



A Letter on Peace
And Good Health



James P. Wind

Support for printing this letter is provided by
Lutheran Brotherhood, a family of financial services for
Lutherans and a steward for more than one million members,
their families, congregations, institutions, and communities.

Linking Faith, Values & Finances



LUTHERAN BROTHERHOOD

A Letter on Peace And Good Health



James P. Wind

June 23, 1998

Contents

<i>About the Project</i>	3
<i>A Letter on Peace and Good Health</i>	4
Why the Concern About Health? Why Now?....	7
Health Seen Against the Horizon of Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification	11
A Healthy Creation	12
The Great Loss.....	13
Healing and Restoring the Creation.....	14
A Commitment to Life, Wholeness and Health	15
A High View of the Human	15
Valuing the Body	17
A Tradition of Discipline and Prevention	18
Jesus' Gospel of Health and Salvation.....	20
The Church: A New Reality	23
A Reforming Tradition	25
Multidimensional Health and Healing	30
The Exhorting Tradition	31
<i>Symposium on the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Ministerial Health and Wellness</i>	37
<i>InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness</i>	38

About the Project

THE INTERLUTHERAN COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON MINISTERIAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS is grateful to Lutheran Brotherhood for its strong support in the writing and publication of this *Letter on Peace and Good Health*. We believe this letter will be a valuable resource for our church's professional leaders, their spouses and families, as well as the congregations and ministries in which they serve.





Dear Friend in Ministry,

THIS LETTER COMES TO YOU AS A RESULT OF WIDESPREAD INTEREST AND HOPEFULNESS within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) about the health of ministers and the congregations they serve.¹ For more than three years representatives of these two church bodies have met together as the InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness with the express purpose of offering you, your colleagues in ministry, and the people you serve a set of health-affirming and wellness-enhancing resources. Their goal is to help develop and implement what is needed so that American Lutherans will be known for their healthy leaders and healthy churches.

¹ This letter is addressed to all ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. I will use the word minister to include ordained ministers, LCMS professional church workers, deaconesses, and teachers, and ELCA rostered lay ministers (associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, and deaconesses). In a full Lutheran sense, however, minister includes all baptized members of the body of Christ. The treasures of the Lutheran tradition described here are very much for their use and edification.


One of the resources the InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness (ILCCMHW) wishes to offer is a reminder of the life- and health-enhancing treasures that are at the heart of our Christian faith tradition. This conviction that our faith—both its beliefs and its practices—is a matter of life and death and that it is of value both in sickness and in health led the ILCCMHW to convene a small group of biblical scholars, theologians, denominational leaders, and parish clergy (see p. 37) from both church bodies to reflect together in a workshop setting on the biblical and theological dimensions of health. They commissioned me to join this group as listener, questioner, conversation partner, and finally as correspondent with you. I entered this unofficial conversation with no status other than my place within the American Lutheran ministerium and my participation in numerous conversations that have tried to relate the realms of health, faith, and ethics. This letter has no official status and makes no claims to being a definitive or last word about what Lutherans believe and practice concerning these important topics. Indeed, the

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*This letter has
no official status
and makes no
claims to being a
definitive or last
word about what
Lutherans believe
and practice
concerning these
important topics.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

conversations that took place at Spirit in the Desert Retreat Center in Carefree, Arizona, for three days in January 1997 were so rich and so multifaceted that no single statement could do justice to the range and diversity of insights and perspectives that arose from our common biblical and confessional heritage. Rather than try to compress these insights into a single, comprehensive statement, it makes sense to offer a collection of treasures, a sampler of life-giving resources that await us within our Lutheran tradition. And so, in the spirit of letter writers who trace their rhetorical strategy back at least to the apostolic age, I write what I hope will be the beginning of a

conversation, so that our congregations, homes, and churchwide offices can be places where we talk well together about health and healing, life and salvation. 

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

I write what I hope will be the beginning of a conversation, so that our congregations, homes, and churchwide offices can be places where we talk well together about health and healing, life and salvation.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Why the Concern About Health? Why Now?

Concern about health is like concern about the weather. The topic is always timely, and a change in either can make all the difference in the world. So any time could be an appropriate moment to seek to discern what our faith has to say about health. But the people who gathered in Carefree and leaders throughout the American religious community share the conviction that special reasons exist for focusing on health now. First, there is the powerful and all too regularly taken-for-granted fact that so many of our ministers and congregations have so much health in them. For many in our churches, ministry is a joy, and daily life holds rich measures of health, peace, and joy. In fact, one of our difficulties in a media-saturated culture that routinely presents a disturbing image of a new or frightening disease as part of the daily news is our inability to see the health that is in us. Powerful industries keep us so focused on what is or could be wrong with us that we fail to notice the marvel of how much health we have and the mystery of how much healing goes on around and within us.

Health is a timely topic for the church now for still another reason. The 20th century has been so full of life-giving medical discoveries that some have called it, without any apparent sense of irony, the health century. Ours is the age of wonder drugs and laser surgery, of organ transplants and intensive care units, of liposuction and in-vitro fertilization. Killer diseases like smallpox have been wiped from the face of the earth, and life expectancies have been

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
*... we fail to notice
the marvel of how
much health
we have and the
mystery of how
much healing goes
on around and
within us.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

extended enormously. We know a great deal about healthy lifestyles, and many in our congregations have learned to exercise regularly, monitor their stress levels, pay much more attention to what they eat, stop smoking, and fasten seat belts when they get into a car. Research has demonstrated that if we practice health behaviors of this sort, we have reason to expect longer and better lives. When we become seriously ill, modern medicine seems ever more able to repair our bodies and extend our longevity. We dare not take these significant health advances for granted. They are wonderful gifts of God that few in earlier centuries could imagine. Te Deums should be on our lips and in our hearts!

There is an irony, however, in our modern story, a very deep one. We live in an age of unprecedented killing, of terrifying new diseases like AIDS and lethal viruses like Ebola. Surprisingly, it is an age in which people have amassed great knowledge about many ways to prevent premature death, and yet they willfully do not change behaviors to do so. It is an age in which the meaning of health has become increasingly less evident, in which our medical capacities to extend life can become so burdensome that people vote for legislation allowing physician-assisted suicide. Our entertainment and advertising industries fuel a great debate about health, flooding our homes and minds with conflicting and numbing images of what the healthy and good life really is. The anorexic model becomes the icon of beauty; the ruthless gladiator, whether in corporate or athletic form, becomes the image of success.



In short, this is a time when 'health,' once such a clear word, has become a complex and ambiguous idea.



In short, this is a time when *health*, once such a clear word, has become a complex and ambiguous idea. Our society is engaged in a great, costly quest for health. To be sure, the tremendous advances made can and do improve our quality of life—whether the provision of pure drinking water or flu shots—but those advances come with a cost. Our healthcare industry has become almost as large a part of our national economy as the military-industrial complex was when President Eisenhower warned against it at mid-century. Now physicians and healthcare economists speak similar words of warning about the voracious appetite of our medical-industrial complex, and great debates occur about how to pay for all the health care that Americans and people around the world wish to have. Sadly, in this age of unprecedented concern about health, many, indeed most people, in the world have little or no access to all the marvels that modern medicine has to offer. In ways their great-grandparents could never have imagined, the people in our communities and in our congregations do daily battle with an idol that frequently comes draped in medical garb and regularly seeks to seduce with its offers to perfect our bodies and souls. Intensive care units are often places where families go through great pain as they wrestle with the dilemma of letting a loved one die or trying one more magic bullet to see if life can somehow be extended just a bit more. Those who track medical costs regularly remind us of the disproportionately large sums of money spent on healthcare during the last year of patients' lives. For all of these reasons health has become a frontline for the church's engagement with the world. Our

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*...health has
become a frontline
for the church's
engagement with
the world.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

congregations are arenas for this contest, and our religious leaders and the people they serve are participants in it.

Further, we see many, too many, warning signs that all is not well with those who minister in our congregations and communities. Denominational executives express great concern and spend significant amounts of money dealing with serious pathologies that seem endemic to ministry at the end of the 20th century. They list the abuses, addictions, and maladies that afflict our leaders—misuse of alcohol and other substances, sexual misconduct, financial crises at work or at home, identity and role confusion, burnout, stress, family breakdown, physical and mental illness, and untimely death. Members of congregations express concern about overworked professional ministers, live with the consequences of ministers' boundary violations, and feel betrayed when surprised by sexual or fiscal scandal. In a sense, none of this is new—ordained and unordained alike

have committed the Seven Deadly Sins (pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth) for millennia. But in another sense our pathologies and breakdowns are taking new forms—one thinks of the ways that clergy sexual misconduct has become such a pervasive concern in the last two decades or of the powerful addictions that seem so controlling in our culture. Whether we use ancient lists or ultramodern ones, we have abundant evidence that our congregations, denominational systems, the people who lead them, and those who belong to them are in need of healing and ways of life that nurture health and well-being.



... we see many, too many, warning signs that all is not well with those who minister in our congregations and communities.



Once more, we need to remember that breakdown and pathology are not the whole story. Though some of our congregations are sick enough to require emergency treatment and though others are caught in patterns of decline serious enough to be called “terminal,” congregations do exist that give evidence of great health and life. Yes, some ministers are in trouble, some have health problems severe enough to be “life-threatening,” and others (less dramatically) are counting the days to early retirement, but these do not exhaust the story either. We live in the tension between the real presence of both the health and the illness that surround us. We need to be able to discern the difference between the one and the other. And we need to practice ways of life that foster well-being and minister to the deep pathologies that afflict us. To meet those challenges, those of us called to positions of leadership in the church must recover the life- and health-giving treasures at the heart of our faith. We must put those treasures to work in new ways and teach a new generation to draw upon them.


■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
*... those of us
called to positions
of leadership in
the church must
recover the life-
and health-giving
treasures at the
heart of our faith.*
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Health Seen Against the Horizon of Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification


One of the greatest gifts bestowed on us by our Lutheran tradition is the enormous context it sets for any consideration of ministerial, congregational, denominational, or societal health. Lutherans instinctively turn to the Bible for orientation and guidance about every aspect of life before God and life in the world. When we bring our questions of

are added: light, heaven and earth, days and nights, plants, animals, creeping things, man, woman. The week climaxes on the seventh day when God rests with the whole creation, enjoying this cosmic garden with completely healthy people who need each other and who stand at ease and unashamed before God in order to be whole and complete.

The pictures of Adam and Eve at rest and in the garden and then actively involved in God's whole creation set the context for all biblical discussions of health and healing. Hold on to the fleeting image of the seventh day because in it we see God's intent: humans and all other creatures at ease, in harmony, resting in the presence of the Creator. Our first picture of health, then, is an ecological one, a picture of people in perfect relation to God, neighbor, self, and cosmos.



Our first picture of health, then, is an ecological one, a picture of people in perfect relation to God, neighbor, self, and cosmos.



The Great Loss

The third chapter of Genesis tells of our and God's great loss. A whole creation at peace with itself and its Creator was not to be. The wholeness, rest, and peace of the cosmos were fractured by a naive, self-centered willfulness in humans. Here began the great cover-up of humans' true selves, their inability to be who they are before God and before their neighbors. Eden was lost; strife, oppression, suffering, sickness, and death entered the world. God's original wholeness, what Hebrews would later attempt to capture in their word *shalom*, was broken. Perfect health was a victim of the tragic flaw at the heart of creation itself, humanity's original sin. This new reality, sin, had

tragic consequences for humans, their Creator, and the whole creation. Life after the Fall was deeply out of alignment, and relationships between God, humans, and the world became filled with fear, guilt, shame, and hostility. What was once a whole was now at odds with itself and the Lord of life.

Healing and Restoring the Creation

The rest of Israel's story can be read as the unfolding of the consequences of this great loss and of God's relentless efforts to heal and restore the creation, and a specially chosen people, to health in its original wholistic sense. The call of Abraham and Sarah, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, the entry into a promised land, the great contests between prophets

and kings, captivity, exile, and return are moments in the great story of God's ongoing work to heal a creation so deeply wounded. Along the way, in this grand drama of sin and redemption, we are given glimpses of health restored and lost. We see King David dancing in joy before the Ark of Yahweh, the picture for a moment of *shalom*. Jerusalem and its temple become holy places of connection to the Eden lost and the new Eden hoped for. But we also see Job suffering with the consequences of being human in a flawed creation, we read laments of deep physical suffering and great anguish in the Psalms, and we hear the Prophets thunder against the sick traditions and unwholesome actions of their people.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

This great story of stories sets health into a context, a frame of reference that can help us comprehend the ambiguous quest for health we are caught up in today.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

This great story of stories sets health into a context, a frame of reference that can help us comprehend the ambiguous quest for health we are caught up in today. It provides us with access to a God who heals and saves, often in costly ways that require deep pain and suffering. In this story there is reason for us to hope that health is not a lost cause but that in fact God is continuing to create in our midst by healing and restoring.

A Commitment to Life, Wholeness, and Health

Among the many gifts for us in the great stories, hymns, poems, preaching, and legislation of the Hebrews is the ringing affirmation of God's undergirding commitment to life and wholeness. The creation arises out of the Creator's delight in life. This orientation to life, captured so well in the familiar Jewish greeting "L'Hayyim" (To life!), provides the basis for a stance toward the world that gave Judaism and Christianity their distinctive shapes. At the heart of our traditions lies a love for life in all its forms, a reverence for the whole creation, a commitment to cure, heal, and restore, and a concern to develop healthy patterns of life that prevent illness.

A High View of the Human

Further, in the biblical texts a *nephesh*, a whole human being consisting of dust and breath, body and spirit, comes into view as the standard for biblical anthropology. In the biblical view humans are not the divided selves of Greek philosophy or immortal souls imprisoned in impure and disposable bodies. Here and there in the sacred texts we encounter a burst of awe and insight or stumble upon a description that offers clues of a precious, high, wholistic way of

distributes healthcare along the fault lines of wealth or insurability needs to recover the connection between justice and health that Israel treasured.

Valuing the Body

Return to the Garden of Eden for a moment. In Genesis 2 we encounter a Creator who is very concerned about human bodies. Out of the dust God molds a male. Then out of the body of the male comes the raw material for woman. The Creator designs their bodies so that they will cleave to each other. This God takes delight in their naked presence. This divine interest in and intimate care for human bodies echoes throughout our tradition. When we look at our bodies, we can, if we have eyes to see, discern the Creator's fingerprints still. When we search the Scriptures, the earthy, even erotic, images of the Song of Solomon, the portraits of heroes like Miriam and King David, and the health codes of the Pentateuch show us that the human body is a special work of art, a gift greatly to be treasured.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*This divine interest
in and intimate care
for human bodies
echoes throughout
our tradition.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Once we have put on these lenses, the discoveries of medical science can become something more than clinical details. The 75 trillion cells that make up our body, the genetic codes that guide our development from single cell of fused egg and sperm through the stages of life we call embryo, fetus, infant, baby, toddler, child, pre-adolescent, adolescent, young adult, middle-aged individual, elder, and corpse and determine whether we will be tall or short, black or white or brown, male or female, and the like are our own first-hand evidence of the Creator's delight,

power, and love. Our bodies with their integumentary (skin, skeleton, and muscle), reproductive, respiratory, circulatory, digestive, excretory, nervous, and endocrine systems reveal what a complex whole each of us is—ringing the changes on the psalmist’s theme. A little lower than God indeed.

This biblical perspective can free us to see our lives as the true marvels they are. A full consideration of all that happens each time we take a breath, eat a meal, embrace a spouse or friend, drive a car, or read a book should leave us dazzled by the mystery of creation. Part of that mystery is the remarkable recuperative powers and immune systems built right into our bodies so that God’s creation continues.

A Tradition of Discipline and Prevention

To moderns accustomed to an assortment of medicines and surgical techniques for almost every conceivable malady, Israel’s medicine chest can seem

almost empty. We search it in vain for an elaborate pharmacopoeia or descriptions of elaborate curing techniques. Instead we are taught that health is a gift of God. When it is absent, people lament out of their suffering and pray for help. Unlike moderns, who treat health as an entitlement or a project, the Hebrews display a fundamental awareness that health is the Creator’s work.

One distinctive feature of the Hebrew Scriptures is their heavy emphasis on prophylaxis, or prevention. The biblical message makes clear that behavior has consequences. The



One distinctive feature of the Hebrew Scriptures is their heavy emphasis on prophylaxis, or prevention.



elaborate Mosaic code contained in the Pentateuch regulated Sabbath rhythms, edible foods, sexual relations, circumcision, menstruation, personal cleanliness, and community sanitation. These two traditions of cleanliness and godliness for personal and communal health set Israel apart. It gave the Hebrews a distinctive way of life that contrasted markedly with that of other cultures of the Semitic world. These health practices remind us once more of the wholistic nature of health in the Hebrew world. Diet, dress, sex, weekly, monthly, and yearly rhythms established an identity, disciplined people to health-enhancing ways, and established a repertoire of practices that supported a healthy way of life. When Israel fell out of its right relation with God, neighbor, and creation, sickness, death, destruction, and defeat usually followed. At the heart of this people's health was their right relation with Yahweh. When that was troubled, life was very unhealthy indeed.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*These two traditions
of cleanliness and
godliness for
personal and
communal health
set Israel apart.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

This prophylactic tradition takes on new meaning for us as our culture and our congregations experiment with the many lifestyles available to us. It reminds us that a healthy way of life is much more than theology or pure beliefs. Our individual and collective behavior is the arena in which health is enhanced or diminished. In these days when medicine seeks to turn more of its energies to prevention and where so much attention is placed on new exercise regimes and diets, the ancient Hebrew regulations about cleanliness and godliness remind us that health must be incarnated in our daily life patterns and practices—and that our patterns and practices must be centered in a healthy relationship with God.

Jesus' Gospel of Health and Salvation

Our exploration of the Holy Scriptures, in search of treasures that can give us health and healing, drives us ultimately to Christ. Martin Luther wrote that the Scriptures served as the “cradle in which Christ lies.” In that concise phrase lies a recognition, a belief, that although the Scriptures have many treasures, one in particular is most precious and gives distinct value to everything else we find there. As professional ministers who seek resources with which to build healthy lives and healthy congregations, we must come to terms with the person and work of Christ, and the implications of the gospel about him for our health. The biblical portraits of Jesus are a rich storehouse of healing resources for us, for the people we serve in the church, and for the world in all its need.



The biblical portraits of Jesus are a rich storehouse of healing resources for us.



In the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, God's long-suffering labor to heal humanity and the world becomes clearer and still more focused. The healing and restoring work begun in response to the Fall culminates in the gracious acts of this Galilean healer, whose ministry leads his followers first to call him Christ and Lord and then to see in his life, death, and resurrection the healing of the old cosmos and the beginning of a whole

new creation. Those who count such things find 35 distinct instances of Jesus' healing activity in the Gospel accounts. During his ministry Jesus healed people who were blind, deaf, mute, lame, leprous, disabled, paralyzed, and demon-possessed. The Gospel writers make it clear that these acts of restoration to wholeness were not his only healing activity, however. More dramatic than even these

restorations to health were the resurrections of Lazarus of Bethany, the son of the widow at Nain, and Jairus' daughter.

The number, variety, and prominence of these mighty healing acts make it clear that at the heart of Jesus' ministry was the healing of bodies and the restoration of physical health. In, with, and under these acts of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing, a larger healing of the world was taking place. To look only at these forms of healing would be to miss the larger, multidimensional character of Jesus' commitment of life, wholeness, and health. His offering of food to thousands and his table fellowship with tax collectors, prostitutes, and other outcasts were acts that healed the fractures of human society and created new forms of community. His preaching about the Kingdom of God, his double-edged parables with their messages about the lost being found and the outsiders being invited in, his welcoming of children, his practice of a servant-style leadership, his confrontations with money changers at the temple and religious authorities whose traditions had become the dead faith of the living, his unjust arrest, torture, and execution on trumped-up charges by the vested interests of his day were all part of his redemptive work to heal sin, the wound at the heart of the world.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

His offering of food to thousands and his table fellowship with tax collectors, prostitutes, and other outcasts were acts that healed the fractures of human society and created new forms of community.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

At times, this healing took the form of great mercy and gentleness. At other times, however, healing required painful truth-telling and difficult conflict. Jesus' healing work also included judgment and harsh

words. When he healed on the Sabbath or touched lepers or the unclean woman, Jesus challenged cherished understandings of the very health codes and Sabbath practices that had set Judaism apart for centuries. Part of his healing work was confronting traditions that had over centuries become ill, had become instruments of oppression and separation rather than means of justice, health, and mercy.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Part of his healing work was confronting traditions that had over centuries become ill. . .

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

More radical still was Jesus' offer of forgiveness to sinners. This stunning offer of unconditional acceptance to humans whose brokenness had become so apparent was regarded by the leaders of his day as blasphemy, a fundamental challenge to their beliefs about the proper relations between God and humanity. But this offer,

combined with Jesus' other acts of healing, awakened faith in its recipients. They learned to trust God, neighbor, and self again. They were freed from the deep alienation that had marked humanity from the Fall. For offering this kind of healing, Jesus was put through the paces of a mock trial, tortured, and executed. At each stop of his humiliation and crucifixion, the sickness of the world became more apparent. Justice perverted, friendships betrayed, truth silenced and lies allowed to reign, political systems caught up in deadly patterns of self-preservation, religion at its most unhealthy, and human cowardice and hatred at full throttle—the depth of the loss back at Eden was never more apparent. Yet even in the midst of his suffering Jesus continued to heal—the soldier who lost an ear trying to arrest him, the grieving disciples and Mary at the foot of the cross, the malefactor dying next to him, even his executioners for whom he prayed as he died.

By the time he died, Jesus' mission and ministry had called the conventional wisdom about health and wholeness into question. The ultimate Outcast, the One whose quest to heal and forgive had cost him his life, seemed by established standards to be the sickest of souls. Then came the healing surprise. On the third day the new creation originating in him became more visible. A new era of health and salvation, a kingdom of grace and forgiveness came to life with the one who was raised from the dead. The good news of Jesus' resurrection began to propel a healing community into the world. The peace experienced in encounters with the risen Christ released the Holy Spirit, a healing and forgiving energy that continues to heal the world to this day. In the first Christian century and in our own, the work of the Spirit of Christ in the daily lives of his followers brings fallen life into the presence of this new creation, continues the healing of Jesus' ministry, and extends it across time and space.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The peace experienced in encounters with the risen Christ released the Holy Spirit, a healing and forgiving energy that continues to heal the world to this day.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The Church: A New Reality

Those who experienced the health and salvation offered by Jesus were fashioned by his Spirit first into one community in Jerusalem and then into many communities around the world. These communities were united by the Holy Spirit into a whole through their recollections of his life, death, and resurrection and by their attempts to follow the practices of his ministry. Table fellowship, the ministry of healing the

sick, care for the poor and widows, and time spent in the presence of God through prayer and hymns were the first forms of this new healing community that came to be called the church. A distinct way of life with central liturgical events—especially Baptism and the Eucharist—emerged. These sacraments and narratives about Jesus’ ministry became the central means of grace, the chief places of connection to the Risen Christ and to the new creation that was

beginning to transform the old one.

In its whole way of life, both in its gathered time of worship and its dispersed time of ministry in the world, the church became a healing community that offered health and forgiveness to the world. Over the centuries it developed a repertoire of practices (anointing the sick, welcoming the stranger, confessing and absolving, commemorating the blessed dead) and institutions (hospitals, orphanages, monasteries, universities) that healed various elements of the world’s ongoing brokenness.



*... the church
became a healing
community that
offered health
and forgiveness
to the world.*



Because of its memory of Jesus’ suffering and death and because the old creation was still very much alive, the church practiced a costly kind of healing. It called people to a life of service and suffering, to a vocation of struggle with the principalities and powers of a world that still groans in the pain of the great loss of Eden. As the body of Christ in the world, the church carried on the fleshy and bloody work of bringing health, healing the world’s sickness, and suffering with those marked by sin. The great struggle of living in the tension between the “already” of Jesus’ inauguration of the new creation and the “not yet” of its completion at the end of history has put the church

and its ministers in a between-the-times reality. In Christ, the church has access to and embodies the health of the new creation. But living in this world, it also participates in the pathology of the old creation and experiences the pain of sin. For this reason the church struggles to live with the paradox that it bears within itself both the health of the new age and the illness of the old one. This means that it simultaneously reveals the health of the Gospel and succumbs to the captivity of sin. Its traditions, just like those of Israel of old, can lose their healthy marrow and become unhealthy, even lethal. So the same church history that abounds in practices of health and mercy is also full of failure, oppression, and pathological self-centeredness.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
*... the church
struggles to live
with the paradox
that it bears
within itself both
the health of the
new age and
the illness of
the old one.*
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

A Reforming Tradition

The history of the Christian tradition in the post-apostolic ages is full of treasures that can be recovered and drawn upon in our search for sources of health and healing at the threshold of the third Christian millennium. In fact our treasury is so full that a letter like this one can only begin to gather up the riches.

Over the centuries, followers of Christ have followed the impulses of the Gospel and the leading of the Holy Spirit into new situations where new health-giving actions and fresh understandings of God's commitment to health have yielded new practices, institutions, and insights. Early Christian literature,

for example, is full of admonitions to care for the sick. In those first centuries special offices of deacons and deaconesses were established to organize the church's care of the sick. After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in the Fourth Century, bishops assumed responsibility for large-scale charitable efforts on behalf of the sick. One such bishop, Basil the Great of Caesarea in Cappadocia, was an inventor of a new Christian institution, the hospital. The prototypical hospital he opened in A.D. 372 was staffed by both nurses and medical attendants.

On many occasions in antiquity Christians demonstrated courage in the face of plagues and illness, often manifesting a commitment to the sick that their contemporaries viewed as suicidal. One such group in Alexandria became known as the Parabolani ("the reckless ones"). In the Sixth Century Pope Gregory the Great fostered the emergence of Western monasticism and developed reforms in pastoral care that made lasting impacts upon the health of medieval church and state. In particular, St. Benedict, and his sister St. Scholastica, established monastic communities and rules that changed the face and health of Western Europe.

The disciplined lives of those who followed the Rule of St. Benedict, structured around the liturgical hours of daily prayer, sought a healthy balance between work and prayer.

As tempting as it is to go on, we must let these few examples represent the great cloud of healing and health-giving witnesses who are a part of our story. Sadly, most members of our congregations do not know this

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
*Sadly, most
members of our
congregations
do not know
this history.*
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

history. They remain unaware of the power, creativity, inventiveness, and passion for health that is a baptismal gift, their birthright and pedigree. But even from this briefest of samples it becomes clear that the church carried forward an “always reforming” tradition as it grew and developed. Its understandings of the healing implications and the health-nurturing consequences of the Gospel have grown and deepened as the church moved across centuries and continents. That tradition, rooted in the Scriptures, manifested itself in fresh ways during the 16th Century, when our own Lutheran tradition emerged within the larger Christian story.

This dynamic of reform and growth in the church’s understanding and practice of health and healing should not surprise us. Israel’s Scriptures tell a story of repeated relapses into patterns of sin and sickness. They also proclaim that God keeps on reforming, restoring, and healing. Jesus’ own ministry can be viewed as one instance—a most magnificent one—in that ongoing pattern of illness healed and health restored. The New Testament Scriptures, especially the letters of St. Paul, tell similar stories of traditions in trouble being marvelously opened and healed by God’s Spirit. Throughout its history the church has experienced that dynamic of falling into unhealthy patterns and being surprised by the Spirit’s gift of new health.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

*Jesus’ own ministry
can be viewed as
one instance—a
most magnificent
one—in that
ongoing pattern of
illness healed and
health restored.*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Martin Luther’s reform arose out of the fragmentation of personal crisis. But his healing was not merely the healing of one troubled young monk. Luther’s assertion of “justification by grace alone

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

In a sense the church was Luther's patient, and from his vantage point it was very sick indeed.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

through faith” was initially a diagnosis of a tradition that was out of relationship with its source, the grace of God freely offered in Christ. In a sense the church was Luther's patient, and from his vantage point it was very sick indeed. When Luther looked at the church of his day he saw an institution in deep need of healing at its core. He sought to drive the church back to Christ, the Gospel, and the central biblical teachings about God's gracious and costly commitment to human health and salvation. Luther's distinguishing of

Law from Gospel was a fresh way of showing the depths of humanity's predicament and recovering the new health that Christ had come to offer.

The Lutheran Confessions, which gave official shape to the teaching of Luther, Melanchthon, and the other reformers, spoke of original sin as an “inborn sickness” and held up the Eucharist as “healing medicine.” Concerned with the illness at the church's heart, the Reformers focused their energies on recovering a theology of the cross that could address the realities of sin and death in the world rather than on developing long prophylactic lists or the creation of new healthcare institutions. They spent their energies challenging church practices that had lost their connection to the Gospel. At the same time they sought to shape new or reformed liturgical and catechetical practices that could move people from an unhealthy reliance on their own works to a healthy trust in the Gospel. They translated the Scriptures into the vernacular, taught congregations to sing and pray, and sought to call all baptized Christians to new life in Christ. They sought to build new forms of community around congregation and parsonage

where the Gospel could be preached, the Sacraments rightly administered, and Christian vocation practiced by all who were part of the priesthood of all believers. They reaffirmed the Pauline insight that the Christian had to learn how to live with sickness and health, with sin and grace, in the two kingdoms of the old fallen creation and the new creation that exists in Christ. *Simul justus et peccator* (“at the same time saint and sinner”) became a powerful shorthand phrase for describing a peculiarly Lutheran way of understanding life as a Christian. Every day the baptized Christian participates in the life-and-death struggle between self as sinner and self as saint. The Christian is very ill and very well at the same time.

Others followed these Lutheran reformers and sought to create additional patterns of practice and new institutional forms that would extend the reach of the healed tradition in church and world. In later centuries, for example, Lutherans pioneered in deaconess ministries and in our own time in efforts to practice wholistic health. In the United States, Lutherans became leading creators of hospitals, homes for the elderly, and orphanages in the 19th Century, and of centers for social work, substance abuse treatment, and counseling in the 20th Century. But the main concern of the tradition has been with health at the heart of things—the reality of God’s grace and the centrality of faith in human well-being.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

In the United States, Lutherans became leading creators of hospitals, homes for the elderly, and orphanages in the 19th Century, and of centers for social work, substance abuse treatment, and counseling in the 20th Century.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Given the frequency with which both the Jewish and the Christian traditions have slipped into unhealthy patterns of life and needed their moments of reform and renewal, it should come as no surprise that the Lutheran tradition, too, has been less than whole, often leaving to other religious communities the work of social justice. We witness the thundering silence of many Lutheran churches in the face of pogroms and holocaust and the laxness of much of our religious life. The renewed emphasis in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod on wellness and healing which occasions this letter to you is another sign of a tradition that has become ill and that seeks to become healthier.

Multidimensional Health and Healing

In our own century the multidimensional reality of health has been further obscured by the successes of medical science and technology. Health has become increasingly a matter of biological functioning. The church in this century has found itself pushed to the

margins of healing—concerned with the leftovers that the hard science of medicine had little or no interest in. In the 1960s, pioneers in the Lutheran tradition began to espouse new philosophies of “human ecology” (which became institutionalized at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Illinois) and “wholistic healthcare.” These reformers protested the modern world’s reduction of health to physical functioning. They warned that our age was typified by “unhealthy health” and “unhealthy religion.”



*These reformers
protested the
modern world’s
reduction of health
to physical
functioning.*



These reforming movements proposed a multi-dimensional understanding of health that moved away from the narrowness of biomedicalism and toward the wholistic understandings of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Health was, once again, multidimensional, a dynamic unity between physical, social, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. Ministers and healthcare professionals who embrace this new understanding recognize that human illness can be caused by a malady within any of those dimensions, not just the biological. Moreover, the interactions among those dimensions means that something occurring in one, say, the psychological, could have consequences in another, perhaps the physical. To be complete, healing had to occur in all the dimensions of life. Too much attention to one aspect of health could lead to illness in others.

This larger, interactive, dynamic, and complex understanding of health gets us closer to the biblical framework that is one of our tradition's great treasures. It also helps us see that any narrow attempt to focus on one aspect of health at the expense of others will not ultimately heal. For those concerned with ministerial health and well-being this recovery of the larger health horizon of the Scriptures has several implications.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
*... this recovery of
the larger health
horizon of the
Scriptures has
several implications.*
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The Exhorting Tradition

One of the special treasures of the Lutheran tradition is its emphasis on exhortation. This tradition certainly reaches back to Martin Luther, but in fact, we can trace our practice of exhortation to the outcries of



Exhortation is the ancient practice of encouraging people to persevere in the Christian faith and to continue the struggle of living in the tension between Christ's new creation and the old one.



Israel's Prophets, the preaching of Jesus, and the letters of St. Paul.

Exhortation is the ancient practice of encouraging people to persevere in the Christian faith and to continue the struggle of living in the tension between Christ's new creation and the old one. All along the way of Christian history, evangelical and catholic cheerleaders have urged the faithful to strive for the goal and to complete their race. In that spirit, I wish to conclude this letter with some words of encouragement and exhortation. They are offered not as burdensome "oughts" or "shoulds" but as privileges and joy-filled responses to what we have first received from Christ.

As I write these words, I recall Jesus' parable about the rich man who gave his three servants "talents" to take

care of while he went on a long journey. This familiar parable from the Gospel of St. Matthew tells us that two of the three servants took their talents and shrewdly invested them so that by the time the owner returned, they had doubled his original gift. The other servant dug a hole in the ground and buried his talent. When the owner returned, he was pleased with the two who had made use of his treasure. The unprofitable servant was punished, first with the loss of the one talent he had received, and then with banishment from the owner's land.

In a sense the ministers of Christ's church are like the servants described in St. Matthew's Gospel. As the preceding pages make clear, we have been entrusted with a boundless treasure of health-giving and

healing riches. Our bodies indeed are temples of the Holy Spirit, and they are to be cared for in ways that recognize just what a marvelous creation each one of us is. Our faith tradition can help us lead healthy lives and live with sickness and death that will inevitably come. The great danger for us is that we can leave all these riches buried, hidden from view and use. The point of Jesus' parable is that treasure must be put to use, that they must be given the chance to compound themselves, to double and triple in size and value. All of the health-giving treasures in our tradition are meant to be put to work in the world.

So, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, plunder the treasury. Remember what a gift your body is and put it to good use. Take care of your body by attending to what you eat and drink. Develop a healthy regimen of exercise—whether that be running in marathons or regularly taking a long and vigorous walk. Change those behaviors that are dangerous. Stop smoking. Fasten the seat belt. Find the support groups that can help you overcome addictions to alcohol, sex, and work. Firmly establish healthy and appropriate boundaries. Develop the disciplines that Paul urged upon his followers. Go back to the prophylactic codes of Israel and see how interrelated life before God and healthy living in the world really are. Learn to rest. Take a clue from the Benedictines and order your day around times of prayer and reflection.

With colleagues in ministry and with members of your congregations, retrieve some of our tradition's great practices and make them central parts of your lives. Make regular use of the means of grace. Keep

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

All of the health-giving treasures in our tradition are meant to be put to work in the world.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

the Sabbath by carving out at least one day per week for rest and renewal. Build “mini-Sabbaths” into your daily routines. Learn the practices of compassion for the sick and dying and put them to work in your congregation and in your community. Heal the fragmentation of our world by mastering the art of hospitality. Attend to your family and friends and make sure that those relationships are shaped by the one you have with the Lord of life Who created and redeemed you.



*We can teach health
by what we serve
at church suppers,
by the blood drives
we host, by our
ministries to the
sick and shut in. . .*



Building healthy ministers requires that we simultaneously work to build healthy congregations, and vice versa. One reason that our ministers face so many threats to their own health is that they live and work in unhealthy systems. We need to look at the way people are welcomed and excluded in our congregations, at the ways they are put down or lifted up, at the ways our meetings, worship services, and social events reflect God’s love for us and our love for each other. Just as traditions are constantly in need of reform, we need to recognize the need for reform in our personal and corporate lives in Christ.

More than that, we need to work intentionally to make our congregations places of health and healing. We can teach health by what we serve at church suppers, by the blood drives we host, by our ministries to the sick and shut in, by our working for social justice, and by our prayers for peace and shalom. Our congregations can be places where honest diagnoses of the world’s ills occur and where people are given room to find health in the midst of sickness and tragedy. We can make our congregations

places where people can experience the depths of God's commitment to life and health and where we can help each other embody that commitment to justice and service in the world.

The good news for those who wish to be healthy leaders and who wish to be members of healthy congregations is that we have so many gifts that can produce health in us. The Christian tradition is full of life- and health-giving treasures. The great stories of the faith that put our own health and the health of the world into a different context are of inestimable value. In those stories we meet again the God who intends us to be well and who works constantly to heal and to save. We know the truth about the creation and about the Creator's intentions for us. We have Sacraments that bring the new creation to life in us, Baptism and Eucharist. We have practices like Sabbath rest that allow us to participate in God's wholeness and practices of compassion that heal us as we heal others. We are freed from the need to make our own health an all-consuming quest. We are also freed to love our bodies and to practice disciplines that care for them. We know that health often comes to us in the midst of brokenness, that perfect health this side of the eschaton is a delusion. Moreover, we know because of our encounters with the testimony about Jesus that God creates new health in the midst of suffering and that even when we are ill, God has a greater wholeness to offer us. And we know that we have been given each other—that it is in establishing healthy relationships with our neighbors and those who are strangers to us that God's work of restoration occurs. Finally, we have the gift of a healing promise.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

... those of us called to positions of leadership in the church must recover the life- and health-giving treasures at the heart of our faith.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■



*Peace I leave
with you; my peace
I give to you I do
not give to you
as the world gives*

—*John 14:27*



The same Jesus who said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you I do not give to you as the world gives,” (John 14:27) is the One who promises to be with us always. That promise of his special gift and his abiding presence can awaken the faith in us again and again so that we can receive shalom and extend the wholeness that is ours.

Peace and joy,

James P. Wind

Symposium on the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Ministerial Health and Wellness

January 24-26, 1997
Spirit in the Desert Retreat Center
Carefree, Arizona

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Author

Rev. Dr. James P. Wind President, Alban Institute, Bethesda, Maryland

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Representatives

Rev. Allan Bjornberg Bishop, Rocky Mountain Synod, Denver, Colorado

Rev. Susan Briehl Holden Village, Chelan, Washington

Rev. Dr. James Childs Trinity Seminary, Columbus, Ohio

Rev. Dr. Gary Harbaugh Florida-Bahamas Synod, Orlando, Florida

Rev. Dr. Duane Larson Gettysburg Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Rev. Karen Locken Parish Pastor, Middleton, Wisconsin

Rev. Dr. Daniel Simundson Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Representatives

Rev. Dr. Andrew Bartelt Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

Rev. Dr. Ralph Bohlmann President Emeritus, LCMS, St. Louis, Missouri

Rev. Dr. Tom Droege Carter Center, Atlanta, Georgia

Rev. Dr. Arthur Just Concordia Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dr. Lois Klatt Concordia University, River Forest, Illinois

Staff

Rev. Dr. Bruce M. Hartung LCMS Health Ministries, St. Louis, Missouri

Rev. Dr. Stephen L. Ganzkow-Wold Project Coordinator, InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness, Chicago, Illinois

Rev. A. Craig Settlege ELCA Division for Ministry, Chicago, Illinois

Additional Participants

Dr. Ruth Busman Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota

Dr. Arnold Mickelson Lutheran Brotherhood, Minneapolis, Minnesota

InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness

Members

Rev. Mark Anderson (ELCA) Director, Ministerial Health Services, Fairview
Riverside Hospital, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Rev. Allan Bjornberg (ELCA) Bishop, Rocky Mountain Synod, Denver, Colorado

Rev. David C. Cloeter (LCMS) Parish Pastor (retired), Ottertail, Minnesota

Rev. Susan Gamelin (ELCA) Assistant to the Bishop, Southeastern Synod,
Atlanta, Georgia

Rev. Dr. Bruce M. Hartung (LCMS) Director, LCMS Health Ministries; Executive
Director, Commission on Ministerial Growth and Support, St. Louis, Missouri

Rev. Dr. John L. Heins (LCMS) District President (retired); Pastor Emeritus,
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Dr. Lois Klatt (LCMS) Distinguished Professor, Concordia University,
River Forest, Illinois

Rev. A. Craig Settlage (ELCA) Associate Executive Director, ELCA Division for
Ministry, Chicago, Illinois

Project Coordinator

Rev. Dr. Stephen L. Ganzkow-Wold Chicago, Illinois

*Not for distribution or quotation
without permission from the*

INTERLUTHERAN COORDINATING COMMITTEE
ON MINISTERIAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

(773) 380-2881

