

## Why Study the *Book of Concord* (And get others to do likewise)?

C.F.W. Walther of the 19<sup>th</sup> century made a statement we Lutherans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would do well to heed:

"The *Book of Concord* should be in every Lutheran home. If a person isn't familiar with this book, he'll think, 'That old book is just for pastors. I don't have to preach. After working all day, I can't sit down and study in the evening. If I read my morning and evening devotions, that's enough.' No, that is not enough! The Lord doesn't want us to remain children, blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine; instead of that, He wants us to grow in knowledge so that we can teach others."<sup>1</sup>

Walther recognized the benefit of people knowing the Book of Concord. Its confessions would unite them. The people would speak the same language. Unity was one of the primary purposes for the Augsburg Confession, as stated in its Preface.

Instead of unity though, we see division. This is not new. Consider the situation before the Formula of Concord was written and signed. The Augsburg Confession apparently wasn't enough. Theologians interpreted it differently. Pastors were at each other's throats. Then in 1577 the Formula of Concord was written. Three years later the Formula with other confessional documents were bound together. The Book of Concord was born. Everyone who wanted to be considered a Lutheran had to sign on to it. They would say, "I agree with these confessions. They are a correct exposition of the Bible."

In light of our situation today, wouldn't it make sense for us to know well what it is that binds us together? What it is that has helped keep us from going off the doctrinal deep end? Furthermore, as we reach out to the unchurched, we Lutherans will need to be recognized as a faith community. As one mission-minded theologian observed, the Confessions are the perfect document to promote and preserve unity in our ranks.<sup>2</sup>

Now it's true, pastors are required to study the Book of Concord in seminary, and the professors are very thorough in their training. This training is so these new pastors can be well prepared when they make the same vows the original Lutherans were making when they signed the Book of Concord. The idea is clearly to keep our synod's pastors unified and of one mind.

After making the vows, however, these new pastors may not get the support they need. The pastors of their circuit may subtly encourage the new pastor to forget about the vows he just made. Sometimes it even reaches a level of mockery as a pastor may be accused of valuing the confessions over the Bible. This is ridiculous! If the confessions are true expositions of the Scriptures, then to know them well is to know the Bible better, especially its central teachings. Pastors might as well be accused for preaching since sermons are only based on Bible passages.

Even so, before long, the new pastor concurs, gives in, and gives up. Is this what most pastors want? Probably not, but the pressure is effective.

What could change this?

What if the situation in the congregation was different? If congregations valued the Confessions, might their pastors be a little less inclined to ignore their writings? After all, their congregational constitution should demand an unconditional subscription to them. Maybe if congregations did value them, the pastors would give the Confessions more attention in their own personal study. Still, pastors wanting to teach them to their people could easily run into the wall that Walther had described.

What can be done? A well-organized, can't-miss event is what the CLCC suggests. A circuit convocation—a special gathering of circuit congregations, taught by its own pastors, but organized by selected lay leaders of the circuit congregations—can be a great way to get the people started toward knowing what the confessions say.

That is what the CLCC is offering. It has been done in one circuit with excellent results. (Click here to see the [flyer](#) and [trifold](#) brochure.) If you think you might like to see this in your circuit, you can get more information about [organizing a circuit convocation](#) here.

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<sup>1</sup> Walther, *Essays for the Church* vol. 2, 51

<sup>2</sup> Schulz "Mission from the Cross" 61