savior who would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). This first gospel promise is pure comfort because it deals with Christ and his work for us. It did not depend on Adam and Eve and it does not depend on us to free ourselves from the power of the devil and the harmful consequences of sin. The promised Savior alone would do this. At a very high price he would crush the serpent's head, that is, the power and dominion of the devil, and free us from sin and death.

This comforting message has been passed on to all sinners through the word of the prophets and the apostles until this day. The prophets preached about Christ who would come, and the apostles preached about Christ who has come. Through their preaching the Holy Spirit has comforted afflicted sinners both in the Old and the New Testaments. The main point in both the Old and the New Testaments is the message about Christ, and the chief work of the Holy Spirit is to comfort sinners with this promise of Christ.

The first man and woman had to hold on to the promise of a Savior against sin and all its consequences. This promise was the Spirit's comfort in their lives. Their senses and reason could not confirm the truthfulness of this promise. If they were to draw any conclusions from the pain and toil they

experienced, it would rather be the assumption that God's wrath was resting on them. They had only God's promise to cling to, a promise that assured them of a Savior. They had to believe God's promise without anything else confirming or guaranteeing it than the fact that God said so. They believed without seeing (Hebrews 11:1). God's dealings with us find no support in our understanding so that the grace promised to us can be affirmed by what we experience with our senses. It was only by faith that our first parents could be comforted through the promise that God gave them. The same is true about us. It is faith that believes the gospel promises and it is the Holy Spirit who awakens this faith in our hearts. In this way he brings his comfort into our hearts.

The Holy Spirit comforts the troubled sinner.

In order to help us believe the gospel promises in the difficult times of life the Holy Spirit regularly trains our faith in the Lord's Supper. We believe that the true body and blood of Christ are present in this sacrament, in, with, and under the bread and wine, because God says so in the words of institution. When we receive the sacrament, we are trained by the Holy Spirit to believe what we cannot see, in order that we also will believe what we cannot see on other occasions. We believe only because the Holy Spirit speaks to us in his Word.

Since the Holy Spirit works through the outward Word, it is of great importance that every Christian knows what gives comfort from the Holy Spirit to people who are afflicted by their sins. When we listen to God's law, we are troubled in our hearts. The troubled sinners can only be comforted when they are given the knowledge about God's universal grace and forgiveness. This knowledge the Holy Spirit gives us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. By pointing to objective justification, he comforts troubled sinners (1 John 2:1-2). He tells us that Christ has borne our sins on the cross of Calvary (1 Peter 2:24) and has given us the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). When we feel condemned in our hearts, the Spirit assures us that God, who knows everything, "is greater than our hearts" (1 John 3:20), and that "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The Holy Spirit assures us that we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). God no longer remembers our sins (Psalm 103:12; Jeremiah 31:34). They are "hurled into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).

The Holy Spirit not only sets before us this comfort as an object of faith, but he also creates faith in our hearts and in this way brings divine comfort to us. He works this faith in us that we regard God's Word and promises to be more sure and true than what we see with our eyes and experience with our senses.

The Holy Spirit enlightens us.

After the fall human reason is spiritually blind (1 Corinthians 2:14). The fallen man lives in a thick darkness (Isaiah 60:2) and is blind to the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Because of this blindness the depraved reason always takes the attitude that what the Bible says about salvation is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14). Only the Holy Spirit can cure this blindness, so that a man can believe that the gospel is not foolishness, but heavenly, divine wisdom. The Holy Spirit overcomes our spiritual

blindness and reveals to us what “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). He gives light to the darkened hearts through the Word of God (2 Peter 1:19). Paul says that his assignment from God was to go to the Gentiles “to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18).

For this reason we ought not to despair at the sight of the consequences Adam’s fall brought on all his descendants. We are not left to spiritual darkness and blindness. When the contrite sinner, who has lost all hope of saving himself, comes to see that there is hope, forgiveness, and salvation for him in the Son of God, who obeyed the law in his place and who suffered his punishment for him on the cross, he finds true comfort. That is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes through his blessed work. Through his Word the Holy Spirit gives us true knowledge of God. And just like the apostles we also have greater confidence in the Words of Scripture than in our own senses and understanding.

The Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray.

In the fall people lost a proper relationship with God. God continued to speak to them, but they could not answer in a way that pleased God. God does not hear the prayers of unbelievers, but prayers from believers go up before God (Proverbs 15:8; Revelation 8:4). The Holy Spirit enables us to pray to God through Christ (Galatians 4:6).

God wants us to pray to him in all trouble and to praise him (Psalm 50:15). The Holy Spirit opens our lips so that we can declare his praises (Psalm 51:15). He helps us to pray by showing us what we need and what God’s gifts are. Yes, he gives the very words to use in our prayers to God. The Spirit knows better than we, what our needs are, and he helps us to pray in harmony with God’s will. In addition to this, the Holy Spirit himself also intercedes for us (Romans 8:26-27).

The Holy Spirit comforts us amid the toil of everyday life.

God sends suffering upon the believers. But amid the suffering the Spirit gives us comfort so that we can even rejoice in our sufferings. As believers in Christ we know that God does everything for our good (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28). The Holy Spirit teaches us that our suffering serves a spiritual good (Romans 5:1-5; 8:28-39).

“God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world” by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of his Son, and that to every one His cross shall and must work together for good, because they are all called, according to the purpose, whence Paul has concluded that it is certain and indubitable that “neither tribulation nor distress, nor death nor life,” etc., “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (FC SD XI: 49).

The Holy Spirit assures us that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

In the book of Revelation the Spirit directs us to Christ who is the victorious one and who has authority to judge. The judgment, by which the enemies of God are ultimately defeated and by which Christ triumphs, surrounded by his people who have been saved from the great tribulation, is described throughout this book. For our reason it is hard to understand how God can be almighty and good when wickedness is so great. Through faith we understand that God has everything under control and that all the elect will certainly be saved. Christ is protecting his church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18). Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39).

The Holy Spirit comforts us with the assurance of the glory waiting for us.

All believers can feel and see that their bodies deteriorate and die. But we still believe that we have eternal life through faith in Christ. The Apostle writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” The Holy Spirit keeps on focusing on the invisible, and when we experience decay in our bodies, the Holy Spirit renews our inner self with the assurance of the glory waiting for us. He continues to impress on us Christ’s promise of the resurrection (John 5:24; 11:25-26).

The Holy Spirit comforts us through the doctrine of election.

The doctrine of election is the ultimate comfort to the struggling and suffering church on earth (*ecclesia militans*). Having been brought to faith in our Savior Jesus Christ through the gospel, we meet suffering and affliction in our new lives as Christians, and we see the activities of the enemies of God. It is then that the Holy Spirit comforts us with the Word of God, speaking about his gracious election. God’s Word shows us that he has elected from eternity every one of those who will be saved, and has ordained to save us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore the Holy Spirit has created faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel. The reason for our salvation is God’s eternal decision to save us through the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ. This eternal decision cannot be revoked or aborted (Romans 8:28-30). That is why every believer can be absolutely sure of his salvation. Neither sin, nor the devil, nor the wickedness in this world can deprive us of our salvation (Romans 8:38, 39). Because of God’s decision our salvation lies safely in the almighty hands of our Savior Jesus Christ, and he assures us: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

We reject the following errors:

1. That the Holy Spirit comforts apart from his Word and sacraments;
2. That comfort is to be found in how we feel about God rather than in God’s means of grace;
3. That human reason and experience can bring us comfort.

V. SANCTIFICATION IN THE NARROW SENSE

The Holy Spirit sanctifies and preserves the church.

Sanctification is used in a narrow sense to refer to the internal spiritual transformation which follows upon justification through faith (Romans 6:22; 1 Thessalonians 4:7). The proper order between faith and good works must be maintained and preserved as well as between justification and renewal or sanctification. For good works do not precede faith; nor is sanctification prior to justification. First the Holy Spirit kindles faith in us in conversion through the hearing of the gospel. Faith apprehends the grace of God in Christ whereby the person is justified. After the person is justified, the Holy Spirit next renews and sanctifies him, and from this renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works will follow (FC SD III: 40ff).

Sanctification in the wide sense.

Sanctification is used in a wide sense to refer to the entire work of the Holy Spirit by which he brings us to faith and keeps us in the faith (cf. Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed). The Holy Spirit calls by the gospel and baptism. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes a person a believer. The means by which he makes believers is the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The gracious call of God through the gospel is effectual; it kindles faith in Jesus Christ, who is received by faith (Romans 8:30). Where the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, one may well expect to find faith, for the preaching of the gospel is the prerequisite of faith. Faith depends upon the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17).

The Holy Spirit uses baptism to sanctify.

This salvation is given to believers through the washing of regeneration. God uses the washing of holy baptism as a means by which he transmits and seals to the believer the benefits of salvation. Through baptism regeneration is wrought in the heart of man; he is born anew to a spiritual life. The water of baptism works a renewing of the heart and mind.

Baptism is a one time event, but the renewal begun by the Holy Spirit continues throughout the life of a Christian. The new man created in baptism is renewed from day to day (2 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Peter 4:1). The water of baptism, which is simple water, is endowed, by the power of God the Holy Spirit, with such properties that it becomes the bearer of God's salvation to the heart of man (Titus 3:4-5).

The Holy Spirit called people to faith on Pentecost (Acts 2:38-47). The promise of the Holy Spirit, who works repentance, is active in baptism and gives forgiveness, is for all who hear Peter's words. We can demonstrate it this way: when the law has accomplished its purpose by working contrition of the heart, the Holy Spirit brings the assurance of the gospel, the good news of the grace of God in Christ. "Preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This is the way the Holy Spirit calls and invites people to come to Christ and offers to them the blessings of his salvation. This is expressed in both the

Old and New Testaments. “Come, for everything is now ready” (Luke 14:17). Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my unfailing kindnesses promised to David” (Isaiah 55:3). “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). This invitation is free, without conditions or obligations, which one must fulfill before accepting it. It offers to every sinner grace and forgiveness “without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

This invitation is universal. It is addressed to all people without exception or distinction (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Revelation 14:6). For this reason the gospel must be preached to all nations to the end of time (Mark 13:10).

This invitation is sincere in every case, no matter who reads or hears it. Those who reject it are also sincerely called. “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Romans 10:21).

This invitation is always efficacious, that is, because of the blessings it freely offers and because of the power of God operating through it, it is always able to work faith in the hearts of people (Hebrews 4:12; Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:15).

The Holy Spirit enlightens us with his gifts.

Enlightenment pertains to believing the message of the gospel. Whenever the gospel call is effective, it works in the heart of man the acceptance of its invitation; it works faith. Paul speaks of the Word of God “which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). By the holy calling we are saved, that is, converted (2 Timothy 1:9). We are called out of darkness into God’s wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). This means calling us out of spiritual ignorance and despair into spiritual knowledge and faith in the grace of God. This is what the Bible says, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Koehler puts it this way, “As in the beginning God by His creative Word called the physical light into existence, so has He by His Word of grace enlightened our dark and despairing hearts by giving us knowledge of His glorious grace as it is revealed in Christ Jesus” (Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*:132-133). The knowledge of faith is a gift of God (Philippians 1:29) which he has put in us by means of the gospel (Romans 10:17).

Enlightenment does not pertain to understanding intellectually the message of the gospel.

Unbelievers can understand the meaning of the words of the gospel. We must distinguish between an intellectual knowledge of spiritual things and the spiritual knowledge of these things. A bare intellectual knowledge is not faith. It makes no impression on the heart. Knowledge becomes the same as faith the moment the Holy Spirit works faith in Christ in the heart. The mere knowledge of the gospel and its precious promises is dead if it does not move the heart. It becomes alive the moment it creates in the heart a longing for the promised gifts.

The Holy Spirit enlightens by giving us faith.

The Holy Spirit enlightens us by giving us faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin (John 8:12; Acts 26:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Ephesians 1:17). This spiritual knowledge, no matter how weak and small it may be, is true saving faith by which the heart turns and reaches out for the grace of God offered in the gospel. Each increase and strengthening of this knowledge is an additional gift, whereby the first faint longing of the heart grows into joyful assurance. Thus the Holy Spirit enlightens us with His gifts (cf. FC SD II:14). The very moment that this spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation moves the heart, the attitude of man toward God is changed radically. Man is converted. The promises of the gospel become precious wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Man is no longer an enemy of God, but God has returned him to the Shepherd and Overseer of his soul (1 Peter 2:25).

The Holy Spirit gives us his gifts.

One of the gifts that we receive from the Holy Spirit is the gift of peace in the knowledge that we are justified in Christ. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

As those in the Lord, our lives will be different from what they once were. We will live for Christ and not for ourselves. We will live as children of God ought to live, sanctified lives (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10; John 15:5).

The Holy Spirit keeps us in the one true faith to life eternal.

There is a constant struggle between the new man and the old man in the Christian. It is true that the sinful nature does not conform to what God wants, just as it is that the spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. Because of this conflict, a believer does not always do what he wants (Galatians 5:17). Thank God that a believer, despite his struggle with the sinful nature, is controlled by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9).

The Holy Spirit preserves faith through baptism: To show us how this works St. Paul uses the picture of being buried and raised again like Christ (Romans 6:4). Luther says, “Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare ... ‘whoever believes and is baptized will be saved’” (SC). The Holy Spirit preserves faith through the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Luther again says, “That is shown us by these words, ‘given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation” (SC).

The Holy Spirit keeps the Christian church in the one true faith.

Where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are used according to Christ’s institution, there the church will be found, for there the Holy Spirit is at work (Matthew 28:19-20; 26:26-27; 18:20).

Luther says, “I believe that I can not by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead; and he will give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true” (SC).

We reject the following errors:

1. That sanctification is the basis for justification or that sanctification precedes justification;
2. That the chief gifts of the Holy Spirit are speaking in tongues and healing;
3. That people can believe the gospel by their own thinking or choosing;
4. That the Holy Spirit preserves faith apart from the means of grace.

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO HIS CHURCH

God gives the Holy Spirit and his gifts through the means of grace.

We believe that the Holy Spirit, with his gifts, grace, and powerful working, is available only in the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament. The Holy Spirit comes to us through baptism. On Pentecost Peter declared, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Peter tied the reception of the Holy Spirit to the sacrament of baptism. Baptism, then, is a means of grace by which the Holy Spirit gives to us faith in Christ. It is not a mere act of obedience performed by us. Paul tied the reception of the Holy Spirit to the preaching of the gospel. He wrote to the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (3:2) The Holy Spirit, with his gifts and work, comes to us through the means of grace. We are not to look for him or his work apart from the means of grace (cf. also Romans 1:16, 10:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:23).

The Lutheran church has historically asserted this biblical truth. In the Smalcald Articles Luther asserted, “We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil” (SA III, VIII:10). In his comments on John 6:63 Luther asserted, “God has established this order regarding his Holy Spirit, that ordinarily he is to come through the Word. Christ himself says at this place ... He will not have it that you fly to and fro to seek or to imagine a ‘Spirit’ so that you might say: I have received it through the ‘inner voice’ of the Holy Ghost ... Christ will not accept such inner voice, but binds us to his word only: He does not want the Spirit separated from his word. Therefore, if you hear someone boasting that he got something by inspiration or inner voice of the Holy Spirit, and it lacks God’s word, be it what it may, then declare it to be the abominable devil” (St. L. VII:2389, 2388). The Lutheran dogmatician Francis Pieper, asserted, “The remission of sins for Christ’s sake and faith in this remission, regeneration unto spiritual life and all the spiritual gifts connected with it, God will give

only through the means of grace he has ordained, through the word of the gospel and the sacraments” (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III:134).

Scripture distinguishes the fruit of the Spirit from the gifts of the Spirit.

Scripture speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, that is, that which flows from the Christian’s new nature. In Galatians 5:22, 23, Paul wrote, “The fruit (*karpos*) of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” In these verses Paul described the new life which flows from the new man, the handiwork of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. This “fruit” is common to all Christians.

The “gifts” of the Spirit are gifts given to individual Christians to equip them for service to the church in either the public ministry or the priesthood of all believers. These gifts are not common to all Christians. The Holy Spirit gives a diversity of gifts to a diversity of people. All these gifts are to be used by these various believers to edify the church. In Ephesians 4, Paul spoke of the gifts which the exalted Christ gives to his church “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12). The Lord called and equipped Paul for the work of the public ministry. Besides Paul, the Lord also provided other “gifts” for the building up of his church. They were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers (Ephesians 4:11), believers equipped by God for carrying out the work of the public ministry.

It should be noted that giving gifts to the church is an “external act” of the Trinity. All three persons of the Trinity cooperate in doing this work. Thus, Scripture can attribute the work of giving and equipping people to build up the church both to the Son (Ephesians 4:11) and to the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4, 27-28, Acts 20:28).

The Holy Spirit also equips the saints for service in the universal priesthood of all believers. He gives individual believers gifts which are used to build up the church. In Ephesians 4 Paul spoke of the gifted men Christ gave to the church for the public ministry. In Romans 12 he speaks not only of the public ministry, but of many other ways in which the Holy Spirit equips the saints for service to the church. Paul wrote, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:6-8). Prophesying (proclaiming God’s will in accord with Scripture) is the only gift in this list which has a direct connection with the ministry of the Word. Some of these other gifts may be reflective of the offices in the church, occupied by those elders that did not labor in word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17). Others seem to reflect the fact that God gives believers gifts to serve the church in the priesthood of all believers.

Finally, Peter also spoke of “gifts” given for the benefit of the church. He wrote, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he

should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11). God the Holy Spirit equips his people with gifts for building up the church. Some are used in the public ministry. Others are used by Christians who serve as members of the universal priesthood of all believers. All are given for the common good of the church. Praise God the Holy Spirit for his gifts to the church!

The Apostle Paul, by inspiration, gives us God’s perspective on spiritual gifts.

The Holy Spirit gives a diversity of gifts.

The Corinthian Christians were richly blessed by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to them, “In him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift” (1 Corinthians 1:5-7). Paul spoke of a great diversity of gifts among the Corinthians. He wrote, “In the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:27-28). He emphasizes the diversity of gifts by asking the questions, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).

The Church needs a diversity of gifts.

This diversity of gifts is given for the good of the entire church. Diversity is good and necessary. The only person who was ever given the fullness of the Holy Spirit for the work of the ministry was our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came to Jesus without limit (John 3:34). The sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit rested on him (Isaiah 11:2). The Holy Spirit distributes his blessings to Christians in a limited way. No Christian possesses every gift necessary for the work of the ministry. Thus, there is a need for a great number of different believers equipped by the Holy Spirit to build up the church, the body of Christ.

Scripture compares the “body of Christ” – the church – to the human body.

Just as the human body has a variety of members working for the good of the whole body, so the church is given a diversity of gifts for the good of the church. Paul wrote, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, everyone of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body” (1 Corinthians 12:17-20). Paul compared the need for different believers with different gifts collectively to build up the church to the need for various members of the body to maintain the good of the body. The body is comprised of many different members. The hands, feet, legs, eyes, nose, ears, all have different functions. Yet, they have a common purpose. They all exist for the good of the body. No member of the body exists for itself. Similarly, the diversity of gifts given by God in Corinth existed for the good of the church. Paul wrote, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all parts

are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

It is the Holy Spirit who determines the gifts individual believers receive.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul, by inspiration, made it very clear that God the Holy Spirit is absolutely sovereign in his giving of spiritual gifts. After listing the gifts of wisdom, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, to speak in different kinds of tongues, to interpret tongues, Paul wrote, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each man, just as he determines” (12:11). It is not possible for a person to “pressure” the Holy Spirit to give him a specific gift. The Holy Spirit distributes them as he wills.

The Holy Spirit distributes his gifts by grace.

All gifts are given by the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7, 8, 9, 11). He bestows them by grace, not in response to any merit or worthiness on the part of the recipients. In verse 4 Paul called these gifts *charismata*, gifts given by the unmerited love of God. They are the work of the same Spirit and are given by pure grace through the means of grace. Concerning gifts for ministry, Paul wrote, “Our competency comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).

The Holy Spirit distributes his gifts for the good of the entire church.

Spiritual gifts are not given to people for personal glory, so they can boast, or so they can think of themselves as better than others who do not have the same gifts. Paul wrote, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Spiritual gifts are to be used for the good of the entire church. Thus, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to value most highly those gifts which served to build up the church.

The Apostle Paul valued spiritual gifts based on their contribution to the edification of the church.

Paul listed spiritual gifts given to the church at Corinth. He wrote, “And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28). In view of the discussion of gifts in chapter 14 and the problem of the over emphasis of tongues in Corinth, it is inescapable that when Paul begins with “first,” “second,” “third,” he is establishing a scale of values based on the criterion of how these gifts contribute to the edification of the church.

Love makes all gifts serviceable to the church.

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is the bridge which connects chapters 12 and 14. Paul stressed that love makes all spiritual gifts useful. No gift of the Spirit is given for selfish and egotistical use. Christian love is a reflection of God's love for us. Christian love "does not boast ... it is not self-seeking" (13:4-5). Christian love is "Christ-like" love. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28; consider also Isaiah 42:1-7 and Philippians 2:5-8). Christian love is serving, not self-serving. The Corinthian attitude toward spiritual gifts did not reflect love. It reflected pride and self-interest. When love is the motivation behind the use of spiritual gifts, then the church will be built up. The Holy Spirit's gifts will be used as he wants them used, for the good of the entire church.

Gifts which build up the church are to be especially valued.

Paul began 1 Corinthians 14 by stating, "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (14:1). Paul urged the Corinthians not to seek the most showy but, at the same time, least useful of the spiritual gifts. Rather, they should seek the gift of prophecy. Prophecy was probably a gift which God gave to some at that time through which he gave them his word to speak in the congregation as well as in other situations. Prophecy is of greater value to the church than tongues, for it edifies the entire church.

In this chapter, Paul stressed the following points:

1. Speaking in tongues edifies the individual, but prophecy edifies the church (4).
2. The Corinthians should try to excel in gifts that build up the church (12). Their valuation of spiritual gifts was not in harmony with God's will.
3. Whoever speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. If there is no interpretation, only the speaker is edified (13).
4. In the church, Paul would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (18).
5. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers; prophecy is for believers (22).
6. The worship in Corinth was disorderly and not edifying God's people. The Corinthians' valuation of spiritual gifts was self-serving, not motivated by a servant-love. Their overvaluation of tongues and undisciplined use of them in worship confused people rather than edified them. Women were also acting in the worship life of the church in a way not in harmony with God's will (26, 33-35).
7. "If anyone speaks in a tongue, two – or, at the most, three – should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God" (27-28). If tongues are used in worship, they are to be interpreted and used in an orderly way to edify the church.
8. "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. For the spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets" (29, 31-32). God gives his gifts to edify the church in a way that the prophets can control the way in which they proclaim God's revelation to others.

(The case of Saul and his men prophesying at Ramah – 1 Samuel 19:19-24 – is an instance where the Holy Spirit caused them to prophesy against their will as a sign of God’s judgment on Saul.)

9. Paul does not forbid speaking in tongues. He does stress the superior value of prophecy (39).
10. Since God is not a God of disorder (33), the worship of the church should not be a disorderly discussion of individuals contending for attention. Rather, it should be carried out in an orderly way for the edification of the church (40). This is why the Holy Spirit has given his gifts in the first place (12:7).

What were the “tongues” mentioned by Paul?

There have been two interpretations concerning tongues. Some take them to be ecstatic utterance, not necessarily ordinary human languages. They cite Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 13:1: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels.” However, it is certain from the account of Pentecost in Acts 2, that the tongues there were real human languages spoken by people (Acts 2:8). While the question of what the tongues were may never be settled with certainty in this life, it presents the fewest difficulties to view the tongues as real human languages.

Did tongues cease?

In 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul wrote, “Where there are tongues, they will be stilled.” Does this passage compel the view that tongues must have ceased with the apostolic era? Historically, there is evidence that only in a few, marginal groups such as the Montanists, was there any emphasis on speaking in tongues in the post-apostolic era. However, to say that Paul is stating that tongues will cease prior to the rendering useless of prophecy and knowledge, is perhaps to say more than Paul is saying.

Further, we can evaluate the tongues movement today without recourse to this passage. Very simply, we compare what people teach (their doctrine) with Scripture. If their doctrine does not agree with Scripture, we do not have to worry about whether their speaking in tongues is genuine. As someone once observed, “I am not concerned about what people say in tongues. It is what they say in my own language which concerns me.” If, in our own language, people speak false doctrine, we may conclude that their tongues are false as well.

The biblical perspective on miracles and gifts of healing.

The Bible records many miracles.

The Bible abounds in records of the miraculous. It records the miracles God did, such as creation (Genesis 1-2), enabling Abraham and Sarah to conceive Isaac (Genesis 18:10-14), altering the normal course of the heavenly bodies (Joshua 10, Isaiah 38:7), and the incarnation of Jesus (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:26-38). Scripture records the many miracles performed by God’s prophets of the Old Testament (Moses, Elijah, Elisha) and the apostles of the New Testament (Peter, Paul), as well as the many miracles of Jesus.

The miracles of Jesus substantiated his claim to be the Messiah. He said, “Even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:38). The purpose of the miracles God enabled his prophets and apostles to perform was to substantiate the message they proclaimed. The Lord sent the ten plagues, which came and went at the direction of Moses, so that “the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it” (Exodus 7:5). The Lord enabled Moses to perform the miracle at Marah to establish the principle, “I am the Lord who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). Luke recorded, “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there (Iconium) speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3).

God, on occasion, has provided for his people through miracles.

The Bible records many instances where God provided for his people through miracles. He miraculously kept Moses alive without food on the Mount twice for 40 days and nights (Deuteronomy 9:9, 18). He did the same for Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), as well as miraculously providing him food through ravens (1 Kings 17:6). Jesus also was preserved miraculously without food in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:2-4). God miraculously provided manna for Israel in the wilderness for 40 years. He also sent them quail on two occasions, and even kept their clothing from wearing out during the wilderness wanderings (Deuteronomy 8:3-4). Jesus provided for 5000 (Matthew 14:13-21) and 4000 (Matthew 15:29-39) men, plus women and children, using only the small amount of food at hand.

On occasion, God enabled his prophets and apostles to heal people and even to raise some from the dead. Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath’s son from the dead (1 Kings 17:22). Elisha healed Naaman of leprosy (2 Kings 5) and raised the Shunemite’s son from the dead (2 Kings 4). Peter and Paul also healed people (Acts 3:1-10, 9:32-35, 14:3, 8-10) and raised some from the dead (Dorcas: Acts 9:36-43; Eutychus: Acts 20:7-12). Jesus, of course, performed many miracles of healing. He drove demons from people. He raised the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:18-26), the youth of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and Lazarus (John 11) from the dead.

Though God can provide for his people through miracles, he normally carries out his preservation through ordinary means.

God normally preserves people through ordinary means. The rain and the snow come down from heaven. They water the earth so that seeds sprout, crops grow, and people have food to eat and seed to plant (Isaiah 55:10). God sustains life through food (Acts 27:33-36). He heals bodies through medicine (1 Timothy 5:23). Scripture directs us to look to God for preservation. As the Psalmist wrote, “The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:15-16). Yet, God gives that food through our work and labor. Paul says that those who refuse to work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

God does not want us to neglect the ordinary means he uses for preserving us. To do so would be to “test God.” This is what Israel did to the Lord in the wilderness when they complained about God’s

care of them (Deuteronomy 6:16). This is what the devil wanted Jesus to do when he told him to jump from the pinnacle of the temple (Matthew 4:7). To neglect eating or medical care because of the belief that God will preserve us miraculously is to go beyond God's promises. It is "tempting" God. God has promised that he will preserve us through ordinary means (Matthew 6:25-34). He has not promised to perform a miracle every time we petition him to do so.

As Christians approach God in prayer, they should not doubt that God's power is limitless.

The Lord does not want his people to doubt his power to help. His power is limitless. When Sarah doubted God could give a woman her age a child, the Lord responded, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). When Moses doubted anyone could provide enough food for Israel in the wilderness, the Lord responded, "Is the Lord's arm too short?" (Numbers 11:23). When Judah in exile doubted God's ability to carry out his promises concerning the Messiah, the Lord raised up Cyrus of Persia to make a decree allowing them to return home (Isaiah 44:28). When Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth, the Lord caused Caesar Augustus to make a decree which brought them to Bethlehem, where Micah (Micah 5:2) had prophesied the Messiah would be born (Luke 2:1-7). When Jesus' disciples didn't know where they could get enough food for 5000 men plus women and children, Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish (John 6:1-15). When Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, the disciples responded, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:23-25). Jesus responded, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (v. 26). James recorded how Elijah petitioned God to withhold rain from Israel, and God withheld rain for three and a half years (James 5:17).

God tells Christians to seek his will in earthly matters.

In spiritual matters we know what God's will is for us. This is not the case with our earthly existence. In earthly matters we are directed to submit to God's will for us. As John wrote, "This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). It was in this spirit which the leper approached Jesus, saying, "If you are willing, you can make me clean" (Mark 1:40). It was in this spirit Jesus prayed, "Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). God has not promised automatic healing or miracles to those who believe strongly enough or who meet the right conditions. Even Paul, who healed others, was not healed himself when he approached God in prayer (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

Christians are encouraged to submit to God's will by the assurance that God loves them.

Jesus encourages us to submit to God's will by telling us, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13). Christians find the strength to submit to God's will in the gospel declaration of his love for sinners. As the Psalmist declared, "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far

has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:8-14).

Miracles and healings do not automatically confirm a messenger was sent by God.

When a person comes and does wonders in the name of God, Scripture directs that we examine the person’s doctrine to see if he is from God. John said, “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Paul even wrote that the antichrist will deceive many by “counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). We have the full record of Scripture. It is not miracles which confirm if a person is sent by God. It is the person’s doctrine which indicates if he is sent by God (John 8:31-32).

Gifts of healing and miraculous powers have been bestowed upon the church by the Holy Spirit. Whether they occur today is still up to the Holy Spirit.

We know a great deal about miracles and healing performed by the prophets and the apostles. We know little, however, of how the gifts of miracles and healing, mentioned by Paul, were used. Yet, there are some things we do know. The Holy Spirit gave these gifts as he saw fit. They were not given to all people. They were gifts of God’s grace, not earned by any human effort. They were given for the good of the church, not for self-glory. The Holy Spirit’s gifts came through and in connection with the means of grace, not through prayer.

Has the Holy Spirit given these gifts of miracles and healing to the church today? The answer lies with him. We do not actively seek these gifts, for we seek the will of God, who distributes gifts as he sees fit. We do not look for the Holy Spirit to come through prayer, for he comes to us through the means of grace. We need not fear if we are confronted by claims of miraculous powers or healing, for we judge teachers by their doctrine. If their doctrine is not from God, neither are their miracles. If someone tells us we may expect God to heal us if we believe strongly enough, he is leading us away from the will of God to self-will and despair. We trust the Holy Spirit will give his church today, and to the end of time, the gifts that are necessary for the edification of the church.

We reject the following errors:

1. That the Holy Spirit comes to us apart from the means of grace, that his gifts are “earned” through prayer or obedience;
2. That we may expect the Holy Spirit to give us the specific gifts we request;
3. That baptism is merely an action which witnesses that a person has submitted to the lordship of Christ;
4. That faith is a condition to be fulfilled to receive the gifts of tongues, miraculous powers, or healing;
5. That speaking in tongues or performing miracles of healing are the chief gifts of the Holy Spirit;
6. That all who seek the gift of tongues, sincerely praying and obeying, will receive this gift;

7. That we can always expect God to provide for us through miracles;
8. That, if we believe strongly enough, God must heal us;
9. That we should seek our own will with God, rather than his will for us;
10. That God, in every age, must provide the same gifts to the church which he provided in previous ages.

VII. THE HOLY SPIRIT PRESERVES OUR UNITY OF FAITH

The work of the Holy Spirit is expressed clearly and succinctly in the Explanation of the Third Article of Luther's Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; just as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Only by the Spirit's Word are we brought to faith

It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith. This is so important because we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins and enemies of God. Furthermore "man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Because of this condition we are unable to believe by our own reason or strength. But the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, in that he has called us by the gospel and enlightened us with his gifts. He has caused the light of the Word to shine in our hearts and thereby given us a true knowledge of sin and true faith in Jesus Christ.

Through God's holy law the Holy Spirit works a true knowledge of sin in our hearts. And this is important because faith in the Savior arises only in a heart that feels the misery of sin. Without the law no one will appreciate the gospel. The hymnwriter states:

When sinners see their lost condition
 And feel the pressing load of sin,
 And Jesus cometh on his mission
 To heal the sin-sick heart within,
 All grief must flee before His grace
 And joy divine will take its place (ELH 111:1)

And it is necessary to have a true faith in Jesus Christ, because only faith in him justifies and saves. True faith in Jesus Christ then is this that I, a lost and condemned sinner, know Jesus Christ as my only Savior from sin, death, and the devil, that I lay hold on him and his merits and trust with all my heart in Him alone. This is the faith-creating work of the Holy Spirit.

That the Holy Spirit brings us to faith is clearly brought out in many places in Scripture. The apostle Peter praises God who "in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3b-5). The “new birth” of which Peter writes reminds us of holy baptism. By this gift of God many of us were first made members of God’s eternal family. The apostle Paul echoes this same truth when he writes: “But when the kindness and love of God appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

To the congregation in Thessalonica Paul writes: “We continually remember before our God and Father *your work produced by faith*, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,” (1 Thessalonians 1:3) and “We know that he has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5), and “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning *God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth*. He called you to this through our Gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

We notice that in this passage Paul gives all the credit to God for faith. It is not a work of man. “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

The Holy Spirit unites us in the faith

Not only does the Holy Spirit bring us to faith, but he also unites us in the faith. In his high priestly prayer Jesus prays to the Father for this unity when he says, “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word” (John 17:6). And then he prays, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one” (v. 11). And he concludes with this beautiful prayer: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one” (20-22). This prayer is answered every time a person is brought to faith.

God’s Word is the foundation for unity in faith

Our faith is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). It is indeed comforting and reassuring that the Holy Spirit unites us in the faith. This unity is not man’s doing, but it is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who gives and preserves unity of faith among believers. It is this Spirit-wrought faith that has brought us together in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Pray God that he will continue to preserve us in this unity.

God's Word is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit preserves unity in the faith. This truth should cause us to be faithful to the Word. It is the Spirit through the Word who creates faith and unity in the faith. So also preserving unity of faith is the work of the Spirit through the same Word. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Corinthians 2:1-4).

Unity of faith is often threatened by a lack of understanding. For example, in Acts 18 we read of a man named Apollos. He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament, though he knew only the baptism of John (cf. Acts 18:24-25). This was due to a lack of understanding on the part of Apollos. In Acts 18:26 we read, "When Priscilla and Aquila heard him they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately." The result was that the matter was resolved.

Sometimes it takes a larger group to clarify an issue. In Acts 15 we read of a "synod convention" which dealt with a serious doctrinal problem. There were those who held that "the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). This matter was discussed. The leaders of the church spoke and presented God's Word, and following a discussion, the matter was resolved.

From this we see that doctrinal differences need to be addressed in Christian love. God's Word cannot be compromised in the interest of external unity in the church. There are clear passages from Scripture that address this situation. St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians points out the spirit in which we are to contend for the truth. He writes: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3). This is especially true when dealing with weak brothers.

When it comes to dealing with persistent errorists the same apostle writes: "I urge you brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in the way contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people" (Romans 16:17-18; cf. other passages such as Titus 3:10; 2 John 9-11).

By the grace of God there is a blessed unity in the CELC. For this we are most grateful and we pray that God will preserve this unity to his glory and the welfare of the church.

A Caution

We also do well to heed what our Lutheran Confessions have to say on this matter: "In order to preserve the pure doctrine ... the contrary error must be refuted in order to preserve the truth" (FC SD Rule and Norm:14,16).

In our zeal for preserving the truth of God’s Word we need to be careful not to start unnecessary controversies (1 Timothy 6:3-4, 2 Timothy 2:14). Our Confessions warn that false doctrine “cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended” (FC SD Rule and Norm:10) and also caution against starting unnecessary controversies. The Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm says: “We shall at all times make a sharp distinction between *needless* and *unprofitable contentions* (which since they destroy rather than edify, should never be allowed to disturb the Church) and necessary controversy (dissension concerning articles of the Creed or the chief parts of our own Christian doctrine, when the contrary error must be refuted in order to preserve the truth” (FC SD Rule and Norm:15). And Martin Chemnitz says that a minister of the Word “is not to stir up all kinds of unnecessary disputes and strifes about words ... and arouse his hearers with untimely clamoring, but only fight against adversaries in necessary conflicts, without which purity of doctrine cannot be retained” (Ministry, Word, and Sacrament: 47).

It is incumbent upon us, as we seek to preserve the truth, that we do not get caught up in unnecessary controversies that “destroy rather than edify” (FC SD Rule and Norm:15) and given our old Adam this is a real danger. And when it comes to necessary controversy where the truth of God’s Word is at stake, then we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). In the heat of controversy it is easy to give way to the works of the flesh which include “hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish dissensions, factions and envy” (Galatians 5:20). Our Confessions also warn that “many heresies have arisen in the Church simply from the hatred of the clergy” (Ap IV:242). How we need to heed these words as we go about our task of confessing the truth!

May our prayer be that the Holy Spirit preserve our unity in the CELC and to that end may we continue to sing,

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
 For round us falls the eventide;
 Nor let Thy Word, that heav’nly light,
 For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress
 Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
 That pure we keep, till life is spent,
 Thy holy Word and Sacrament (ELH 511:1-2).

We reject the following errors:

1. That unity in the church can be achieved by the efforts of men;
2. That outward unity in the church can be achieved at the expense of agreement on all that God teaches in his Word;
3. That Christians can agree to disagree in the church, as long as the disagreement deals only with a non-fundamental doctrine;

4. That the basis for unity is only what the Lutheran Confessions teach and not all that the Bible teaches;
5. That we may continue to tolerate those in the church who persistently adhere to false doctrine.