

# ULMA Fellowship Process

**Adopted** November 13, 2005, **Amended** August 24, 2009

1. The United Lutheran Mission Association (ULMA) is not a fellowship or a synod, it is an association.
2. An association is a group of people organized for a joint purpose (see “Article IV Objectives” of the *Constitution of the United Lutheran Mission Association*).
3. We live in a time when the official positions of various Lutheran synods often reflect an erring majority. We also know that there are orthodox pastors and people in these Lutheran synods who are in a state of confession and are working to avoid the yeast that makes its way through the whole batch of dough.
4. Institutional boundaries have become so vague and ill-defined that we are reminded of the time of the Reformation when everything was in upheaval. Here it is good to remember that the marks of the church are the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments. Affiliation with a synodical institution is not a mark of the church.
5. With this in mind, we are required to be more judicious in our practice of altar and pulpit fellowship. The word “judicious” means “done with good judgment.” Each situation warrants its own careful examination.
6. The ULMA may be a first step in ultimately bringing together pastors and congregations of like mind. While the association may grow into something more, for now we remain an association.
7. When a congregation and pastor(s) become members of the ULMA they are required to indicate their adherence to the *Constitution of the United Lutheran Mission Association* and the *Constitutional Guidelines for Mission Congregations*. Both documents require submission to the Old and New Testaments as the inspired, inerrant, written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice, and the symbolical books of the Book of Concord of 1580 as true and unadulterated statements and expositions of the Word of God.
8. With Scripture and the Book of Concord of 1580, the Commission shall also familiarize itself with and diligently use the following in order to carry out its objectives: *Church and Ministry*, *The True Visible Church*, and *The Form of a Christian Congregation* by C. F. W. Walther. The Commission shall also consult *For the Sake of Christ’s Commission: The Report of the Church Growth Study Committee*, *The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod*.

9. We cannot imagine that anyone would want to be a member of our association, give money, and sacrifice time and talent in order to establish Lutheran mission congregations that would be in opposition to what they themselves believe, teach, and confess. However, if they did, they would not be in altar and pulpit fellowship with other members of the association.
10. Those who become a member of our association and attempt to subvert our governing principles in Commission work will be dealt with according to *Robert's Rules of Order* which includes expulsion.
11. Mission congregations, which are required to adopt the *ULMA Constitutional Guidelines for Mission Congregations*, are in fellowship with one another unless a mission congregation or former mission congregation becomes heterodox.
12. Are the member congregations of ULMA in altar and pulpit fellowship with one another and with mission congregations established by ULMA?

While keeping in mind the above statements, if member congregations of the ULMA adhere to the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions in Commission work, and if there is nothing to manifestly indicate that they do otherwise in their respective congregations, then nothing should prohibit them from entering into altar and pulpit fellowship with one another and with mission congregations that have been established by the association.

**“Altar fellowship”** is the practice of communing at the same altar. It is a public proclamation of unity or oneness in doctrine. Consequently, if someone is living in manifest, unrepentant sin or tenaciously clings to false doctrine (here we are not talking about the casual intrusion of error), such should not be admitted to the Sacrament of the Altar. Concerning “pulpit fellowship”, the Lutheran Cyclopedia observes: “In the early church, unity was exemplified by fellowship in worship. Pastors in one part of the church were recognized in other parts and, if present at a service, were invited to take part. . . Rise of heretics and impostors led to rules and safeguards (Concordia, 1984, pg. 295).”

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### **Amendment on Member Congregation Communion Practice** **August 24, 2009**

The ULMA was contacted in 2009 seeking further clarification of items 4 & 5 in this document, *The Issue of Fellowship*. We were asked whether Member Congregations of the ULMA can commune members of heterodox bodies at their altars. We appreciate the inquiry and have reproduced a portion of our response.

[Referring to item 3 in *The Issue of Fellowship*] The demarcations provided by Lutheran institutions are quite useful when the pastors and people within such human affiliations are unified in creed and in what is publicly taught. Unfortunately, we live in a time of widespread doctrinal controversy. Synodical membership has become almost meaningless as it applies to the doctrine one holds and the practice one exercises.

In such occasions, when pastors and people are moving toward a final resolution to doctrinal controversy, things typically become difficult and slow; especially, when institutions are large. While we would prefer an instantaneous conclusion, we are once again reminded of the fact that we are the Church Militant. There are a number of historical cases that you may want to research and consider:

1. The separation of Judaism and Christianity.
2. The early struggle between Jewish and Gentile Christians.
3. The struggle with the church in Corinth, the seven churches in Asia Minor.
4. The slow division of Arianism and orthodox Christianity. In the shifting that took place during this time, institutional membership meant very little and communion was decided by membership in a particular church.
5. The history surrounding the Wittenberg Concord of 1536. Luther and Wittenberg communed with Bucer and the churches in South Germany, but not with Zwingli and the churches in Zurich.
6. In the original constitution of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod it states: “If it is impossible in some congregations to replace immediately the unorthodox hymnals and the like with orthodox ones, then the pastor of the such a congregation can become a member of Synod only if he promises to use the unorthodox hymnal only under open protest and to strive in all seriousness for the introduction of an orthodox hymnal.”

All of these cases dealt with issues of fellowship in the midst of doctrinal controversy. All of them were difficult to traverse. They all took time. A shifting had to take place. The orthodox predominately practiced charity where they could. All of the cases came to a final resolution. All of them were unique. The Christians who lived during these challenging times relied upon the Biblical practice of examination (1 Cor. 11:28).

As Lutheran institutions are in chaos, there are still orthodox churches in a state of confession and working toward an exit when the “fighting” is deemed as an exercise in futility. While we and our congregations reached that point some time ago, we understand the plight of those who preach the Word in truth and purity and administer the Sacraments rightly, and we intend to treat them with as much charity as possible, thus our reference to the marks of the church superseding institutions in chaos. We were just like them not that long ago. Also, if it happens that there are orthodox but honestly ignorant churches in the mix, we will treat them with charity as well, and help them to see the seriousness of their situation. However, if any persistently and indefinitely remain in a heterodox institution with no reasonable explanation, then we will have to ask them and ourselves if they are really orthodox. We would not commune with those who persistently adhere to false teaching. And we believe that the orthodox cannot indefinitely remain in a heterodox body and also then claim that they preach the Word purely and administer the Sacraments rightly (*Brief Statement* 28, 29). This is what we mean when we say in point five (*The Issue of Fellowship*) that “we are required to be more judicious in our practice of altar and pulpit fellowship. The word ‘judicious’ means ‘done with good judgment.’ Each situation warrants its own careful examination.”