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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER - NOVEMBER 05

### We Believe and Confess

Through the reformation of Martin Luther in the early 1500's, God saw to it that the Gospel would be restored to the world. Luther's work was not a one-time, short-term return to the Gospel. We celebrate the heritage of the Reformation five hundred years later. There were external reasons for the continuation of Luther's work. The German people and princes were tired of the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church and were sensitive to the money flowing from the coffers of Germany into Rome. Furthermore, the German Emperor, Charles V, needed the Lutheran princes to turn back the threat of the Turks (Muslims). So following the Diet of Worms in 1521, there was an uneasy status quo. Would the Reformation continue or would it disappear from history as so many previous efforts of reform had? The Almighty King saw to it that the work of the restoration of the Gospel would continue through remarkable confessions of faith which are still the foundation of the teachings of the true Lutheran Church.

The Lutheran princes pressed Charles V for a free General Council. In June of 1530, Charles V convened the Diet at Augsburg promising to give a gracious hearing to the question of whether preachers are bound to confine themselves to the doctrine of the Roman Church in their preaching. Charles V directed the "Protestants" to prepare a statement on the points of doctrine where they differed from the Roman Catholic Church and to present it to the Diet at Augsburg.

When Bruck, the Chancellor of Saxony, presented the *Augsburg Confession* he said, "By the help of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, this Confession shall remain invincible against the gates of hell, to eternity." We are celebrating the 475<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this remarkable confession of the one true faith.

Confessional statements based on Scripture seem to have gone the way of the dinosaur in this ecumenical age. Recently at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, FL an annual Bible Symposium was held. The topic was "Sex, Love and Marriage in Scripture and Tradition." A professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School, James L. Crenshaw began his lecture by noting, "We must reject at the outset any notion of the supreme authority of scripture.....Even those who take most literal interpretation of biblical texts, who claim to believe everything literally, nevertheless sit in judgment on their meaning at every juncture because readers determine meaning."

The *Augsburg Confession* was different. Every doctrine was established by the Word of God and was confirmed with the witness of His Church. The attacks on the teaching of the Reformers forced them back into the Scriptures and caused them to reexamine things they had taken for granted from tradition and church theology. The *Augsburg Confession* swept away the remnants of Popery.

At Augsburg the Lutheran princes and theologians sought to clearly confess what they believed and also to show that their doctrine was in line with the teaching of the New Testament church based on the prophets and apostles. The key thing that makes the *Augsburg Confession* so

special is that it is a positive confession of what the Lutheran Church believed and taught. It breathes a faith that believes the Gospel and confesses it before men.

Too often a church expends all its energy exposing the errors of its “opponents” rather than presenting the true teachings of Scripture. I remember a member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church of West Columbia summarizing the ministry of Pastor Paul Nolting. The congregation had left the *Lutheran Church in America* and had become an independent congregation. He stated that before Pastor Nolting came, they knew what they were against; now they knew what they were for. So it was with the *Augsburg Confession*.

The overthrow of error is an indispensable prerequisite to the proclamation of the truth. However, the overthrow of error in itself is not the same as proclaiming the truth. The *Augsburg Confession* clearly presented the truths of Scripture. There was no fear of agreeing with the Roman Catholic Church when it was in accord with Scripture i.e. the doctrine of the trinity. In fact, the *Augsburg Confession* sought to establish the fact that the Lutheran Church was in agreement with the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. We need to remember that Luther was being presented as some kind of wild-eyed radical. The positive nature of the *Augsburg Confession* is what makes it such a precious confession of faith. The calm, peaceful nature of this confession shines forth today.

This confession of faith and unity should be a part of our ministry. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith are set forth in a concise and readable format. The *Augsburg Confession* is a part of our heritage, but it is also an important part of our modern day witness. It is a part of the doctrinal standard of the CLC and in the constitutions of our congregations. And yet how few people are even aware that there is such a thing as the *Augsburg Confession*? May the Lord bless this “Good Confession” in our age and the life of our people. Pastors Wayne Eichstadt and Michael Schierenbeck have prepared a series of texts, hymns, and readings based on the *Augsburg Confession* designed to be used during the Trinity season. They also have bulletin covers with readings from the Lutheran Confessions. I used this series this summer and fall and would recommend it to all of you.

We struggle with budgetary problems as we seek ways to bring the Gospel and a continuing reformation to our age. We need to remember the importance of having something solid and Scriptural to bring to people. May we be a church body and pastors that clearly confess God’s truths not only knowing what we are against, but graciously knowing what we have in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. It is always easier politically and religiously to appeal to our base and rev them up by attacking the opponents. It more difficult but has longer results to clearly confess the positive love of God and power of the living Word of our living God and Savior. The *Augsburg Confession* is a good confession for today.

We believe and confess .....

John Schierenbeck

Please remember in your prayers Hope Redlin, who has been hospitalized at Rochester for the last month and Pastor John Klatt, who broke his hip.