

The Præsidium of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
The Board of Directors of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
The Council of Presidents of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

Dear Brethren in Christ, Elected to Leadership Positions in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod:

As members of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregations, we have watched with perplexity and dismay the attempts of some of our clergy to justify the prayer spoken and the comments made by the Rev. David Benke on the occasion of the Yankee Stadium Prayer Service. The context and doctrinal content of his words abdicated what Holy Scripture and the confessions teach us. Specifically, our God forbids us to address Him in such a way as to give the appearance that He were but one in a pantheon of gods. Yet, in the presence of those who reject Christ, Rev. Benke claimed that the words of the false teachers and idolaters that preceded him left the crowd strengthened by the power of God's love.

Such comments, devoid of any mention of the exclusivity of the Gospel, relegated the Triune God to sharing His glory with Allah and others. That such a thing could not only happen, but be tolerated and sanctioned and applauded within our beloved synod is a most grievous thing, for which we seek our Lord's face with tears. We pray that Rev. Benke would repent. We pray for the repentance of those who support his error. We pray for the repentance of those who have thus sinned against our Lord, against every member of Christ's Church, and against the lost ones, as well. Our hope was that the leadership of our church would have exercised its ecclesiastical authority rightly to admonish Rev. Benke, invite him to repentance and restore him to fellowship among us, but this hope has been met, instead, with an ungodly decision that contradicts Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

Perhaps the most destructive outcome is the lasting public witness of Rev. Benke's Yankee Stadium comments and prayer. The comments of non-Christians bear out the tragic consequences of this ill-advised and unscriptural action—comments proudly posted on the website of the Rev. David Benke and St. Peter's Lutheran Church of Brooklyn and carried throughout the nation's newspapers and magazines. The Rev. Benke gave to all the world the appearance that Christianity is 'just another way to the same God and the same Heaven.' While we in no way wish to assert that this is what the Rev. Benke intended, this is the effect that it had. There was no media spin nor misunderstanding of Rev. Benke's words that day; the very words of his

comments and prayer bear certain testimony against him. Diversity and tolerance is the only 'norm' for post-modern man, but we in the LCMS have been called to faithfulness and orthodox practice.

For the past twenty months, Rev. Benke and his congregation have vigorously defended his misguided and misapplied missionary zeal. He taught falsely. He affirmed and did not contradict countless people in their belief that Christ is but one of many ways to Heaven, and he allowed listeners to infer that prayers for the dead might yet save them. Worse, despite numerous opportunities to right the wrong, he and his congregation refuse to correct this false impression. After numerous attempts, official and unofficial, to bring this about, we have no choice but to conclude that this is a matter of remaining steadfastly impenitent, of refusing to hear God's clear Word—of substituting a new teaching for what the Lutheran Church has always taught and confessed.

Pastor Benke and his congregation are not alone in their sin, however. The president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Rev. Gerald Kieschnick, approved what Pastor Benke did before he did it and then defended him afterward. The Rev. Don Matzat has been a constant defender, twisting the words of Luther's Large Catechism beyond recognition in order to support Pastor Benke's false statement that the Muslims worship the true God.

We cannot express the depth of our amazement and disbelief that the Commission on Constitutional Matters rejected the truth of Scripture and replaced the doctrine of the church with a new and false teaching. They would have us believe that if one has permission from his 'ecclesiastical supervisor' he cannot be held accountable for his sin.

The Dispute Resolution Panel that finally ruled in this case ignored voluminous and clear evidence to make a ruling that is neither in line with Holy Scripture, nor the Lutheran Confessions. The Dispute Resolution Panel was not even faithful to the man made laws that guide this church body. Their ruling contradicts our Constitution, Bylaws, and doctrinal resolutions of the LCMS. Even though, as the Rev. Schulz points out in his report to the Synod, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations told the Dispute Resolution Panel that resolution 3-07A did not apply to the specifics of the Benke case, they based a large part of their decision on this document referenced that only deals with situations arising with *other Christians*, never accepting co-participation in leading prayer with those who worship false gods *at all*.

We, therefore, decry the unconscionable ruling of the Dispute Resolution

Panel and seek its repudiation at the next convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is also our prayerful expectation that the errant Opinion of the Commission on Constitutional Matters will be overruled. We, further, insist that Resolution 01-03-07A be clarified so that it can never be misused again.

We have read the documentation in this case, and we see from it that the judgment rendered by the Rev. Dr. Wallace Schulz is in perfect agreement with Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, the Constitution and Bylaws of the LCMS, the historic doctrine and practice of the LCMS as shown in her history and writings, and with Resolution 01-03-07A itself. We, therefore, pledge ourselves, as members of LCMS congregations, to move our congregations to submit overtures to the 2004 Convention. Let our congregations rise up faithfully and insist that the LCMS overrule the Opinion of the Commission on Constitutional Matters and to repudiate the ruling of the Dispute Resolution Panel that left the Rev. David Benke faultless in spite of his confusing and misleading remarks at Yankee Stadium and his further false teaching and casting of aspersions upon all who dared question him.

In so doing, while recognizing that a Dispute Resolution Panel decision cannot itself be overturned, we will be seeking the public confession and repentance of the Rev. David Benke for his words and actions of 9/23/01 and all that came after. Failing that, we will seek his removal from the clergy roster of the LCMS based upon his false teaching and anti-scriptural actions (including partaking of the Lord's Supper in an ELCA congregation, which is specifically forbidden in the Constitution of the LCMS [Article VI, 2, b]). Along with this, we will seek the public confession and repentance of St. Peter's Lutheran Church of Brooklyn for their advocacy of this same false teaching, as well as that of all others who continue to thrust this new and unscriptural position upon the Church. If they do not repent, we must also require their removal from the rosters of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We will also petition our own congregations and pastors to publicly state that they will not commune those who hold to the false doctrine and practice promoted by the above-cited, as those who teach such things or approve of such things as the Dispute Resolution Panel has approved have thereby removed themselves from our LCMS fellowship.

We will not concede to those who seek by such anti-Scriptural and anti-Confessional theology to set the synod on a different course from that which our fathers in the faith confessed and approved. Therefore, while it is painful for us to do so, we are compelled to make this public statement, as to fail to do so would be to refuse to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”