

# *TRANSCRIPT*

*Rev. Todd Wilken, Host*

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## **"President Gerald Kieschnick's Proposed Restructuring of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Part 4"**

**Guest:  
Rev. Dr. Ken Schurb  
Pastor, Zion Lutheran Church, Moberly, MO**

**May 26, 2009**

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**AUDIO CLIP [Pres. Gerald Kieschnick]:** No particular or specific form of government is prescribed by Holy Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions. At the same time we assert that our theology must influence whatever we decide to do organizationally. So for the good of the synod I invite you to receive this report objectively and be ready to respond constructively to the information shared. If you like an idea, say you like that idea. If you don't like an idea, say you don't like that idea. If you have a better idea, please, share it.

**WILKEN:** Well, that's Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, he's president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, talking about his Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance, a proposal that we've talked about several times here on *Issues, Etc.* to restructure to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, one of the older and more conservative Lutheran synods, Lutheran church bodies, in the United States. We're going to be talking about that plan to restructure this denomination with Dr. Ken Schurb here in the first hour of *Issues, Etc.* It's actually part four of an ongoing conversation with Dr. Ken Schurb. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. It's Tuesday afternoon, May the 26<sup>th</sup>. You can join us for the next two hours. 1-877-623-6943, 877-623-MY-IE. Or you can email us right here in the studio: [talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org).

In the second hour of the program we're going to start out with a short conversation on President Obama's nominee for the Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor. We're going to be talking with Dr. Robert George of the President's Council on Bioethics. He's also Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University—oddly enough where, I believe, the new nominee matriculated at some point. We'll also talk with him about today's ruling by the California Supreme Court on Proposition 8. They upheld the people's will there, although there are 18,000 gay marriages there that are going to remain on the books in California. A little later in that second hour of the program Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse will join us. We'll get her reaction to the California Supreme Court decision as well. And then it's the *Issues, Etc.* book of the month for May and its author. The Book of Amos. We'll be talking to Dr. Reed Lessing, author of the Concordia Commentary on Amos in the last half hour of today's program.

We do have some special guests. The Maiwald family of Hancock, Maryland, and the Schulz family of Campbell Hill, Illinois, have come somehow, miraculously, together, all together in the studio here. They're standing outside with Jeff and Craig where we consign all of our guests to stay once the microphones come on. They're just in a perfect line. It's like the von Trapp family singers out there. It's amazing. Thank you very much for coming in, and all the way from Maryland too. We always invite guests out here to come and so few visit us. We get kind of lonely here at LPR.

Always breaking the loneliness for us, very good friend, Dr. Ken Schurb, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Moberly, Missouri, formerly served as an assistant to the president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and as theological professor Concordia University in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He joins us to talk about President Gerald Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod Structure and Governance. Ken, welcome back.

**SCHURB:** Hi there, Todd. I hope yours was a good, and not lonely, Memorial Day holiday.

**WILKEN:** Not lonely at all. Just getting over a cold, which kind of put a damper on the festivities, but it's getting a little bit better.

You have spent a lot of time thinking about, writing about, talking about this proposal to restructure the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod on many fronts, and you've written recently: "I look upon this matter not as a question of maintaining Synod's structure or traditions but integrity." What do you mean by that?

**SCHURB:** Somebody told me, oh, within the past month or so, I can't remember exactly when, "Well, Ken, you're a historian of the Synod"—and I'm not sure that I really qualify in that regard, but I'll take the accolade if they want to give it to me—"you're a historian of the Synod and you just want to maintain the structure as it has been." Well, even historians are not necessarily the most conservative people as far as keeping governmental structures in place. I do think though, Todd, the big question that is before the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as it considers this task force's proposals is not so much do you just want to keep a structure for the sake of keeping the structure, but do you want to try to keep what the structure is designed to say and to embody? Your opening sound bite from President Kieschnick was very much on point. I think he said it very well. If I wrote down his words correctly as I was hearing the actuality, I wrote, "Our theology must influence what we do organizationally." And that's absolutely right. And since we do have a theologically shaped structure that has been put together with certain theological points and truths in mind, it's important that when we restructure, we don't restructure it in such a way as to lose those theological points and truths. And we've talked about that in some of our previous conversations.

I redirect everybody's attention. I think the last time we talked I referred to an article in the Winter 2009 issue of the *Concordia Journal*, written by Erik Hermann and David Schmidt, two professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. And they jointly wrote an article designed to kind of help people think through the task force's recommendations, and they had three really good criteria. They're certainly not the only criteria that could be applied to the task force's work, but they are theologically rooted criteria. They ask, number one, how does the proposal help us faithfully express our God-given unity in Christ? Number two, how does it facilitate mutual accountability, enabling conversation, reconciliation? And number three, how does it help us share diverse gifts and bear the burdens of one another?

If a tweak or a change or an outright radical shift, whatever it may be, in the structure is not going to do as good a job on those things as we've got right now, then there's real significant question about why we should change the structure. But that's not a question, once again, of simply of staying with the structure for the structure's sake. It's staying with the structure for the sake of what the structure was designed to do.

**WILKEN:** Does the organization, the structure, if changed in certain ways, have the power to run the influence back the other direction? That is, if our theology ought to shape our structure, could our structure, if wrongly reconstructed, have the power to change our theology for the worse?

**SCHURB:** Conceivably. And that's always the case. Practice and theology are always related. Hopefully, your theology drives your practice, but it is possible to sort of practice your way out of good theology into something that's not so good. So today, as we take up some of the proposals of the task force that we have not talked about in our previous conversations back in, well, August and October of last year and March of this year, I think we just need to do so with the awareness in mind that we need to keep the theology in the backs of our minds.

**WILKEN:** All right. One of the things you're concerned about [is] smaller, less frequent synodical conventions. What's a synodical convention? What is it supposed to do? And why should we be wary of making them smaller in terms of the voting delegates and less frequent terms of how often these conventions come together to decide matters for the synod?

**SCHURB:** In its earliest days the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had a convention every year, of the entire synod. That was back in the days when there were no districts and it was just everybody getting together every year. As the synod got bigger it was unwieldy, of course, to do that and so pretty much kind of the situation that we've got

now has been in place for the vast majority of the years that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has been around. We have synodical conventions every three years, and since 1874 those conventions have brought together delegates from circuits, groupings of congregations, one pastoral delegate and one lay delegate. Right now there are, oh, six hundred some circuits all across the synod. The synod divides itself into districts, the districts in turn dived themselves into circuits. And so there are in round figures somewhere around 620 circuits. And so you multiply by two, and that gives you the number of voting delegates at a synodical convention, which again meets every three years. It's about 1240 voting delegates.

The task force's proposal number seven is to cut that number of voting delegates almost in half. The proposal here is 650 voting delegates at the synodical convention. No advisory delegates. Right now every district can send a certain number of pastors and a certain number of teacher, deaconesses, DCEs, etc. to the convention with voice but not vote as advisory delegates. And the task force is proposing eliminating that. And there would be fewer advisory representatives from the various boards, commissions and other agencies of the synod. This would require a constitutional amendment in order to pass this, because right now that system of sending delegates, voting delegates, to the national convention by circuits is enshrined in the constitution.

The argument on the part of the task force is, in these economic times, a potentially very potent one. They're saying it's going to save significant money. If you're only meeting 650 voting delegates instead of 1200 some, and you don't have nearly as many advisory representatives and no advisory delegates, you've got fewer people you're having to pay to get all together in one place at one time. The argument is also made that it will get these delegates more deeply involved. I wonder about that one on the face of it. I simply wonder if a group of 650, for somebody who's a little bit shy or is in their first convention, the first time they're going to a national convention, if they're going to be any more forthcoming or anymore, you know, inclined to get up and make a speech, for example, in a group of 650 as opposed to the group of 1200-some voting delegates we've got now.

**WILKEN:** Well, let's take a break right there, Ken, and when we come back I'm going to let you finish that thought. We're talking about President Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on the structure and governance of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I'm Todd Wilken. Stay tuned.

[Break]

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Dr. Ken Schurb is our guest. We're talking about some changes proposed by the president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in his Blue Ribbon Task Force for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Ken, before the break you were talking about smaller, less frequent synodical conventions, these what have been up to this point triennial conventions of about 1200 voting delegates, pastoral and lay, and then some advisory delegates. You wondered whether or not this would increase the involvement of each individual delegate. What about accountability?

**SCHURB:** Well, just let me make clear here, Todd, this proposal is from the task force which was appointed by President Kieschnick, and he appointed it really without the convention calling for it or anything. But the proposal at this point is that of the task force, not necessarily that of the president. Now that said, the prime question I've got about this smaller conventions proposal is all about the word you just mentioned, and that is "accountability."

Right now, everybody in every congregation at least can know, ought to know, who quote-unquote their delegates are going to a synodical convention. And there's two of

them, so that if you can't get in touch with one of them prior to the convention about something you're concerned about, you certainly have an opportunity to get in touch with that second one. The smaller number of delegates combined with the new system of choosing those delegates at district conventions, as we have talked about in the past, might well lead in a lot of congregations and in a lot of circuits to there not being anybody from that circuit going to the synodical convention. So, yeah, the idea of accountability broadly across the synod suffers here. And this is one of the places where you've just got to make a choice. You know, what's more important to you. Is it more important to save money, or is it more important to have accountability? And I think in this case, in my mind, accountability is key.

**WILKEN:** Let's talk about the way that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is one synod that is divided in some manner into 35 districts and each one of those districts, as you mentioned before, is divided further into what are called circuits, usually what maybe eight to thirteen...

**SCHURB:** Typically, it's about ten, eleven, twelve congregations. It could be as few as seven; it could be as many as twenty.

**WILKEN:** What is the task force proposing with regard to the kind of basic building block of the polity of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the circuit?

**SCHURB:** Well, I'm not sure I'd call the circuit the building block of polity. But what the task force is saying in Proposal 10 is that it wants to—interestingly enough this is exactly the language of the task force's presentation—"restore circuits to their primary purpose." But some of the things that it calls for are not restoring the circuits to primary purpose if by "primary" you mean original. They're talking about service, coordination, resources all for the sake of greater congregational participation in God's mission. There's one reason, basically, why circuits were created, and then a second got added—visitation and election. And we still talk today in our parlance about "visitation circuits" and "electoral circuits," and they need not be exactly the same.

The task force is recommending with respect to circuits first of all that the electoral function be taken away from circuits altogether and placed somewhere else, at the district level as we said a moment ago. So that means that the kind of function that would be taken up by the circuit, that is traditional anyway, would be the visitation function. And so the proposal is to let the districts establish visitation circuits with factors other than geography in mind. For example, you may have congregations that are involved in similar types of mission outreach or that have similar demographics, and let the circuits be constituted that way.

The *Concordia Journal* article that I referred to a moment ago itself asked the question how well this would do at expressing unity if all of a sudden you had like all the congregations, say, that had a contemporary worship service in a given corner of the district forming a circuit and just getting together with people who were like-minded in that way, what that would do about fostering the kind of – preservation of unity, I should say – that we're desiring here in the synod. The other thing that's interesting about this thing though, Todd, is you don't have to change the existing by-laws about visitation circuits in order to accomplish this. You don't need to make any change at all. Right now a district could, if it wanted to, create a circuit, in principle, of congregations that each had less than a hundred members if that was the criterion they wanted to use. They'd have to have a number of them in order to make the circuit of appropriate size, but they could do that. And no change would have to be made.

Another thing that the task force is proposing is that circuit counselors would be appointed by the district presidents with the concurrence of the district boards of directors and praesidiums. That's the vice-presidents meeting in consultation with the presidents of the districts. And also then that the circuit counselors would be chosen by

the district president in consultation with the congregations that they would serve. This is an interesting change, and I've got to say I do have a certain sympathy for the task force in this one, because circuit counselors really do serve as the extensions of the district president in the circuits where they serve. That having been said circuit counselors are ecclesiastical supervisors and in our synod the long-standing practice has been to elect all ecclesiastical supervisors, whether that be the president of the synod, president of the district, or the circuit counselor. The same logic that leads the task force, I would imagine, to say that the district presidents should appoint the circuit counselors could also lead someone to say, "Well, then the president of the synod ought to appoint the district presidents." The task force is not saying that. I'm not sure that anybody across the synod is saying that. If the task force's point here is judged to have any merit at all by people, I think an idea might be that district president might nominate the circuit counselor, and then let the circuit or the district, you know, elect from a group that the district president might nominate. But this would be another change.

**WILKEN:** Another concern, or at least an area that you think requires a little more examination. You use the term "regionalization" of districts or of the synod countrywide. What is envisioned here?

**SCHURB:** The task force wants to set up five regions, and they're very clear to say this is not adding a new level of administration, not a new level of bureaucracy. What they want is five regions for the purposes of election and communication. And so they have a proposal to elect, for example, vice presidents of synod from the regions. At one point they say in their PowerPoint presentation to the district conventions that this would not apply to the first vice president, but there's no further detail about how you would work that out, you know, whether it would be only the first vice president who would be nationally elected and then the others would all be regional. But they do talk about all five vice presidents being regional. So it's just not clear to me how you'd work the first vice president.

**WILKEN:** Well, let me stop you there before you go on with the details. One of the concerns I have is when it says for electoral purposes but not for administrative purposes. You've worked in administrations before. You know the tendency for things to expand and not to contract.

**SCHURB:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**WILKEN:** And you know the tendency of any kind of administrative structure to kind of lay down stakes and once they're in the ground it's very difficult to pull them up again.

**SCHURB:** Yeah. At the very least I would say this, you would have to have enormous vigilance and it would have to be exercised up and down the structure of the synod, which means you'd have to have people elected at all these various levels who would be committed to the idea of keeping these regions not to be administrative in nature.

**WILKEN:** All right, then, the picture here seems to be—it's hard for me not to see that resulting in another layer of bureaucracy, at least in practice if not in principle. Are my concerns unfounded? You've got about a minute and a half.

**SCHURB:** No, I think you do have a valid concern. Like I said there would have to be enormous vigilance exercised and you'd have to have people who agree in every key position that would be affecting and affected by these regions to keep it that way. I have a concern just about the idea of potentially electing the vice presidents regionally. There's a handout that's going to the district conventions that's also on the synodical website that holds out the possibility that these vice presidents would not simply be nominated region by region, but they'd be elected region by region. Now that could really be a centrifugal force as far as the unity of the synod is concerned. Electing your vice presidents regionally would mean that all of a sudden now you'd have a group of vice presidents together advising the president and one would basically represent the opinion

from one section of the country and one from another section of the country. Beyond that, Todd, even if it's just that these vice presidents are going to be nominated regionally—I worked for a task force a few years ago that suggested something like this, not electing them regionally, but nominating vice presidents—

**WILKEN:** About ten seconds here, Ken.

**SCHURB:** I just wonder how much a region would have in common among it if you have congregations, say, in Maine and in Indiana all in the same region.

**WILKEN:** That's a good question. Dr. Ken Schurb is our guest. We're talking about President Gerald Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod, Structure and Governance this Tuesday, May the 26<sup>th</sup>. We'll be right back.

*[Break]*

**WILKEN:** We're talking about restructuring the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod according to the proposals of President Gerald Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force. It's Tuesday, May the 26<sup>th</sup>. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. Another half hour with Dr. Ken Schurb. He's pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Moberly, Missouri, formerly served as an assistant to the president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and as theology professor at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, Michigan. You can join us with questions or comments. Our call in number: 1-877-623-6943, 877-623-MY-IE. Or email us right here in the studio: [talkback@issuesetc.org](mailto:talkback@issuesetc.org).

Ken, any other concerns about what you call regionalization?

**SCHURB:** Well, there's another proposal the task force has, not only to perhaps nominate, and perhaps elect, vice presidents at the regions, but also to elect board members for the Board of Directors of the synod from each region. Again, it's not altogether clear to me from the PowerPoint online who would be doing the electing, whether it would be the national convention or the region. But the proposal is that there would be one pastor and one layperson from each of the five regions on the Board of Directors. So ten of the seventeen, if I'm counting them correctly, voting members of the Board of Directors would be elected from the regions. Then the elected Board of Directors members would together appoint five others to the Board of Directors. And this strikes me as just new thinking with respect to the Board of Directors. It's a little bit new thinking with respect to vice presidents, although maybe there's more discussion that's gone under the bridge with respect to vice presidents and representation. But the Board of Directors of the synod has never been designed to be a representative group. I mean the thinking usually has been in the past: you simply want the best people to be on that board. You don't necessarily care if they do all come from the same basic fifty-mile radius area. If they're the best people, then they're the best people.

The other thing that the task force is, of course, setting itself is a difficult task, I think, an uphill task of trying to tell this next synodical convention that the synodical convention is not necessarily in the position to elect those best people, and that therefore some of the members of the Board of Directors need to be appointed by those who are elected.

**WILKEN:** That seems to kind of set up—and maybe I misunderstand how things ought to be working—but it strikes me, if there's going to be mutual accountability, say, between the president of synod and the Board of Directors, and that they each are tasked with their own area or realm of responsibility, ecclesiastical supervision, primarily that of the president of the synod, and fiduciary responsibility, that of the Board of Directors, that if there's some appointing going on there between the two, it seems to kind of confuse those things, or could potentially confuse those things.

**SCHURB:** Well, I don't think the proposal here is for the president to appoint anybody on the Board of Directors. It would be the voting members of the Board of Directors who would appoint the additional five, who would be themselves voting members of the Board of Directors.

**WILKEN:** But is not the president also, is not the president of synod also a voting member of the Board of Directors?

**SCHURB:** He is, and I'm flipping through the proposal now just for accuracy's sake, Todd, to see if he would be one of the people, whoever the president is at a given time, if he would be one of the people who would be making this appointment. Yes.

**WILKEN:** I mean it strikes me, if there's not a distinction made between, an explicit distinction made there, then a voting member's a voting member regardless of whether he's the president or not.

**SCHURB:** Yeah. As I'm reading the PowerPoint slide from the synodical website it does look like the president of the synod would be one of those appointing, not by himself but in concert with these others. Yeah. And you're right, to an extent that does make for some untidiness. I understand your point.

**WILKEN:** All right, let's talk a little bit about at the district level there also are some suggestions being made about the way the districts organize themselves. What's there in the proposal?

**SCHURB:** Well, the proposal of the task force is basically to punt on this one, but to punt in a certain direction. Proposal 11 of the current task force is that the Council of Presidents, which is the 35 district presidents plus the president and vice presidents of the synod come up in the interim between now and the next convention -- between 2010 and the next convention -- with a new recommendation on the number, function, and configuration of the districts. Now the task force is clear that it likes the idea of having fewer districts. There are 35 now. They like the idea of 25, perhaps even as few as 15 districts, which would have 200-400 congregations each. So it would really eliminate your very small districts.

This is really interesting that the task force would put this kind of a proposal on the table at this point, saying that somebody else needs to think through the number, configuration, but even function of districts.

**WILKEN:** Well, especially the Council of Presidents made up largely of the 35 district presidents who—look, we're human beings, Ken. These guys are paid to do their jobs. It's hard for me to imagine they would say, "You know, I think we need fewer districts. Some of us ought to be not working at this level anymore."

**SCHURB:** Well, if the Council of Presidents wants to take the lead that the task force is obviously trying to suggest that they take, yeah, then some of these district presidencies would be eliminated because some of these districts would be eliminated.

But I've got even a prior question, Todd, and that is: if we're looking to have a new proposal ginned up by the Council of Presidents over the next, oh, three or four years to tell us what the functions of districts are going to be, then some of the task force's proposals right before us right now may be premature: for example, the proposal to have districts elect the national convention delegates, or giving priority to resolutions adopted at the district level, or involving congregations in electing the president of the synod perhaps in the context of their district conventions, says the task force. Now we've talked about some of these things before in our previous conversations, but these are certainly assigning functions to the districts. Now if we're going to wait and see what the functions of the districts are going to be, then I guess you can't have your cake and eat it too in my mind. Either you're going to do this now or your going to do this later, but it's really like trying to do a little now and a little later.

The big question in my mind is: what are you more interested in pursuing at the district level? Is the most important thing you're trying to do at the district level the supervision of doctrine and practice or the provision of services? If you're trying to concentrate on the provision of services, then fewer, larger districts makes sense.

**WILKEN:** This is an email from Keith in Chadron, Nebraska. He says, "It has occurred to

me that synod, in order to structure itself properly as an advisory body which assists congregations in carrying out the church's mission, must know what that mission is. Yet as demonstrated by the dropping of *Issues, Etc.* from the airwaves there are some at least in the synod who apparently have no clue. Shouldn't the Missouri Synod figure out what it is supposed to be doing before it decides on a new structure?" Do you think we have unanimity, really, truly, beyond paper here, Ken, on what the synod ought to be doing?

**SCHURB:** The task force right now, as I say, is punting on even something as basic on the function of the districts. And while it is making some proposals that certainly speak to and would build on a certain idea of district function, it's also saying we need further study on this. I also am kind of wary of the sort of language that I see in the handout that the task force has for the district conventions where they say, "Districts are large ecclesial clusters of congregations and circuits." Maybe just at a glance that's what a district looks like. The way the synod defines a district is "a division of the synod as determined by a national convention of the synod." And that's a huge difference. That is one of the maybe most important philosophical questions that lies behind any kind of restructuring here. Do you look upon the synod as a national church body consisting of congregations and their church workers which has divided itself into districts and whose districts have divided themselves into circuits, or do you look upon the synod as a confederation of districts which themselves are a confederation of circuits which themselves are a confederation of congregations? That's a huge difference in the way you look upon the church body.

**WILKEN:** We've got about a minute here before our break, Ken. Another proposal: lengthening the terms of office. What are they now? What is the proposal? And what do you think about it, with about one minute?

**SCHURB:** Well, in some cases the terms would contract, because there are some board members who are elected for a six-year term. For example, one who is elected to the Board of Directors of the synod right now is elected for a six-year term.

What the task force proposes, and by the way, which would also require constitutional amendment in order to fly, is that the synod meet in convention every four years and that the year before the synod meets in convention, the districts would have conventions, but in the years prior to that there would be theological convocations at the circuit and district levels. So we'd be on a four-year convention cycle.

Coterminous with that the task force is recommending that all terms for all elected and appointed officers, all boards and commissions go to four years and that there be no term limits.

**WILKEN:** All right. I want to talk more about that on the other side of the break. And probably something more consequential for the future of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in terms of doctrine and practice, and that is the certification process for ordained clergy being proposed by President Gerald Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod, Structure and Governance. Dr. Ken Schurb is our guest. Also, an email from Don in Kansas, when we come back. Stay tuned.

[Break]

**WILKEN:** Talking about some of the changes proposed by President Gerald Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Synod, Structure and Governance for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, heretofore one of the more conservative Lutheran church bodies in the United States. Dr. Ken Schurb is our guest.

Coming up on the first of—boy, this is coming up fast; I'd better get my tail in gear—coming up on the first of June, the *Issues, Etc. Journal* re-debuts after a long hiatus. The *Issues, Etc. Journal* is basically the radio program condensed into a print form, and we're offering it to our listeners free. All you have to do to get the new *Issues, Etc.*

*Journal* starting June 1<sup>st</sup> is email us at [journal@issuesetc.org](mailto:journal@issuesetc.org). There's an article in there called "Sheep Don't Keep Track." I've written this about moral progress and measuring your moral progress. And then Pastor George Borghardt writes about his transition and his change from Rome to the Reformation in the new *Issues, Etc. Journal*: [journal@issuesetc.org](mailto:journal@issuesetc.org).

Ken, let's talk about, first of all just to put a bow on the term limits thing, you're talking about longer terms for elected officers by and large, by and large, and no term limits. How significant is no term limits?

**SCHURB:** Well, it depends upon where you're talking about. I think the task force is not necessarily calling for term limits to be removed for a lot of board- and commission-type positions within districts. However, all officers of the synod and board and commission members at the national level, which would include the district presidents, would have no term limits. The term, again, would be four-year, because the idea is to go to a four-year convention cycle instead of a three-year convention cycle. And might I say, Todd, I think that that actually is a pretty good money-saving idea. I'm not sure that we necessarily need a three-year convention cycle. For most of its history the synod has existed with one, but I would be willing to experiment with a four-year cycle and see how it works for a while. There was a time about 25-30 years ago when the synod was trying a two-year convention cycle. It had a synodical convention every two years and the year there wasn't a synodical convention there were the various district conventions. So that's the kind of thing that we could try.

The issue about term limits always becomes a sensitive one, and I know that there's lots of people who disagree with me on this. I have generally been an opponent of term limits up and down the line, wherever they may be in the synod, because my basic take on it is, if you have somebody who's good and who is capable of serving and willing to serve, why in the world would you deprive yourself of the opportunity to reelect this person artificially? The other side of that argument is that, you know, people need to have—every dog needs to have his day in the sun, and term limits make it possible for some other dog to step up and get into the sun after the present group. And I understand that, I respect that. I'm not too terribly convinced by it. The one place where I get a little bit nervous about my own position about opposing term limits is that a lot of the proposals before us, particularly with respect to the president of the synod, would give him a great deal more day to day authority, supervising the synodical staff, perhaps even himself appointing key executives, because there would be no authoritative boards—we've talked about this in the past—to appoint and supervise these national level executives. And, you know, then you might want to institute term limits on the president of the synod. Now, again, that's not what the task force is calling for, but usually if you're giving somebody a great deal more authority or you're giving that authority to a position, you have some way of having checks and balances.

**WILKEN:** Okay, then, certifying pastors: what is the Blue Ribbon Task Force suggesting here?

**SCHURB:** It's a little bit unclear exactly what they are suggesting. They do want to include congregations, district presidents, and circuit counselors as well as faculties. See, right now all church workers in the synod, whether they be pastors certified by seminary faculties, whether they be teachers, deaconesses, DCEs, etc., certified by the faculties of the various synodical colleges and universities from which they came, the faculty does the certifying. As soon as the faculty says that a candidate is in fact qualified and certified, then that person is eligible for placement as a pastor, teacher, whatever they may be. This new system, I think, hones in on seminary candidates who would become pastors and says that, you know, we really need to include a wider group, because while the candidates may come out academically qualified, they may lack in

some other ways that are deemed to be essential.

Now I view this one with a great deal of alarm, Todd, and I think we need to bear in mind that our seminaries currently, as of this moment, require among the highest levels of field experience that are required by any seminaries whose accreditation is handled by the Association of Theological Schools. In other words, the ATS says that our seminaries are requiring as much, if not more, field experience than just about any other seminaries out there. And at every stage along the way in this field experience it is possible for concerns about a candidate to be noted.

I'll tell you a story from my own experience, because I used to be a field education supervisor for Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. And I had a field education student one quarter who—I really didn't see any problem in particular with the guy. Lay people in my congregation who had heard him speak in Bible class and who had seen him in settings that maybe I hadn't seen, or who just had a take on this guy that I didn't have, came to me and said, "You ought to watch this, this, and this." And I did start watching, and the more I looked, the more I as his supervisor began to get concerned. I filled out my report, which I shared with the student as supervisors do at the end of the quarter. It was just his first quarter of field-work. I passed him, but I said I had some significant reservations and I did want to see improvement in these areas in the next quarter, or else I probably wouldn't be passing him at the end of the next quarter. Well...

**WILKEN:** About one minute here.

**SCHURB:** ...that young man went right to the registrar's office and withdrew from seminary when he read my report. And I regret the fact that he withdrew. But, see, the process worked. And the process was not one of the members of the congregation kind of going around me as his supervisor. They came to me as the person who was entrusted by this process with making that kind of call. They came to me, gave me the kind of information that I needed, and they said, "Look at this." I did. If, in fact, this was a weeding out process, which certification is in any field, then this was a guy who got weeded out. The process works. And I think we're just burying our heads in the sand if we think that somehow or another requiring more field experience of some of the people who have the most field experience required of them of any seminaries will improve this appreciably.

**WILKEN:** With only fifteen seconds here—so the longer you look at these proposals of President Kieschnick's Blue Ribbon Task Force on structure and governance, what's your temperature on it? Is it going up or down?

**SCHURB:** Oh, I find things to be concerned about all over the place. The devil is in the details on stuff like this, Todd. The good news is, the task force is saying that they're going to put out the entire report, which I understand includes all the details, this coming fall. So we'll have plenty of time to look at it.

**WILKEN:** And Ken will, you can rest assured. Dr. Ken Schurb is pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Moberly, Missouri. He formerly served as an assistant to the president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and as theology professor at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Ken's congregation, Zion Lutheran Church in Moberly, Missouri, is among the congregations, this growing group, of the "Issues, Etc. 300." Ken, thank you very much for being our guest, and thanks to the people at Zion in Moberly for being part of the "300."

**SCHURB:** Hmm. I just saw the Indianapolis 500. Is that anything like this?

**WILKEN:** It's better, [laughter from guest] better than the Indianapolis 500.

Well, the "Issues, Etc. 300" is a growing group of congregations that are supporting *Issues, Etc.* with \$1000, at least, a year in their annual budget. You can find out more about how your congregation can join the "Issues, Etc. 300." Go to our website:

[www.issuesetc.org](http://www.issuesetc.org). Click “Promote,” you’ll find a flyer there that you can print off and give to your congregation when you ask them to join the “Issues, Etc. 300” – [www.issuesetc.org](http://www.issuesetc.org), click “Promote.”

When we come back from our break, it’s hour two of *Issues, Etc.* We’re going to start out talking with Dr. Robert George of the President’s Council on Bioethics, of Princeton University, about President Obama’s nominee for the Supreme Court, made this morning, and today’s ruling by the California Supreme Court on Proposition 8. They said “Yes” to Proposition 8; they also said “Yes” to 18,000 gay marriages in the state of California. That’ll be the subject of conversation with Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse also a little later in that second hour, and then we’ll round off today’s *Issues, Etc.*—half hour conversation on the book of Amos. Is it all about liberation, political, economic liberation, as so many say this Old Testament prophet is? Dr. Reed Lessing will answer that question. He’s author of our *Issues, Etc.* Book of the Month for May, the Concordia Commentary on Amos. That’s hour two of *Issues, Etc.* It starts in seven minutes. I’m Todd Wilken. Stay tuned.



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