

## The Golden Rule is still worth its weight

Last month, I reviewed the current situation with District President Benke and the “Prayer for America” service. This month, I will continue on that topic, this time looking at the other side of the coin: the response of some members of Synod.

Within days of President Benke’s participation in the “Prayer for America” service, formal charges were filed against him by two pastors and one congregation of the LCMS. Those filing the charge were upset about a District President of the LCMS giving the impression that all religions lead to heaven. The LCMS has taken a very strong stand against any such practices since its inception, and in fact, our Synod was formed for *precisely* this reason. The founding fathers of the LCMS started out in Saxony, Germany, where two main Christian faiths coexisted: Lutherans and Reformed. Because the two often disagreed, the local prince decided that he could end their disagreements by forcing them to merge into one church. While this might *seem* like a good idea, it immediately raises the problem of, “Whose teachings will be taught,” and, “Is it Scriptural to Commune with those who reject the Real Presence in the Lord’s Supper?” So a number of Lutherans set out in boats, much like the Mayflower pilgrims, to go to America, where they could practice their faith as they believed.

So while the pastors who filed these charges had a legitimate concern, there appears to be a problem with the way this situation was handled: (Matthew 18:15-17, NIV) “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Apparently, in this case, President Benke was immediately “told to the church” without first contacting him individually. In fact, many of the letters and e-mails President Benke received were very mean-spirited instead of sharing the love of Christ.

Let me assure you of one thing: there are *very few* occasions in life where “the Bible does not apply here.” In this case, it clearly does, and the appropriate action in such a case is first to go to the sinner and encourage repentance, and to do so in *love*. This is a lesson for all of us: treat others as you’d want them to treat you. And remember that Christ’s love forgives the breaking of *all* the Commandments, whether it be the first or the eighth. The key to resolving this entire issue lies simply in the same solution provided for you every Sunday: Confession and Absolution. “In the stead and by the command of my Lord, Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. *Amen!*”

Note: I had originally said that the November Newsletter would discuss Dr. Schulz’s removal from Lutheran Hour Ministries. In light of new information I’ve received, both for and against him, including his subsequent firing, I will not cover that topic because I confess that, at this time I have more questions than answers about the subject, and when I open my mouth without sticking to the Word of God alone, I tend to put stick foot in. So next month, I tentatively plan to finish this thread with a look at the theological conferences being planned to address this issue.