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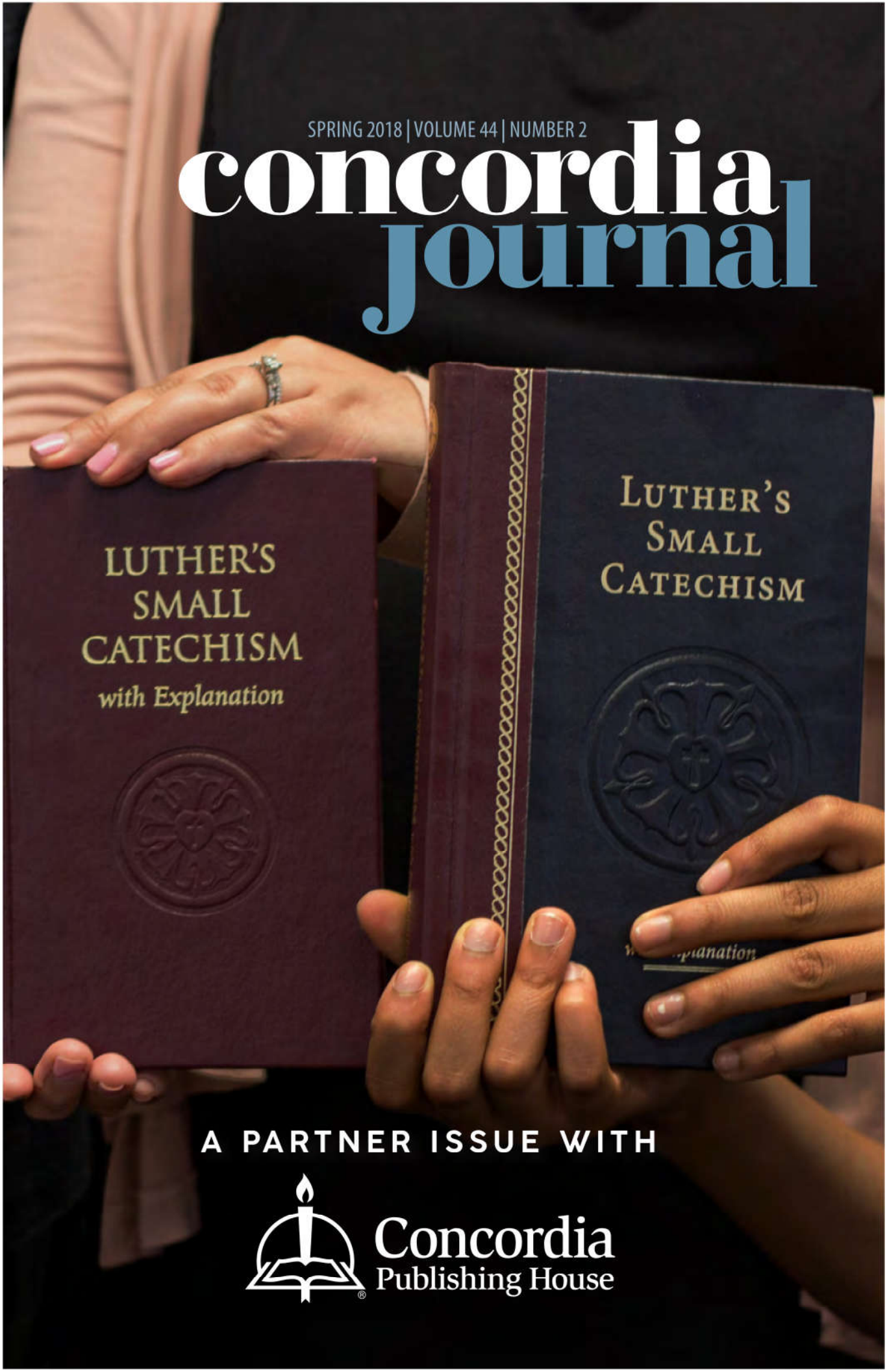

A PARTNER ISSUE WITH

Concordia Publishing House

On the cover: editions of Luther's Small Catechism as published by Concordia Publishing House from (left to right) 1870, 1943, 1991, and the newest edition on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, 2017. Photo credit: Courtney Koll

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LCMS Catechism 6.0

Larry Vogel

Larry Vogel is the associate executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations (2009–present). He served as a pastor in Queens (NYC) and in Pennsauken, New Jersey. He was a member of the drafting committee for the 2017 revision of the synodical Explanation to Luther's Small Catechism.

The 2013 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod resolved, "To Update the Synod's Catechetical Materials" (Res. 3-13A). It directed the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), in concurrence with the Office of the President, to propose "needed revisions to the content" of the 1991 edition of *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation,* noting especially "the many changes in the understanding of morals, civil law and natural law in church and society."[1] Given such changes, only informed, careful, effective catechesis can enable believers young and old to answer with sober judgment and integrity the question, "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?"[2]

History

Catechesis is born of the mission of Christ and his command to baptize and teach (Mt 28:19). To be a disciple of our Lord Christ is to be taught (κατηχέωκατηχέω) "the word" (Gal 6:6), that is, "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25). Early church catechesis was instruction for the baptism of converts, that is, for "those who will give their assent to the faith"[3] or for those who were "persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly."[4] Justin speaks of baptism "in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit."[5] Later, Hippolytus explains how catechumens who could answer for themselves, renounced Satan, his ways, and his service. Parents, or other adults, answered for the children who were too young to speak for themselves. And then they were baptized—first children, then men, then women—as they replied to the creedal confession in three parts: "Do you believe in God the Father . . . ?" "Do you believe in Jesus Christ . . . ?" "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit . . . ?"[6]

Catechesis early developed a threefold shape, focusing on the Creed, the Our Father, and the Commandments.[7] This triad would become the heart of the Christian catechism thereafter. However, as Christianity was established in Europe, the catechumenate declined. "By the sixth century, the pre-baptismal instruction offered to adult catechumens had all but disappeared and been replaced with infant baptism in most cases."[8] While there are certainly examples of catechesis in the medieval church, catechetical instruction declined as conversions and adult baptism became increasingly rare.

Over time, the result became the "deplorable, wretched deprivation" Luther bemoans in the introduction to the 1529 Small Catechism. "The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers."[9]

This was not a new concern for Luther. His first "catechetical" sermons preceded the posting of the Ninety-five Theses. In 1516, he preached a series of sermons on the Commandments and the Lord's Prayer.[10] Throughout his catechetical labor, Luther affirmed the practice of teaching on the key materials from earlier catechesis, namely the Creed, Our Father, and the Decalogue. Luther inverted the order of the three placing the Commandments first. Then he supplemented these three standards with a biblical grounding for baptism, the supper, and absolution, while ignoring material that had made many prior catechisms unusable.[11]

Luther's catechisms bear witness to his concern that the Reformation be a recovery of the one gospel by which all people are forgiven and redeemed, not an intellectual movement for elites. Thus, he attended to not only erudite studies and debates with leaders from the church and the universities, but also to catechesis. Arguably, at least, the Lutheran Reformation continued after Luther largely because of the catechisms. Millions of people would study them and take them to heart.

Luther himself explains why catechesis is so important a task and why he revised the order of the three traditional pieces of instruction, beginning (rather than ending) with the Commandments, continuing on to the Creed and Our Father:

> Three things a person must know in order to be saved. First, he must know what to do and what to leave undone. Second, when he realizes that he cannot measure up to what he should do or leave undone, he needs to know where to go to find the strength he requires. Third, he must know how to seek and obtain that strength. It is just like a sick person who first has to determine the nature of his sickness, then find out what to do or to leave undone. After that he has to know where to get the medicine which will help him do or leave undone what is right for a healthy person. Then he has to desire to search for this medicine and to obtain it or have it brought to him.[12]

Luther's catechetical labor was not a one off. He understood catechism to be content, not a book or manual (even though his Enchiridion would be a vital catechetical tool). He and his contemporaries catechized in sermons, manuals, services and prayers offices, prayer books, hymns and chorales. But the "handbook"—his Enchiridion (Small Catechism, see nearby graphic[13]) came to be the tool most consider when they hear the word *catechism*.[14]

Michael Reu traces the texts and editions of the Small Catechism. Here it may suffice only to mention that the original publication in 1529 was followed by a fuller edition in 1531 (which adds an introduction to the Lord's Prayer and Confession). Numerous regional editions followed both during Luther's remaining years and after his death in 1546. Reu notes that in the sixteenth century the Small Catechism was often "treated, even by staunch Lutherans, with a liberty few of us would dare to exercise today."[15] It was only after the publication of the *Book of Concord* (1580) that such flexibility gradually slowed and then ceased.[16]

Though the text of the Small Catechism proper became largely fixed after 1580, Luther's material was soon supplemented with further explanations. One of the most influential supplemented editions, especially for the history of LCMS catechesis, was Conrad Dieterich's (1575–1639)[17] *Institutiones Catecheticae* (1613).[18] Together with Luther's text, Dietrich employed a full array of dogmatic terminology and technical language in the additional questions and answered plumbing the depths of Christian doctrine. The result was a temptation toward a highly intellectualized version of Christianity which neglected Luther's simplicity and practicality.

We may identify five or six Missouri Synod editions of "the catechism."[19] Dietrich's catechism was used by the Missouri Synod in its earliest years. Soon after its establishment, the synod published a version of Dietrich edited by C. F. W. Walther. [20] In the 1890s Missouri developed its second supplemented catechism under the leadership of H. C. Schwan, published first in German in 1896.[21] The synod soon followed this German edition with an English translation in 1897 which was offered to the public in 1900 with the title *A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*.[22] Having gone through a post–World War I adoption of English in nearly all its congregations and schools, the synod's fourth catechism explanation was an English edition only, published in 1943, with minor variations in the text of Luther's Catechism itself, and the continuance of Dietrich's general approach.[23] In 1986 a new translation of Luther's chief parts was published and approved by the synod. A new set of explanatory material followed in 1991. This fifth "LCMS catechism" once again followed the Dietrich pattern, but its explanations incorporated an increasing number of questions and answers that touched on contemporary concerns.[24]

The 2013 LCMS convention adopted Resolution 3-13A "To Update the Synod's Catechetical Materials," directing the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) and the LCMS president to approve revisions to the supplementary "Explanation" from 1991. As its rationale, the resolution noted that nearly twenty-five

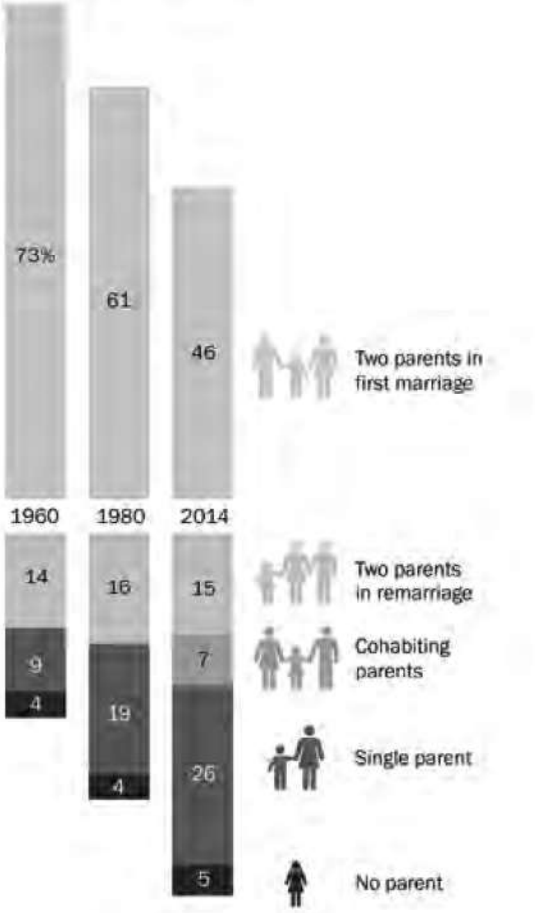
years had elapsed since the previous edition had been published in 1991 and that quarter-century had introduced "many changes in the understanding of morals, civil law, and natural law in church and society." It also noted the "need for more comprehensive catechetical materials for adults."[25]

Overview: Addressing New Realities

It is perhaps an understatement to refer to "many changes" as one looks back over recent decades of American life and culture. Among the new realities of the present day, one may look in three directions: cultural, religious, and demographic. Few things are more central to a culture than its views of marriage and family. Pew Research[26] has documented the steady decline in two-parent households and the rising diversity of "living arrangements" (see nearby graphic[27]). Countless moral questions pervade discussions in church and society over a host of topics: abortion, marriage, divorce, cohabitation, single-parenting, same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage, transgender identity, sexting, and on and on.

For children, growing diversity in family living arrangements

% of children living with ...



Note: Based on children under 18. Data regarding cohabitation ar not available for 1960 and 1980; in those years, children with cohabiting parents are included in "one parent." For 2014, the tot share of children living with two married parents is 62% after rounding. Figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1960 and 1980 decenni census and 2014 American Community Survey (IPUMS)

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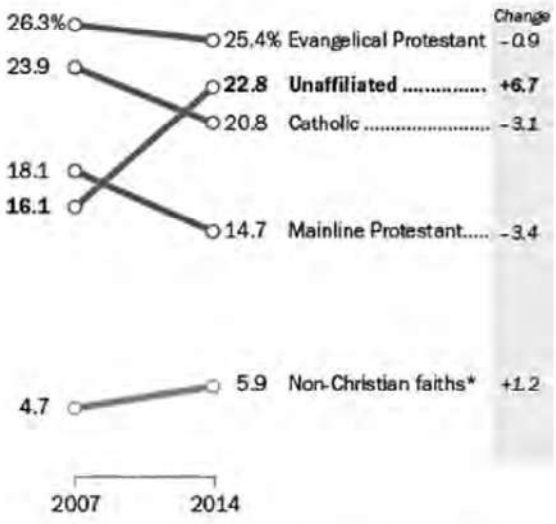
All this has a direct effect on religiosity to the degree that people look to churches for moral guidance, but changes in religiosity go much deeper than the need to comment on discrete moral/ethical questions. America's religious "landscape"—to use a pew Research term—is experiencing profound changes. "The Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing" summarizes Pew's most recent findings (see nearby graphic[28]). The percentage of non-Christian religions is growing steadily, and those without any religious affiliation has grown by nearly 50 percent in less than a decade. People are increasingly "spiritual, but not religious"—a phenomenon that is especially marked in

Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



* Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014

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younger adults. It fits hand-in-glove with discomfort over both Christian doctrine and moral teaching.

American demographics are also changing. America is aging with the median age rising—especially so among non-Hispanic whites, and non-Hispanic whites have the lowest birth rates in the US. That the US population continues to grow is largely a result of the country's growing ethnic diversity.[29]

From the perspective of the LCMS, these cultural, religious, and demographic changes are noteworthy. Demographically, the synod is largely non-Hispanic white in terms of ethnicity and, as such, reflects the aging and birth rate tendencies of the US quite dramatically, while experiencing very little growth from the rising percentage of the US population that is black, Hispanic, or immigrant.

As religious and cultural attitudes and mores have changed, they have done so more strikingly for non-Hispanic whites than others. Once again, the LCMS is experiencing challenges on an acute level. Pew Research data indicates, for instance, that, while the LCMS is theologically and morally conservative in its formal stances, its membership is very much affected by the trends of American life and view such practices as same-sex marrage in much the same way that the rest of America does.[30] In light of such changes, it is completely understandable that the LCMS convention would realize the need for a catechism revision that takes such matters into consideration. The LCMS must address these realities for the sake of our children. Moreover, fewer adults who come to faith will have been baptized, and they too will need solid catechesis and answers to their questions.

Overview: Structure

In the fall of 2013, President Matthew Harrison, with the approval of the praesidium and CTCR, appointed a drafting committee (DC) for requested revision. Joel D.

Lehenbauer, executive director of the CTCR, was asked to chair the committee. The other members of the drafting committee appointed were Charles Arand, Wally Arp, Thomas Egger, Jan Lohmeyer, John Pless, and Larry Vogel.

The committee's first decision concerned the structure of the Explanation.[31] At the suggestion of Arand and with the approval of the CTCR and praesidium, the committee decided on a four-part structure. As in previous editions, the Explanation would take on individual parts of the six chief parts—an individual commandment, the articles of the Creed, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, four baptismal questions, two parts for Confession and the Keys, and four questions on the Sacrament of the Altar.[32] (The only deviation from previous editions was the decision to break the Creed into nine parts—three for each of its articles—rather than only one part for each article.) After each segment of Luther's catechism was repeated, there would follow:

- The Central Thought
- A Closer Reading of the Small Catechism
- Connections and Applications
- Devotional Aids

Arguably, the most innovative element of this structure is the Central Thought. Its goal is to identify a sphere of life or faith being addressed. For example, the ubiquity of some sense of a god or a highest good for the first commandment; a reflection question; an illustrative passage/narrative from Scripture; a summary statement of the key point of the lesson, and a personal application question.

Following this, A Closer Reading of the Small Catechism, focuses on Luther's wording and thought using the familiar question and answer method. Rather than passing too quickly to more technical theological language or to contemporary concerns, the committee saw a need to delve into Luther's simple language and emphasis first. For example, in his explanation of baptism (first part), his phrases and expressions are explored more fully, asking about the meaning of "baptize," the description of the water, and the meaning of baptizing "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In drafting this, the committee gave special attention to Luther's Large Catechism as further commentary on his priorities. Supportive Scripture texts are provided together with longer biblical references cited and some confessional references.

The next section, Connections and Applications, goes beyond Luther's explanations and applications to address associated matters of teaching and application to life today. Thus, a doctrinal concept such as the states of humiliation and exaltation is considered under this heading (2nd Article, Part 2). In the fourth part of the Sacrament of the Altar, consideration is given to who should not be given the Lord's Supper. Once again, a question and answer method is employed together with supporting passages and references.

The final section is a devotional aid. Initially, the committee determined to provide a suggested hymn verse and a newly composed prayer, both of which were

to reflect the basic elements of the lesson. (Later the decision was made to include a suggested psalm.)

Two members of the DC were asked to provide initial drafts for the review of the entire committee, with Arand assigned the first three parts and Pless assigned the remaining three parts. The DC met a number of times in 2014 and 2015, evaluating and revising the materials provided by Arand and Pless and providing progress reports to the CTCR and the office of the president. In 2016, the DC completed its initial draft. The CTCR reviewed the draft in its entirety, making revisions, but retaining the vast majority of the suggested material. The praesidium also provided revisions in various places and requested that the draft be made available to the synod for review and comment.

An Explanation of Martin Luther's Small Catechism: Field Test Edition—July 2016 (FTEd) was published. It was immediately available for download and hard copies were sent to all rostered members of the synod and to every congregation. Provisions for individuals to provide feedback were available online and through the mail. Over 1000 responses were collated and shared with the DC, CTCR, and praesidium. Numerous suggested changes were provided and some respondents were scathing in their criticism of the FTEd; however, the overwhelming number of respondents were favorable with an approval rate of nearly 80 percent (ratings of the individual chief parts were even higher, averaging over 85 percent).

After analyzing the FTEd reactions and suggestions, the DC made some changes to the Explanation, while retaining most of its prior work. Most of the changes were of a minor, editorial nature. Several of the changes bear comment here. First, about a dozen of the suggested biblical sections within the Central Thought sections were changed to include key narratives from the Bible's saving history and, typically, passages that were more vivid. Additionally, in response to the single most frequent suggestion from respondents, the initial design of having each chief part end with a supplementary section was changed so that each chief part would have its own introductory section. Finally, over a dozen additional questions were added to the Connections and Applications sections of the text.

Reactions

Reactions to the field test edition were requested, received, collated, and evaluated by the DC. The responses were taken with full seriousness as the DC continued its work. In revising the FTEd, the DC was cognizant of the need not to allow revisions to undermine the strong support expressed.

At the same time, the responses enlarged the vision of the DC as we revised the FTEd and enabled us to recognize both strengths and weaknesses of our prior work. We are grateful for the numerous individuals who took the time to share their impressions, questions, concerns, criticisms, and suggestions. While the majority of the responses were from LCMS pastors (about 65 percent), about 20 percent of the

responses were from commissioned workers, and a little over 15 percent were from laity. In a few cases, groups of pastors shared concerns and feedback. The broad base of the response was vital. In addition to revisions of the work on the six chief parts, the DC also prepared supplementary materials on Luther's Daily Prayers and Table of Duties, as well as brief considerations of several topics (Reading God's Word, Who Is Jesus?, How Creeds and Confessions Help Us to Answer This Question, What Is Worship?, Simple Prayer, and a glossary).

After revising the FTEd, the DC submitted its work once more to the CTCR. After making some minor changes, the CTCR approved the draft for formal submission to the praesidium. (It should be noted that the president and first vice-president sit on the CTCR, so their input was, to some extent, available for the consideration of the plenary CTCR.) After consultation and consideration by the Office of the President, a final draft was submitted for doctrinal review at the suggestion of the CTCR. Having approved the draft, it would not have required doctrinal review—no documents adopted by the CTCR require doctrinal review. Nevertheless, due to the wide use of any "Synod Catechism," the commission felt it prudent, to provide additional review beyond itself and the praesidium.

Having passed doctrinal review, the draft was in the hands of Concordia Publishing House where it was published in 2017. We pray that this resource will be used to the glory of God and the well-being of his church.

Endnotes

1 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *2013 Convention Proceedings*, 123.

2 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "Rite of Confirmation," *Lutheran Service Book* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 273.

3 *Apostolic Tradition*, 15.1–2. See also Apostolic Constitutions, XVIII; *Didache* VII; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*.

4 Justin Martyr, First Apology 61).

5 Ibid.

6 *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.1–18. See also *Apostolic Constitutions*, XXXIX–XLV. Patristic catechesis did not make use of a catechism "book" and was often lengthy. Cyril provides twenty-four "discourses" and Augustine, twenty-seven catechetical chapters (*The First Catechetical Instruction [de Catechizandus rudibus*]).

7 See Charles P. Arand, *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 29–39. Also see "Catechesis, II (Medieval)" and "Catechesis, III (Reformation)" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, v. 1, 228–236 and Michael Reu, *Luther's Small Catechism: A History of Its Origin, Its Distribution and Its Use* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1929), 1–4.

8 Arand, 32.

9 SC Preface 1–2, KW 347.

10 Bjarne W. Teigen, "Luther's Catechisms, 1529–1979: I. How the Catechisms Came to Be Written," unpublished essay presented to the 62nd Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (June 17–22, 1979).

11 Reu (5) notes as examples of material frequently included: the Ave Maria, seven gifts of the Spirit, seven deadly sins, seven cardinal virtues, seven works of mercy, eight Beatitudes, twelve fruits of the Spirit, the crying sins, the alien sins, and the five senses. Also see Arand, 32–34.

12 AE 43:13–14. Note the footnote on p. 13: "In the Middle Ages the four items everyone was to know by heart were the Hail Mary, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. The most common traditional order in the period from 1450 to 1500 was: the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments on the grounds that the Lord's Prayer in the rosary was valueless without the faith of the Creed, and the faith of the Creed was of no effect without the keeping of the commandments. Luther consciously reversed the order with the purpose of showing that the gospel is the source of vitality and power for morality. Luther did not seek here to show a new way to salvation which omits the keeping of the law. Rather, the law is to show man that he is powerless to fulfill God's will by himself. See Johannes Meyer, *Historischer Kommentar zu Luthers kleinem Katechimus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1929), 82–83." Although Luther greatly simplifies this, it is noteworthy that Luther is still directly addressing the mortal sins, "strange sins," "crying and silent sins" etc. (p. 21).

13 Graphic of Luther's Small Catechism with explanatory material from www.smu.edu/Bridwell/SpecialCollectionsandArchives/Exhibitions/Childrens-Books/Catechisms/~/media/B0057F75D3E345A9A2A-B32AE8A9D27EA.ashx

14 Arand, 58–81.

15 Reu, 66–67.

16 If imitation is the highest flattery, then all of Christianity was impressed by Luther's catechisms. His labors led others, both erstwhile friends and foes, to try their own hands at writing catechisms. A few examples are adequate. In England, *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549) included a catechism. Peter Canisius published a Roman Catholic *German Catechism* in 1555. The *Heidelberg Catechism* was published in 1563. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* was printed in 1647.

17 Dieterich's name came to be [mis]spelled in subsequent editions as Dietrich. We will use that spelling here.

18 See Reu, 175–176. Reu cites Dietrich's catechism as "[a]n especially bad example" of the highly technical catechesis of Lutheran Orthodoxy from the 17th century onward. He faults Dietrich and others for trying to work all of the careful dogmatic precision of Orthodox theology into books of instruction intended for ordinary youth with the result that their labors were "more abstract, theological, and doctrinal, and, as a result, more unfruitful" (176). Reu is no foe of Orthodoxy, but only of a

counterproductive method. He also notes efforts (e.g., Arndt, Gerhard, Schmidt) which, while fully orthodox, emphasized more the kind of simplicity and applicability one finds in Luther (see 179–185).

19 While the Synod has re-translated Luther's texts at various times, its catechisms are noteworthy as supplements or explanations. Luther's words are relative constants either in German or in translation.

20 Reu (282) refers to Missouri Synod use of "the Dresden *Kreuzkatechismus*," initially, soon replaced by Dietrich. In 1858 the Missouri Synod printed Dietrich for its use and then followed with an abridged version in 1870. See David Aaron Fiala, "Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A History of English Language Editions and Explanations Prepared by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* vol. 89, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 29, 49.

21 Some in Missouri seemingly shared the concern about the heavily technical nature of Dietrich and his tendency to turn the catechism into a dogmatics text. Although Schwan seems to have shared this concern in the material he prepared (which is lost), the final product of numerous editorial changes to his work led him to refuse to have his name printed in association with the finished work. See Fiala, 31, 33–36.

22 Ibid., 28.

23 Ibid., 36–41.

24 Ibid., 41–45.

25 The LCMS, 2013 *Convention Proceedings,* 123. The resolution received over a 99 percent vote.

26 See Pew Research Center, "The American Family Today" at http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/.

27 http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/parenting-in-america/st_2015-12-17_parenting-11/.

28 Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape" at http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/
americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

29 Numerous sources document these changes. A few examples include Pew Research Center, "10 demographic changes that are shaping the U.S. and the world" http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/. See also American Immigration Council, "The Ever-Changing Demographics of America" http://immigrationimpact.com/2016/06/09/demographics-united-states-of-america/; American Census Bureau, "Age and Sex Composition: 2010" https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf. Central Intelligence Agency, "World Factbook" https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2127rank.html.

30 For Pew Research on the Missouri Synod, see http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/racial-and-ethnic-composition/ and http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/lutheran-church-missouri-synod/.

31 "Explanation" will be used herein to refer to the explanatory materials—questions and answers—that supplement the Enchiridion itself (Luther's material).

32 Additional materials that the DC would prepare included an Introduction to the Explanation, a supplementary (transitional) section for each of the six chief parts, and a discussion of the Table of Duties.