

Briar Siljander

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June 1, 2023

Via Federal Express Overnight Delivery

**Laestadian Lutheran Church
212 West 3rd Street
Monticello, MN 5536
Attn: Jim Jurmu, Chairman**

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Via Email to:

**Alaska Laestadian Lutheran Church
Brainerd Laestadian Lutheran Church
Coastal California Laestadian Lutheran Church
Cokato Laestadian Lutheran Church
Detroit Laestadian Lutheran Church
Dunblane Laestadian Lutheran Church
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Elk River
Flagstaff Laestadian Lutheran Church
Flathead Valley Laestadian Lutheran Church
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Florida
Gillette Laestadian Lutheran Church
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Glendale
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Illinois
Ishpeming Laestadian Lutheran Church
Lethbridge Laestadian Lutheran Church
Longview Laestadian Lutheran Church
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Menahga
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Monticello
Outlook Laestadian Lutheran Church
Pelkie Laestadian Lutheran Church
Phoenix Laestadian Lutheran Church
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Prescott Valley
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Roaring Fork Valley
Rockford Laestadian Lutheran Church
Rolla Laestadian Lutheran Church
Saskatoon Laestadian Lutheran Church
Seattle Laestadian Lutheran Church
Laestadian Lutheran Church of Spokane
Laestadian Lutheran Church Toronto
Ulster Park Laestadian Lutheran Church
West Barnstable Laestadian Lutheran Church
Williston Laestadian Lutheran Church
Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys
Board of Directors
Attn: Valde Palola**

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Dear Jim, Members of the LLC Board of Directors, Members of the LLC, Delegates to the 2022 LLC Annual Meeting, and Board of the SRK:

Your silence is deafening. Since I wrote to you nearly ten months ago, I heard not a word from any of you – neither by way of correction or rebuke nor with a desire to understand how you might have erred. You have made Apostle Paul’s prophesy true: you will no longer endure sound doctrine, but after your own lusts have heaped to yourselves teachers who will preach not that which is the true Word of God, but that which your itching ears desire to hear. You have turned your ears away from the truth. You have turned to fables.¹

Instead of harkening to the cries of many that you strayed from the Word, you turned from them and hardened your hearts against them. You proclaimed heresy and prohibited your followers to greet them with the peace of God. You encouraged inquisitions to eliminate anyone who might dare to speak the truth. Might is not right. Neither is deception.

When I wrote to you last, I told you that your expulsion of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations, members of your nonprofit corporation, was against Minnesota law. You did not respond to me. Instead, you propagated egregious misrepresentations about the law and your own organization’s governing documents.

In the January 2023 Voice of Zion publication, the LLC Board of Directors (Keith Waaraniemi, Sam Roiko, Rick Nevala, Peter Kuopus, George Koivukangas, Jim Jurmu, Petri Hotari, Randy Hillukka, Lauri Nevala, Michael Kumpala, David Edwards, Marv Wittenberg, Dean Simonson, Carey Simonson, and Roger Plough) all joined together in unity to say the following:

At the 2022 LLC Annual Meeting, delegates raised the issue of the spiritual division in the North American Zion and the danger of the harm and confusion it spread. . . . Delegates then made a motion to formally remove the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations as member organizations in the LLC. The motion was discussed at length and then passed with near unanimous approval. **The motion was in accord with the LLC bylaws which state that member congregations are required to ‘act in conformity with the same spirit and doctrine confessed by the other member congregations’ (Article II, Section I).**

Members of the Board, heed the words of Paul: “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.”² Your words are a lie. You have, quite knowingly, quoted only *part* of the complete sentence that you say supports your expulsion of two members of the LLC. Article II, Section I of the Bylaws says in full:

Only such congregations are accepted as members of the LLC whose applications have been approved and are legally registered and that act in conformity with the same spirit and doctrine confessed by the other member congregations in the LLC **as required in Sections V and VI of the Constitution.**

¹ 2 Tim. 4:3-4.

² Col. 3:9.

Moreover, as you know, the section of the Bylaws you cite does not even pertain to the expulsion of members. Rather, it applies specifically to *admission* of congregations as new members of the LLC. As I told you in my first letter on August 3, 2022 (five months before the Board of Directors' letter in the Voice of Zion), it is Article II Section 9 of the Bylaws that relates to expulsions. I quoted that section to you in my letter. Section 9 of the Bylaws states that a member congregation may be expelled from the LLC only if the member congregation "does not comply or act in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws and fails to comply and obey the decisions made by the LLC" This standard is quite different than that which you have proclaimed.

No one at the Annual Meeting asserted, and no one from the LLC Board or office has claimed, that the Minneapolis or Wolf Lake congregations did not "comply or act in accordance with the Constitution and the Bylaws and fail[ed] to comply and obey the decisions made by the LLC." And, lest you be tempted to mislead again, the basis for expulsion requires that a congregation have 1) "failed to act in accordance with the Constitution and bylaws" **and** 2) "failed to obey the decisions made by the LLC." One or the other will not do – you must have both. At the Annual Meeting, you had neither.

Reviewing the LLC Constitution, and particularly the sections that the LLC Board omitted in its false proclamation that it acted in accordance with the Bylaws, sheds light on perhaps why those sections (and reference to the Constitution altogether) were ignored. Section V of the Constitution states:

Said Laestadian Lutheran Church shall be composed of congregations in the United States and Canada who confess that living faith which is founded on the Holy Word of God in the books of the Old and New Testaments in which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. This faith is also expressed in the oldest creeds of Christendom (Apostle's, Nicene, and Athanasian) which are consistent with the Holy Word of God and in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Small and Large Catechisms by Martin Luther. Said Corporation holds that the Holy Word of God is the highest authority and only measure according to which all doctrines and teachings in said Corporation are to be examined and judged.

This Constitution was adopted by the LLC members on July 1, 2000, and those tenets of faith have been held by its predecessor, the American Association of Laestadian Congregations ("AALC") since the early 1970s. This statement of faith is adhered to by the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations. Do the LLC Board and other member congregations still adhere to and believe it? Do your beliefs align with the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed? Do you believe the words of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small and Large Catechisms by Martin Luther?

I have not heard, nor have I heard it said, that the Minneapolis or Wolf Lake congregations do not adhere to or believe these creeds, confessions, and catechisms. What I have observed is criticism of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations by the LLC Board, officers, and members, *because* members of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations believe these writings and dare to recite from them in doctrinal discussions.

Section VI of the Constitution states:

The members of said Corporation believe that the Kingdom of God is one and indivisible. They also believe that there is only one saving faith, one baptism and one

Holy Christian Church, or communion of saints, wherein God dwells through His Holy Spirit, and wherein He causes repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be preached for the salvation of souls. They hold that the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins is the first and most important function of said Corporation.

I addressed to you in my first letter where I believe you have erred in confusing the LLC, an earthly organization, with God's congregation. I quoted from the writings of Luther, from which a portion of Section VI of the Constitution is derived:

"I believe that there is one holy Christian Church on earth, i.e. the community or number or assembly of all Christians in all the world, the one bride of Christ, and his spiritual body of which he is the only head. . . . This Christian Church exists not only in the realm of the Roman Church or pope, but in all the world, as the prophets foretold that the gospel of Christ would spread throughout the world, Psalm 2[:8]; Psalm 19[:4]. Thus this Christian Church is physically dispersed among pope, Turks, Persians, Tartars, but spiritually gathered in one gospel and faith, under one head, i.e. Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

[I]t is clear that the holy church is not bound to Rome; rather, it extends to the end of the earth, assembled in one faith, a spiritual and not a physical assembly. For what is believed is neither physical nor visible. All of us see the external Roman church. That is why it cannot be the true church, which is believed and which is a community or assembly of the saints in faith. But no one can see who is holy or who believes. . . . Not Rome or this or that place, but baptism, the sacrament, and the gospel are the signs by which the existence of the church in the world can be noticed externally. Wherever there is baptism and the gospel no one should doubt the presence of saints—even if they were only children in the cradle.³

I did not hear at the 2022 Annual Meeting or otherwise that the Minneapolis or Wolf Lake congregations did not believe and adhere to the words in Article VI of the Constitution. Do you, members of the LLC and LLC Board Members, believe and adhere to the words of Article VI? Or have you shifted, as Valde Palola, the chairman of the SRK board, describes some of the "bigger churches in the world" have, to believing that "everything has not been stated in the Bible, but in this sense God's revelation continues in the midst of the congregation"?⁴

To the SRK board: it is disheartening to see that you, also, have ignored calls for help from those in the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations, as well as many others from congregations across the United States and Finland who voiced concerns about the actions of the LLC board long before the expulsion of the congregations. You have permitted earthly bonds of human friendship and trust – no doubt strong bonds built over many years – to evaporate your desire to know and preach the truth. You chose a side and refused to listen to or discuss matters with those painted with the scarlet letter. You do not know how those in the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations believed or believe –

³ LUTHER'S WORKS, Vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III, 367; LUTHER'S WORKS, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I, 75.

⁴ Palola, Valde, Siionin Lahetyslehti, July 2012.

you heard it only through “trusted brothers” from the LLC Board and office. From this alone you have judged, condemned, and ignored. Do you disagree with what I wrote in my first letter to the LLC Board and member congregations? Is it different than how you believe? If it is, how is it different? If it is not, why have you joined in the condemnation?

The chairman of the SRK Board of Directors, Valde Paolola, voiced support of the actions of the LLC, repeating the same false information spread by the LLC Board and office: “Based on discussion at the 2022 [LLC] Annual Meeting, the assembled delegates, based on the [LLC] bylaws, ultimately removed two member congregations from the central organization.”⁵ Again, it appears the SRK Board of Directors, or at least Valde Palola, has blindly trusted those “trusted brothers.”

It is clear that the LLC Board wanted a separation and long campaigned for it. Yet, in accomplishing it, the LLC Board and each member of the LLC who, through its delegates, voted in favor of expulsion at the 2022 LLC Annual Meeting, violated Minnesota law, the LLC’s Constitution, and the LLC’s bylaws.

Now we do not greet each other with the peace of God because you no longer believe as your Constitution says you believe. I still do, as do the members of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations with whom I have visited. Since you have refused to acknowledge that your forceful separation was wrong and unlawful, we are left only with the recourse established by the same laws under which the LLC was created and exists. Those laws are enforced by the Attorney General of Minnesota and by the courts.

I am happy to discuss this matter with you should you wish. If I do not hear from you by June 8, 2023, I will presume you do not wish to resolve it properly and will pursue the remedies provided by the law. Because each of the member congregations approving the expulsion (and their delegates) are implicated, please ensure this letter is distributed to each of them.

Regards,



Briar Siljander

⁵ Paolola, Valde, Opening Remarks at SRK Speakers’ Meeting on January 7, 2023, available at www.llchurch.org/post/news-from-srk-work-areas