

DE TRINITATE

Newsletter of the Society of the Holy Trinity

Societas Trinitatis Sanctae

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From the Senior

CONSENSUS: What is it and how is it used within the life of the Society?

One of the distinguishing marks of the Society of the Holy Trinity and of our life together, is the process of consensus that we use in decision making within the Society. It distinguishes us because, in most of the judicatories to which we belong, it is parliamentary procedures and majority votes which determine how and when decisions are made. To be part of the Society and of our consensus process therefore is often a strange thing to grasp for those new to the Society or even for those of us who have been members for a long time, accustomed as we all are to other ways of operating. Yet the seeking of such consensus is not a new process but rather one which has been used since the earliest days of the Society, even to the founding retreat and the writing of the Rule. It seems strange then that such consensus is not addressed in our Rule, except in reference to the use of a “pure ecclesiastical ballot,” which is the epitome of consensus. Rather, it is to be found in our By-Laws where we read that “As far as possible, the Society shall seek consensus in its affairs.” (Article 7.5) Since such a practice of consensus is sadly lacking both within our culture today and even within our church bodies, it is often not understood or appreciated for the powerful tool it is and what it can mean in the life of a group such as the Society. So I pose the question - what does this seeking for consensus in all things mean for us and how do we go about achieving such consensus?

First a definition. “Consensus is a group decision making process in which group members develop, and agree to support, a decision in the best interest of the whole.” (Webster) This group decision making means that an acceptable resolution can be supported by all, even if it is not the decision that some individuals may have favored. **Consensus therefore describes both the decision and the process of reaching such a decision.**

We see this process played out in the matter of our pure ecclesiastical balloting used for the elections of both Deans and Senior. As we know there is no process for nominating individuals for such offices nor is there politicking for those roles. Rather we trust the Spirit to raise up individuals for these offices. The first two or three ballots leave room for preferences to be seen in the balloting but also the opportunity for the names of others to rise up and be counted. But as the balloting continues and the vast majority of ballots show a preference for one candidate, the person holding out against that candidate is called to hear the consensus of the body and

move toward putting their own needs or interests aside and allow for consensus to be achieved. Again, not everyone may agree but all agree that for the good of the whole, individual preferences and desires are put aside and the vote becomes unanimous. **Thus, the process is by consensus and the result is consensus.**

We saw the same process at work last week when the Leadership Council met in SC. There were a number of issues to discuss, not all of them easy and some of them had the possibility of being more than a little contentious. But as we talked, as we listened to each other, as we pondered both wording and intent, we were able to achieve consensus on a number of matters without having to take a vote. Such voting, after all, implies that there are winners and losers and that is not our model or our intent. Rather it is to work together for the sake of the whole and achieve that consensus for the good of the whole.

This sense of unity achieved through consensus is also seen in the way we live together. In discussing as mundane a matter as chapter funds - how they are to be organized and how they are to be reported - we showed clearly that we are one body and that no one chapter could go off and do its own thing...even if it worked best for them! Working through a draft policy therefore we strove to fashion a document that would serve the needs of the Society as a whole and not concern ourselves with the desires of any one chapter. When the wording and practice did not jibe we moved on and produced a document that, while once again may not have pleased everyone or satisfied everyone's need or desires, nevertheless met the needs of the Society as a whole and was therefore adopted by consensus.

We are not the first religious body to use consensus as its model of operation in decision making – other monastic orders have done the same and the Quakers or Friends are famous for their use of this model. But in the Society we are showing what it means to live under such a practice in a culture and a Church which too often pits one against the other, winners against losers, in a vote. Within the Society therefore, we seek to live truly as brother and sister, not always agreeing with each other but with a willingness to subsume our own desires so that that we may live within the whole. When we subscribe to the Rule therefore we freely offer up our own desires, wants and needs and seek the good of the whole. This is not like the Borg that used the famous line in Star Trek, “You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile” for that implies coercion. Rather consensus within our life together says I freely offer up what I think is best, if we together believe that another course of action is called for or this one is to be elected.

The Lord and His Holy Spirit continue to guide us in this process under the guidance of the Rule.

Patrick J. Rooney, STS, Senior

Chapter News

CALIFORNIA CHAPTER

Dean, Richard Johnson, roj@nccn.net

The California Chapter met in retreat at Christ the King Retreat Center, Citrus Heights, CA, March 6-8, with five in attendance. The discussion centered on the 95 Theses. The Reverend Paul Bieber, STS, served as chaplain.

CENTRAL PLAINS CHAPTER

Dean, Cathi Braasch, prcihb@gmail.com

The Chapter held a pre-Lenten virtual retreat with 10 retreatants (six STS members, four fellow travelers) gathered at five locations in NW Iowa, NW Missouri, NC and NW Kansas and SC Nebraska. With some tweaking, the model could be used in other places where distance and midwinter weather make travel unwise. Next retreat is 7 pm Sunday, May 7, to 6 pm, Monday, May 8 (with an optional additional night and day for extended personal retreat 7 pm, Monday through Tuesday, May 9) at St Benedict Retreat Center, Schuyler NE. Teaching topic is "Post-traumatic Stress, Moral Injury and Pastoral Practice," led by CH Leslie Haines MAJ, USA (Ret.), founder and executive director of Lutheran Military Veterans and Families Ministries. Based in Ft Wayne, Indiana. LMVFM equips pastors and congregations to minister more effectively with veterans and dependents who bear the spiritual, moral and psychological wounds of military service. LMVFM also offers pastoral counseling, information and referral, and trains therapy dogs through its "Paws and Effects" ministry.

COLUMBIA RIVER CHAPTER

Dean, Joseph Hughes, j_w_hughes@hotmail.com

Columbia River Chapter invites guests and inquirers to join them as they gather in retreat at Mount Angel Abbey Guesthouse in St. Benedict, Oregon on Wednesday and Thursday, May 24-25, beginning at 1:00 PM Wednesday and concluding after lunch on Thursday. The Reverend Dr. Kirsi Stjerna, Professor of Lutheran History and Theology at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, will serve as teaching theologian. Dr. Stjerna will present two lectures on topics of women and gender in the Reformation: "Luther and Women," and "The Faith-Mothers We Never Knew: Discovering Women as Leaders in the Reformation." Dr. Stjerna is the author of many books and articles in her field, including the 2008 book, Women and the Reformation, in which she gathers historical materials and personal accounts to provide a comprehensive and accessible look at the status and contributions of women as leaders in the 16th century Protestant world. She is ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

In addition to Dr. Stjerna's presentations, participants will also share in the prayer offices and Holy Eucharist. There will be time for fellowship and reflection on the grounds of the Abbey, and access to the excellent Abbey library. Oregon State University Campus Pastor, Jim Norlies, will

share his experience as LWF Fraternal Delegate to the Vatican's congress on pastoral care for international students, and his meeting with Pope Francis. The Reverend Joel Nickel, STS, will offer a presentation on painter Lucas Cranach and the Social Reformation, supplementing Dr. Stjerna's lecture. Registration deadline is May 15. Contact Dean Joe Hughes to register.

FLORIDA CHAPTER

Dean, Lawrence Recla, larryrecla@comcast.net

This year is the 20th Anniversary of the founding of our Society. The Florida Chapter is making available STS lapel pins for \$10.00 each with a \$4.00 shipping and handling charge to mail up to 10 pins to one address. (Because they're pins they require a special envelope!) For quite some time the only graphic we had were photos of the embroidered seal. The Reverend Brian A. Evans, STS, has had a graphics artist provide a 'clean' representation which we're using for the pin and will soon be used throughout the Society. We have had 150 pins made and don't expect to have any more done for the foreseeable future. Checks are to be made out to "FL STS" and mailed to me @1720 Hagood Loop, The Villages, FL 32162, or just wait till the Annual Retreat. Remaining Florida Chapter Retreats are June 12-13 and November 13-14.

GREAT RIVERS CHAPTER

Dean, James Lehman, jtl611@hotmail.com

The Great Rivers Chapter met on February 6-8, 2017, at Todd Hall Retreat Center, Columbia, IL. Nine members and two guests attended. The Reverend Cindy Bisser, STS, was our teaching theologian. She presented two fine lectures: Icons from the Gospel of Luke (traditionally viewed as the first iconographer); and The Stages of Writing an Icon. The Reverend Ken Tegtmeier, STS, was the Chaplain. The next meeting of the Chapter will be with the Indiana Chapter and the Northern Illinois Chapter at St. Meinrad, IN.

GUADALUPE CHAPTER

Dean, Ralph Reitmeyer, RWReit@aol.com

The Guadalupe River Chapter met in retreat February 6-7 at the Cedarbrake Renewal Center near Belton Texas. Our Teaching Theologian for the retreat was the Reverend Lemae Higgs, STS. She brought a presentation entitled "Pilgrimage: The Literal or Metaphorical Movement to a Condition or Place of Holiness or Healing." She writes: "The reasons for pilgrimage are extremely varied. They may, for example, be for healing, holiness, cleansing, penance, education, gratitude, in response to a vow, to recapitulate an event which occurred at the pilgrimage centre." She spoke of the strong Christian tradition of Pilgrimage and what it can mean for us today. Our Chaplain for this retreat was the Reverend Jan Campbell Unger, STS. Words of proclamation were brought by the Reverend Jared Stillions, STS, and the Reverend Norman Sulaica.

IOWA-NEBRASKA CHAPTER

Dean, Gary Hatcher, ggh5297@icloud.com

The Iowa Nebraska Chapter met February 13-14, 2017 at the American Martyrs Retreat House, Cedar Falls, IA. Mark Mattes from Grandview College in Des Moines presented on "Luther's Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal" and "Trends in Decline in

Mainline Denominations.” The Reverend Marshall Hahn, STS, served as chaplain. The Reverend James Harbaugh, STS, served as confessor, with the Reverend Barbara Wills, STS, and the Reverend Christopher Staley, STS, providing fellowship. The Chapter will meet for future retreats on May 8-9, 2017 and November 13-14, 2017 at American Martyrs Retreat House. The topic for the May retreat will be “Praying the Rosary” and the topic for the November retreat will be on “Dividing the Law and Gospel.”

MINNESOTA CHAPTER

Dean, Trevor Bailey, tbail65@gmail.com

The Minnesota Chapter gathered for its Advent retreat on December 5-6 at Christ the King Retreat House in Buffalo, MN. Fifteen Society members and eight guests took part in the retreat. Preachers were the Reverend Katie Johnson, STS, and the Reverend Dean Trevor Bailey, STS. The Reverend Ryan Stout, STS, Dean Bailey served as confessors. The Reverend Dr. Paul Westermeyer made two presentations: "Church Music Before and After the Reformation" and "Sending and Vocation: What Bach Teaches Us."

The group kept its tradition of an Advent hymn sing (*every Advent hymn, every verse!*), and after Compline enjoyed Gemütlichkeit. The Feast of St. Nicholas was ushered in with retreatants leaving their shoes outside their doors Monday night. By morning, the shoes had been generously filled with treats by St. Nicholas himself.

The Reverend David Hanssen, STS, completed his year as chaplain with this retreat. The Reverend Erma Wolf, STS, has accepted the Dean's invitation to serve as chaplain for our 2017 chapter retreats.

PASSAVANT CHAPTER

Dean, Brian Evans, bae@flcpittsburgh.org

The Passavant Chapter held its Advent Retreat on December 6 and 7, 2016, at the North American Lutheran Seminary in Ambridge, Pa., with the Reverend Jerry Kliner, STS, teaching on Luther's 95 Theses. The Reverend Maurice Frontz, STS, served as chaplain, and the Reverend Joyce Dix-Weiers, STS, provided retreat leadership while our dean was on paternity leave. The chapter held a day retreat at First Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh, on the Annunciation of Our Lord, March 25, with Sister Cynthia Pock, n/OLF, leading a practicum on Music in the Parish, with a visit from our Senior.

We will join other area chapters for an STS Mid-Atlantic Regional retreat on May 1-2, 2017, at Antiochian Village, Boliver, Pa., with the Rev. Dr. Paul Hinlicky, serving as teaching theologian, and will again be joined by our Senior.

SUSQUEHANNA CHAPTER

Dean, Kenneth Elkin, kennethelkin@gmail.com

The Susquehanna Chapter met in one-day retreat on February 27 with The Reverend Nathan Minnich, STS, as host. The Reverend Erwin Roux, STS, gave presentations on the book *Surprised by Joy* by N.T. Wright and ancillary materials to use it in the parish. Pr. Minnich gave a fascinating table-talk on his experiences in leading groups of first-time pastoral visitors of many denominations to Israel. The Senior presided at Eucharist with the Dean preaching. Our next gathering will

be the Mid-Atlantic Regional retreat planned for Antiochian Village near Ligonier, PA on May 1-2 together with several other chapters. The presenter will be the Reverend Dr. Paul Hinlicky, speaking on Luther and Reformation themes. Reservations can be made through the Rev. Brian Evans, Dean of the Passavant Chapter, who is serving as Registrar, First Lutheran Church, 615 Grant Street, Pittsburgh PA 15219.

WISCONSIN CHAPTER

Dean, Tim Duesenberg, stmaximos@aol.com

The Wisconsin Chapter is privileged to regularly retreat with the Norbertines at the St. Nobert's Abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin. At our "All Saints' Day" Retreat, October 31 – November 1, the Reverend Craig Nehring, STS, served as Chaplain; the Reverend Mark Knappe, STS, preached at the Eucharist Service; and I lead a discussion on a podcast involving an interview with LCMS Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller entitled "Has American Christianity Failed?". Our next retreat was held March 6-7 and our teaching time encompassed a presentation and discussion of "Defending Marriage: Twelve Arguments for Sanity" written by Anthony Esolen, Professor at Providence College. At our November 2017 retreat (6th and 7th), the Senior will be visiting us as we will hold an election for Dean of the Chapter.

From the Vicar

Homily delivered at the 2016 General Retreat

2 Corinthians 7

² Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. ³ I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. ⁴ I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy. ⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. ⁸ For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (ESV)

Here in this upper room, over 200 voices just joined together ten times in thunderous affirmation of the promise our new members made to adhere to the Rule and take up our commitment "to work toward the confessional and spiritual renewal of the Lutheran churches." And so we give thanks, to follow Paul's sequence of blessing to the church in Corinth, with boldness in acclamation, with great pride for the sake of the Gospel, filled with comfort in our common Commission, and even in the midst of affliction, overwhelmed with joy.

The Senior spoke yesterday of the multiple forms of our affliction, summarized now by Paul in a single phrase: fighting without, and fear within. We know where he's coming from. Many of us are war-weary from fighting the good fight. Some in this room have been in those trenches almost as long as my life's memory. I don't need to describe in detail the landmarks of the troubled landscape we're slogging through; the Senior summed those up quite well. The widespread recession of orthodoxy, the lasting scars of ecclesiastical animosity, the decline of civic morality, the loss of economic stability, the diminution of public safety, and the prodigious level of political toxicity have all taken their toll in the lives of our parishes. Many face a temptation to a chronic bitterness marked by the sort of wonderfully constructive "hell in a handbasket" imprecations worthy of a Mel Brooks gubernatorial *harrumph* session. Others, worn down by wounds perpetrated and received, are targeted by the evil one with a more acute and radioactive anguish. This spectrum showcases worldly grief: diabolical despair, *curvatus in se*. In facing it as pastors, we discern the force of the Lord's words concerning Paul's ministry: "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16).

But God, who comforts the downcast, has comforted us – as Paul explains, with the coming of Titus, a saint representative in his person of the sisters and brothers whose promises this day we have so resoundingly affirmed. They are partners and fellow workers for our benefit and the renewal of the churches, workers whose mutual consolation in the Holy Spirit with the Word of God is a beatific contagion that yields fruit thirty, or fifty, or a hundred-fold.

This consolation flows from God's answer to anguish: incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, the faithfulness of Christus Victor that endures to all generations. In the poetry of Malcolm Guite, *A Sonnet for St. Matthew* penned in recognition of the evangelist's feast this day, the first gospel "begins with generation. Family lines entwine around the Son, born in Judea, born for every nation; born under law that all the law of Moses might be fulfilled and flower into grace, as every word and deed in time discloses eternal love within a human face."¹

"That all the law of Moses might be fulfilled" – *it is finished* – and sin thus be utterly stripped of its power in the blessed baptismal struggle; and the two-edged sword of law and gospel, the Word of Life, replaces diabolical despair of hope with evangelical despair of self-salvation, replaces infernal fear with stable trust. In this godly grief, the anguish of Friday is now definitively illumined by the joy of Sunday. This *mea culpa* is immersed in the blessed understanding that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. Here one finds the quiet weeping of the lady who dries Christ's feet with her matted hair, adhering as she does to his presence, his Word, *given for her*. This is a pious sorrow that mourns injustice and the erosion of community while it works for the care and redemption of creation. This is the sorrow of repentance that holds fast to the Lord's promise, the same godly mourning for loved ones gone – not lost, but entrusted into the arms of the mercy of Christ, for whose sake alone we can rightly acknowledge with Tolkien that not all tears are an evil. This is the grief of the Spirit's conviction of

sin that clears the heart for the blessed assurance of the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Where this eternal Word is properly preached and the blessed sacraments rightly administered, then there is the Church: gathered to die together to sin and live together in the righteousness of Christ. Our vows of ordination, underscored this day by our sisters and brothers in their subscription to the Rule, are for the sake of this gathering: our Lord's Church, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. As Paul reminds Titus, our ministry is "for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth" (Titus 1:1). Fighting without and fear within will afflict the ecclesia until the day hope is realized in the appearing of the glory of our Beautiful Savior, the Lord of the Nations. Until triumphant, we remain militant – in Paul's admonition to Titus, so that we might put what remains in order (1:5), *semper reformanda*. This necessitates wrestling with polity across our ecclesial bodies, building or resisting, to provide solid doctrinal and pastoral oversight and to comfort our congregations with the peace the world cannot give. While we labor, we lift each other in our hearts, consoling each other as we work for confessional renewal and ecumenical reconciliation. We teach each other how to grieve rightly in the midst of gospel joy, holding tight to Christ's Great Exchange and remembering Luther's poetic summary of the same: "We say, 'in the midst of life we die.' God answers: 'Nay, In the midst of death, we live.'"² Amen.

¹ Malcolm Guite, *Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012), 3.

² Quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abington, 1950), 370. His translation.

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