AN OPEN LETTER TO THE BOARD OF THE SRK

Briar Siljander

September 8, 2026

Via Email (srk@srk.fi; valde.palola@srk.fi) and International Post

Suomen Rauhanyhdistysten Keskusyhdistys ry (SRK)
Board of Directors
Attn: Valde Palola, Chairman
Kiviharjunlenkki 7
90220 Oulu, Finland

Copies to:
The Most Rev. Dr. Tapio Luoma
Archbishop of Turku and Finland, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

The Right Reverend Jukka Keskitalo
Bishop of Oulu, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Board of Directors, Laestadian Lutheran Church, Monticello, Minnesota
Member Congregations of the Laestadian Lutheran Church

Dear Members of the Board of the SRK:

I have written to you before. On August 3, 2022, I wrote to the Board of Directors and member congregations of the Laestadian Lutheran Church ("LLC"), your sister organization in North America, showing that the expulsion of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations violated Minnesota law, the LLC's Constitution, and its Bylaws. On June 1, 2023, I wrote again, and that letter I addressed and sent to your Board as well, by email to srk@srk.fi and to your chairman, Valde Palola, at his SRK address, recalling the first letter in it. In October 2023, the letter addressed to you was translated into Finnish. Both letters (and the translation of the 2023 letter) are enclosed with this one, so that no one need rely on memory or on anyone's summary of them. I asked you then: do you disagree with what I wrote? Is it different from how you believe? If it is, how is it different? If it is not, why have you joined in the condemnation and endorsed the expulsion of congregations from the LLC when they confess the same doctrine and beliefs as you?

More than three years have passed since I last wrote you, in which time you have readily accepted as gospel whatever the LLC Board of Directors has shared about the situation in North America and ignored all other pleas to hear the substance of what those condemned by the LLC Board said. "*Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*" *John 7:51.* You have not answered – not the letter, not with correction, not with rebuke, not with a single word. Because

letters sent to you privately have been met with silence, I write this one openly so that your congregants, too, might see what you have endorsed.

"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord."* – *Jer. 23:1.

For eight years the leadership of the LLC has pursued, quietly at first and then openly, the removal of congregations from its fellowship: first Minneapolis and Wolf Lake, now Coastal California. It began not with doctrine but with men. In June 2018, at a meeting of the Minnesota boards, LLC leaders proposed that ministers "causing confusion" be "spoken to or taken down"; within months speakers began to be systematically removed, and Phil Alajoki of Wolf Lake had been disinvited from speaking at the Cokato congregation.

Pre-Expulsion Efforts to Avoid Doctrinal Discussion

I moderated a meeting between the LLC Board and the Wolf Lake congregation on December 7, 2019. Before it, I asked the LLC in writing to state its concerns about the Wolf Lake congregation in advance, in writing. The purpose was twofold: first, to allow thoughts to be cogitated and put into a coherent, deliberate statement, so that the constant fallback to "weak words" in the moment could be gotten around – the LLC Board could, without the pressure and time constraints of a meeting, write and rewrite what they intended to convey until it was in a clear, cogent, and understandable form; second, to avoid another meeting of long soliloquies, where vague and meandering concerns would be set out and the post-meeting report by the LLC would claim a "different voice" was there, with no actual substance being discussed and all parties leaving frustrated by not reaching the core issues.

For the same reasons, I also requested that the LLC Board and Wolf Lake congregation agree to focus on one topic at a time in the discussion because my observation had been that prior meetings quickly went off track when multiple topics would be listed at once and long speaking turns skimming across these numerous topics made it virtually impossible to progress regarding a single point (of doctrine or otherwise).

The LLC Board chairman, Jim Frantti, declined to do either, stating: "The hope of the Board is that discussion would not be limited to any one or two topics," and, "On the matter of recording, it is always my preference to not record."[1] At the meeting, Mr. Frantti did the opposite of my request. Having given no notice of what the LLC Board wanted to discuss, he rose, walked to the front (he said he preferred this, having been a schoolteacher), and began a rapid recitation of a long list of topics: the robe of righteousness, the 1970s and 80s caretaking meetings, the Church Law of Christ, justification, confession, continual forgiveness. Then he said of them: "On some of those, I don't personally . . . I have to say I don't understand what's our difference. . . . And my answer

[1] Email from Jim Frantti to Briar Siljander and Pat Lake, December 1, 2019, replying to my email to them of the same date.

was, I'm confused.[2]" When I intervened and asked that Mr. Frantti respect my request and focus first on a single topic of confusion, he ignored this request and carried on, cementing the derailing from the outset of the meeting.

At the meeting, several LLC ministers said they had no problem with Wolf Lake's ministers. Just one, Keith Waaraniemi, stated that a letter written by Warren Raisanen and Eric Skoog contained things "inaccurate and perhaps not even doctrinally correct." Twice I asked him, as moderator, to say what those were – "Maybe you could touch on what those are," and again, "since you feel that there are the errors there, it could open a discussion into what those are." Both times he declined: "I want to wrap this up first, and we could get back to that"; then, "Why don't we see if there's another brother that wants to speak to that." Having made the accusation that *he* believed the letter contained doctrinal errors, he refused to respond and tried to deflect it to "another brother." He never returned to it, and when the point was raised a third time later, he answered only that he had "quite specifically spoke[n] my concerns, whether they be right or wrong."[3] That is how the day ended: no doctrine named, no error shown, no desire to identify any points where the Wolf Lake congregation differed from the doctrine proclaimed by the LLC. Only more of the same unfortunate evasiveness and refusal to substantiate the accusation. "*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*" *Exod. 20:16*. One can only wonder whether some clarity might have been had if the LLC Board had set out clearly the doctrine it believed and how it believed the Wolf Lake congregation did not concur. The transcript of that meeting, and the recording from which it was made, are at laestadianrecord.org.

In September 2020, with John Lehtola (a minister trained and ordained in the Finnish church) having been removed as the head pastor in Minneapolis, Keith Waaraniemi pushed the selling of the Minneapolis church and disbanding of the congregation. The funds from the sale, apparently, were to go to the LLC, which was building out its property at Silver Springs. When the Minneapolis congregation voted not to sell its church, its only two serving ministers, Mr. Waaraniemi and Russell Roiko, and seven of its nine Board members walked out in coordinated fashion and joined other congregations. Within nine days of this orchestrated departure, the boards of the southern Minnesota congregations agreed not to send ministers to Minneapolis and suggested that the congregation dissolve. Visiting ministers stopped serving Wolf Lake and Minneapolis; their ministers were dropped from rotations; members were told openly that they must decide to leave or they would be considered in unbelief. Congregations elsewhere were

[2] LLC board-Wolf Lake congregation meeting, December 7, 2019, recording at 00:32:50–00:33:00.

[3] LLC board-Wolf Lake congregation meeting, December 7, 2019, recording at 03:36:49–03:36:54 ("there are also things that are inaccurate and perhaps not even doctrinally correct"); 03:37:03 (Siljander: "Maybe you could touch on what those are"); 03:37:05–03:37:15 (Waaraniemi: "Yeah, I want to wrap this up first, and we could get back to that, but maybe someone else can help"); 03:40:18 (Waaraniemi: "I'm willing to speak more to the letter if need be, but I know there are other brothers that can share this mic as well"); 03:40:30–03:40:34 (Siljander: "Maybe if you would briefly . . . since you feel that there are the errors there, it could open a discussion into what those are"); 03:40:39–03:40:44 (Waaraniemi: "Why don't we see if there's another brother that wants to speak to that . . . I'd be willing, though"); 04:07:02–04:07:09 (Waaraniemi: "I feel that I quite specifically spoke my concerns whether they be right or wrong"); earlier in the meeting, 03:18:11–03:18:33 (Waaraniemi, of the differences: "we've differed on understanding … What exactly it is, God only knows").

pressed the same way. In Detroit, a local minister, Paul Honkala, told the local Board that he had spoken with Jim Frantti, and that the Board should consider disinviting Phil Alajoki from a youth days weekend at which he had been asked to serve. When the Board first declined, Paul Honkala again contacted the Detroit congregation's Board and stated to the Board again that Jim Frantti had spoken favorably of disinviting Phil Alajoki because it would be "confusing" if he was welcomed to speak in Detroit. I witnessed this all personally.

The Expulsion of Minneapolis and Wolf Lake Congregations

Then came the expulsion. Through all of it, no one could "put a finger on" the difference; it was always just a "different voice" or "different spirit." At the 2022 annual meeting, as I recounted in my prior letters, no point of doctrinal difference was raised – only that a majority felt that those congregations had a different "spirit." The language had been set three years earlier, at the LLC Board Members' Workshop in Monticello on April 13, 2019, with Wolf Lake's Board in the room. Olli Vänskä of Finland, at the time living and preaching in Toronto, equating those with whom he apparently disagreed to Korah, stated: "God said, separate yourself from them. And we remember what happened. The earth opened its mouth and they were swallowed to death."[4] A few minutes later he said, "If there is wolves in sheepfold, we have to chase them away."[5] Eric Jurmu, then the LLC's Executive Director, said that those he considered to have a wrong spirit should think that they must repent of it, "otherwise God's kingdom is going to move on, we might be left on the wayside . . . I believe there is this kind of different spirit working among us."[6] And in the evening session, Don Lahti, a former member of the LLC Board, stated brazenly: "if they do not repent, which they have been encouraged by so many here today, they will be swallowed up by the earth, which is the heresy. **When they criticize the LLC, they are criticizing God himself, as we have heard so clearly today.**"[7] A Wolf Lake member answered from the floor that evening: "there was one speech here today that made reference that it's time to chase the wolves today. Ask yourself, is this right or wrong?"[8]

It was on this basis – "our spirit doesn't answer" – that the Wolf Lake and Minneapolis congregations were expelled. My first two letters addressed that expulsion proceeding (or rather, the lack of proceeding) and the doctrinal and legal errors made by the LLC Board, its then-chair Jim Frantti, and those voting for and encouraging the expulsion. These letters are available at laestadianrecord.org.

The LLC's Crusade and Spiritual Abuse

After the removals at the 2022 LLC Annual Meeting, the crusade proceeded with emboldened enthusiasm, with local boards picking up the torch and singling out any member who questioned

[4] LLC Board Members' Workshop, Monticello, April 13, 2019, audio recording, morning session at 01:31:47.
[5] *Id.* at 01:35:57.
[6] *Id.* at 01:52:22.
[7] LLC Board Members' Workshop, Monticello, April 13, 2019, audio recording, evening session at 01:49:25.
[8] *Id.* at 01:00:10. The entire recording is available at laestadianrecord.org.

the expulsion in any manner. These individuals were systematically identified, pressured, and put out. Ministers encouraged members to wholly cut off communication with family members if they did not fully endorse the proclaimed finding of "heresy." I experienced this with my own sister, who is too afraid to speak to me about the weather out of fear that her faith might be taken away. This is what the LLC Board preaches as "great love." Hundreds have been targeted, bullied, and ostracized, many to the point of physical illness. This is spiritual abuse.

This spiritual abuse of individuals followed a predictable nonbiblical pattern. Instead of a person having a concern approaching the preacher or Board member who was the target of the concern, the target of concern would be told that someone (usually anonymous) had a "concern" about him, with the disclaimer from the messenger that the concern was not from him. Then, the targeted individual would be removed from preaching and taken off teaching schedules. And finally, if the individual did not resign, a congregational meeting would be held (often after several announcements that there was concern around the individual) and he would be relieved of his duties based on no claim that his doctrine was incorrect – just that the "spirit" felt different. Most often, the "spirit" winds blew if the targeted individual did not heartily shout "Amen" to the decision to disinvite ministers, or to withhold the preaching of forgiveness of sins from one asking for it (if the asker was judged not penitent enough), or if he said he had no judgment to cast on Minneapolis or Wolf Lake, often because he was not aware of the issues raised about them. Great pressure was exerted to have the targeted individual "voluntarily" choose to "rest." But if not, he was readily removed for having the "wrong spirit." Each case has its own record of letters, messages, recordings, minutes, and testimony. These I will publish individually at laestadianrecord.org, so that you may see how each was done and on what grounds, if any, it rested. I say only this now: it was the same test in every case, not the Word but "our spirits." No doctrine was named.

The SRK is not unfamiliar with this type of spiritual abuse. As you know, in October 2011 the SRK's Board issued a press release that its chairman himself called an apology, acknowledging, in his words, that "spiritual violence" had occurred in the caretaking meetings, and declaring that the SRK must learn from the past and face the facts "openly and honestly" – in particular, the doctrinal errors and abuses at "caretaking" meetings centering around not a finding of doctrinal differences, but rather a different "spirit." The SRK's own press release of October 12, 2011, said: "There is reason to learn from the past. Facts must be faced openly and honestly even when they are not pleasant to us." It acknowledged that in the caretaking meetings "foreign features appeared, such as doctrinal errors and the abuses that resulted from them," and that "the Board regrets the doctrinal errors and abuses that occurred." Your chairman at the time, Olavi Voittonen, named them: the "spirits" people were made to repent of, where "speaking of some concrete sin was not necessarily enough" and the person "had, as it were, to dig such a spirit out of himself"; public and forced confession; and, in his own word, "spiritual violence."[9] The full statement published in

[9] SRK press release (Lehdistötiedote), October 12, 2011, "SRK:n historiatyö jatkuu," released through Kotimaa24 and published with an interview of SRK chairman Olavi Voittonen: *Kotimaa*, "Vanhoillislestadiolaiset pyytävät anteeksi hoitokokousten väärinkäytöksiä," October 2011, kotimaa.fi/artikkeli/vanhoillislestadiolaiset-pyytavat-anteeksi-

Päivämies went further, rejecting the "so-called spirit doctrine" and "a wrong concept that the Board of the SRK or of a Rauhanyhdistys would form some kind of 'government of the House of God.'"[10] Has the SRK Board learned from this?

In the four years since I first wrote, not a single doctrinal difference has been identified as the driving force of the LLC's crusade. No one has shown where, in the Constitution or in the Holy Word of God and the confessions on which that Constitution rests, these congregations who were expelled disagree. Instead, the LLC Board has proclaimed one test, and only one, and this is the test that the SRK Board has fully endorsed: a person (or a congregation as a whole) is saved by the blood of Christ only if he affirms that the expulsions of Minneapolis and Wolf Lake were decisions made by God himself (by the Holy Spirit). Anyone who asks whether the 2022 removals were right or legal (or in any other way wishes to discuss them) is pronounced a heretic and an unbeliever, no matter what he may confess or believe.[11] This is wrong. And this is what the SRK has supported.

This silence on doctrine was not for want of asking, and the LLC's own meetings prove it. At a December 2019 meeting, a member of the LLC staff, Jon Bloomquist, put it candidly: "The issues aren't the issue, if you know what I mean. There's something else that is fueling it."[12] At Menahga on March 26, 2021, the congregation's own chairman asked the LLC's representatives directly: "We want to know what the difference is. What are the differences?"[13] He received no answer. And on May 13, 2022, seven weeks before the vote to remove Wolf Lake, Mr. Frantti told the Wolf Lake congregation: "Sometimes, we have been asked this question, what must the Wolf Lake congregation repent of? And my answer has been nothing. A congregation doesn't repent. Faith is personal. We can only take care of our own matters."[14] Later in the same meeting he added: "from discussions on the board over the years, the LLC board, or in my home congregation as well, I

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hoitokokousten-vaarinkaytoksia/. The Finnish (which is unofficially translated above) states: "Menneisyydestä on syytä ottaa oppia. Tosiasioita on kyettävä kohtaamaan avoimesti ja rehellisesti silloinkin, kun ne eivät ole meille mieluisia"; "ilmeni myös vieraita piirteitä, kuten opillisia harhoja ja niistä johtuneita väärinkäytöksiä"; "Johtokunta pahoittelee esiintyneitä oppiharhoja ja väärinkäytöksiä"; "Kun yksittäiset kristityt erehtyvät, vika ei ole seurakunnan." Voittonen: "kyse on anteeksipyynnöstä"; "myöntää, että hoitokokouksissa on ollut hengellistä väkivaltaa"; "kuivaksi," "hempeäksi," "kososlaiseksi" hengeksi; "ei välttämättä riittänyt puhe jostakin konkreettisesta synnistä, vaan hoidettavien täytyi ikään kuin 'kaivaa itsestänsä esiin tällainen henki'"; "julki- ja pakkoripin."

[10] Statement of the SRK Board of Directors on the "caretaking meetings" of the 1970s (SRK:n johtokunnan kannanotto), published in *Päivämies* no. 41/2011 (October 2011).

[11] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:46:23 (Jared Huhta, delegate, Prescott Valley, Arizona); 01:56:59 (Jouko Haapsaari); 02:10:53–02:11:52 (the chairman: "We believe that the Holy Spirit has revealed this to the living congregation of God"); and my summary of that standard from the floor, 00:57:56–00:58:22. The full recording and transcript are available at laestadianrecord.org.

[12] LLC board-Wolf Lake congregation meeting, December 7, 2019, recording at 05:03:42–05:03:47 (Jon Bloomquist). The full recording and transcript are available at laestadianrecord.org.

[13] Meeting of the Menahga and Wolf Lake boards and ministers, Menahga, Minnesota, March 26, 2021, transcript of the Menahga congregation's recording at 1:56:39–1:58:55 (Mark Skoog, chairman) and 1:59:15 ("I don't know where these issues are now to be honest").

[14] Meeting of LLC Board representatives with the Wolf Lake congregation, Wolf Lake, Minnesota, May 13, 2022, transcript, opening remarks of Jim Frantti.

have not heard questions or criticisms of the Wolf Lake congregation."[15] The LLC's then vice-chairman, Jim Jurmu, added that Wolf Lake's representatives had "spoken in a way that I could not agree with. I don't have a specific example today."[16] Seven weeks later, with the topics named but no error in them ever shown from the Word, the congregation was removed. And take Mr. Frantti at his word: if a congregation cannot repent, then a congregation cannot be guilty, and there is nothing a congregation could do to be received back. Yet it was the congregation, not any individual, that the LLC put out. Its own chairman had just explained why that could not be a spiritual act: the only thing a congregation can be judged by is its confession, and no one had faulted the confession.

What was offered in place of a doctrine was a slogan. The words "continual forgiveness" were made the issue, and within three weeks of the removals the belief of Minneapolis and Wolf Lake was described from LLC pulpits as something no one there had ever taught or proclaimed. At Rockford on July 24, 2022, Russell Roiko preached: "Have you heard, dear brothers and sisters, something similar these past many years that we've battled? Once a believer, always a believer. Once forgiven, always forgiven. So on. That kind of strange teaching that is so foreign, so contrary to the scriptures."[17] The same Sunday at Longview, Loren Keplinger warned against "these words of continual forgiveness" and against the thought "that once forgiven, always forgiven, that we don't want to use words . . . that we as humans can so easily misunderstand" – and then, later in the same sermon, preached the thing itself: "as believers, we are continually forgiven."[18] No one in Minneapolis or Wolf Lake ever taught "once forgiven, always forgiven." Their own words, spoken to the LLC Board, were the opposite: "Continual forgiveness does not mean that I feel like I can sin and be free. That I only have to have my sins forgiven once. No."[19] And earlier still: "This does not mean, once a believer, always a believer. It does not mean that the hearing of the gospel one time in life is sufficient. It does not mean that we never need to use confession."[20] Again, each of these ministers, and many others, has broken the eighth commandment. "*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*" *Exod. 20:16*.

Nor was the term itself ever in dispute. What it means – that a believer lives every day and every moment in the forgiveness of sins – is exactly what the LLC's own chairman confessed at that same 2019 meeting in Wolf Lake: "We live daily in the forgiveness of sins. It must be so, because we all carry Original Sin. . . . We need to be able to live every day and every moment in

[15] *Id.*, second speech of Jim Frantti, at approximately 2:10:30. In the same speech he listed the topics Wolf Lake had raised – "Is there ever a time when the believers cannot preach forgiveness? Or the question about our sins, [are the sins] past, present and future already forgiven, so there's no need for the gospel? Or the question about the robe of righteousness or about watchmen on the walls or the doctrine of confession or the doctrine of justification" – without identifying an error in any of them, and said of the disinvited ministers, "I can't give an explanation to that, I have to say."

[16] *Id.*, remarks of Jim Jurmu at 1:35:55. Mr. Jurmu added: "The question of what we would repent of? I can't look into your heart."

[17] Russell Roiko, sermon at Rockford, July 24, 2022, LLC sermon-archive recording at 16:44.

[18] Loren Keplinger, sermon at Longview, July 24, 2022, LLC sermon-archive recording at 23:09.

[19] LLC board-Wolf Lake congregation meeting, December 7, 2019, recording at 01:18:04–01:18:48; the quoted words at 01:18:33.

[20] John Lehtola, address to the Minneapolis congregation, May 31, 2018.

forgiveness."[21] It is what the SRK has taught and what your own speakers have preached in North America: "Isn't it so that we need God's grace and forgiveness continuously in our everyday life?";[22] "we have been promised every day all of our sins forgiven"[23]; and, in the words of the Small Catechism, that in the Christian church God "daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins"[24]. Your pastor then serving the LLC, Harri Vähäjylkkä, told the Wolf Lake congregation in 2019 that he had first heard the term "continual forgiveness" in Finland and understood it to mean "living under the grace." [25] He did not take issue with it.

Nor has the LLC ever stopped preaching it. Its own sermon archive contains more than one hundred, by scores of LLC speakers, from 2016 through this year, teaching continual and daily forgiveness as the ordinary gospel. A few, from ministers the LLC has never questioned, with their dates: "He has forgiven your debt of sin. And he has continually forgiven"[26]; "that daily washing. And that daily forgiveness for all of our sins"[27]; "God's continual grace covers that original sin"[28]; "He has forgiven us and continuously forgives us all our sins"[29]. And the man the LLC put out of its pulpits for saying it had said no more: "where Christ is present, there is the continual forgiveness of sins."[30]

Many speakers condemned the same words in other sermons, or in the same one. For example, Randall Haapala told the Rockford congregation in February 2018 that "this term . . . bothers me . . . that we live in continual forgiveness," and told Cokato in January 2021 of "a God that will . . . continually forgive us when the heart is penitent." Terry Ruonavaara, in a single breath at Roaring Fork Valley on March 1, 2021: "Not that we are under continual forgiveness. We are always in need of continual forgiveness." Michael Ylioja at Outlook on August 13, 2023, at 19:59: "This is not a correct teaching . . . We can't hear our sins forgiven and believe our sins forgiven once and have a free ride to heaven"; at 36:15: "A penitent sinner is always forgiven." George Koivukangas at Cokato on August 11, 2024: the others "used that in a wrong way. We understand we live in continual grace of God. God's grace is here every moment of our life." And on January 13, 2026, Richard Nevala, a member of the LLC Board when the removals were made, told Menahga: "Some have tried to say that once you're in God's kingdom, you don't need forgiveness. We have a continual forgiveness. And I guess in some ways they're correct because we live of the grace of God . . . theologically correct."[31]

[21] LLC board-Wolf Lake congregation meeting, December 7, 2019, recording at 00:30:48 (Jim Frantti).
[22] Vesa Tahkola, LLC Summer Services, July 5, 2019, at 27:35.
[23] Valde Palola, Rockford, July 12, 2023, at 41:17.
[24] Tapani Kinnunen, March 18, 2023.
[25] LLC board-Wolf Lake congregation meeting, December 7, 2019, recording at 02:37:19 (Harri Vähäjylkkä).
[26] Arthur Harju, Roaring Fork Valley, September 15, 2019, at 31:10.
[27] Keith Moll, Monticello, May 14, 2021, at 28:05.
[28] James Frantti, Cokato, May 2, 2021, at 30:35.
[29] Duane Pirness, Saskatoon, May 14, 2023, at 5:58.
[30] John Lehtola, Phoenix, April 13, 2017, at 44:34.
[31] Richard Nevala, sermon at Menahga, January 13, 2026, at 31:11.

If the doctrine was never the difference, what was? A year after the removals, an LLC minister said from the pulpit what everyone had known: "oftentimes, we couldn't put a finger on what was different. . . . Maybe it wasn't a point of doctrine that we could understand or put a finger on. But it was a different spirit."[32] Not a doctrine, then, but a "spirit." Every sermon quoted in this letter is the LLC's own recording, from its own public archive. Each is linked, at the minute quoted, at laestadianrecord.org so that no one need take my word for any of it.

In September 2022, at your own office in Oulu, your Board and the LLC's declared themselves "of one mind" that "years of division has led to a heresy in North America." Four years on, neither organization has named the heresy. I ask you to name it now, or to say that it cannot be named. Luther left no room for a heresy that cannot be named. A heretic, he wrote, "is detached from the Christian Church by false doctrine and unbelief."[33] By doctrine, not by a "spirit" that no one can describe. And the judgment belongs to the Word alone: a council "condemns a heretic, not according to its own discretion, but according to the law of the empire, that is, according to Holy Scripture, which they confess to be the law of the holy church."[34] He knew what to call those who condemn without it: "If any are to be called heretics and schismatics, it is not the Bohemians or the Greeks, for they take their stand upon the Gospels. It is you Romans who are the heretics and godless schismatics, **for you presume upon your figments alone against the clear Scriptures of God. Wash yourself of that, men!"**[35] And he asked of Rome the same question I ask you: whether it is "a Christian statement to say that all other Christians in the whole world are heretics and schismatics – even though they adhere to the same baptism, sacrament, gospel, and all articles of faith in harmony with us."[36] By his measure, a "heresy" that four years of asking cannot bring to a single article of faith or a single passage of Scripture is not a heresy at all; and the discretion that pronounces it is the very thing he condemned.

What Happened at the 2026 LLC Annual Meeting

On Friday, July 3, 2026, the LLC held its Annual Meeting at the Rockford Laestadian Lutheran Church in Rockford, Minnesota. I attended as the delegate of the Coastal California Laestadian Lutheran Church ("CCLLC"). Your representative, Jussi Rentola, a member of the SRK Board since 2015, was present and spoke. The meeting was recorded, and every quotation below is taken from that recording, with the time shown in brackets so that you (and anyone) may verify each word, that "every word may be established." *Matt. 18:16*. The full recording, this letter, and its sources are available to anyone at laestadianrecord.org, and I will provide a copy directly to anyone who asks for it. The LLC also has a recording of this meeting, likely a clearer version because it

[32] David Anderson, sermon at Cokato, May 7, 2023, LLC sermon-archive recording at 28:23.
[33] Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works, Vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8*. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 288.
[34] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 41: Church and Ministry III. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 133.
[35] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 24.
[36] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 58.

was recorded directly by the Rockford church's sound system. ***A meeting leader stated that the recording would be destroyed after the minutes of the meeting were approved. I strongly encourage the LLC Board to not destroy recordings of such monumental meetings as this, calling for expulsion of a member congregation, and I encourage the SRK to urge the LLC to not destroy them either.*** What is there to hide?

The delegates to the 2026 LLC Annual Meeting were ambushed by design. For months before the meeting, the LLC office and the Southwest Area Mission Committee had been coordinating a motion to remove CCLLC. On April 22, 2026, the committee's chairman, Keith Kesti, wrote that "Daniel [Kumpula], Arvin [Pirness] and myself" had discussed the process for CCLLC's removal and had outlined "the process for informing our sister congregations." They considered giving the congregations prior notice – placing the matter on the Annual Meeting agenda so that every congregation could discuss it with its delegates beforehand – and decided against it, because notice "could raise a number of question[s] in congregations who haven't been . . . part of our meetings." "[T]he LLC brothers had the same thought." The matter would instead be raised "from the floor," and "the meeting chairman . . . [was] instructed [to] ensure that our turn wouldn't be forgotten."[37] Yet when the LLC Board wrote to me days before the meeting, it described the coming motion as something that had merely "come to the attention of the LLC."[38]

I put this to the delegates from the floor, with the correspondence in hand: "It's in their own emails. They were discussing this motion and they didn't want us to hear it beforehand."[39] No one denied it. Thus, the congregations' delegates were asked to set an expulsion in motion when the issue had never been raised with the congregations electing and sending those delegates – the same path used in 2022 against Minneapolis and Wolf Lake: no notice, no opportunity to discuss, and no ability to respond. As I reminded the delegates, Luther writes: "For the Holy Spirit does not come with stealth. He descends in full view from heaven. . . . The serpents glide unnoticed. The doves fly. You can be sure that this secretiveness is characteristic of the devil."[40]

And this is the other thing the recording shows: there was, in any real sense, no meeting. A deliberative body hears a proposal, hears the objections, and decides. This body heard the objections and answered none of them. It heard three motions asking it to affirm its own Constitution and to follow the law of its own state, and let all three die for want of a second – not just because no one agreed, but because no one dared. One delegate offered a conditional second: "If the motion is to strictly follow the law . . . I will second that motion"[41]; it went nowhere. The rest had been taught what happens to one who speaks with a "different voice": he is named, he is corrected, and he is brought back into line – or he is out. The chairman said as much in the meeting's own idiom: where there are "differences of spirit," the Holy Spirit "has revealed" the

[37] Email from Keith Kesti, chairman of the Southwest Area Mission Committee, to Troy Johnson, Shannon Simonson, Dave Wittenberg, Loren Hillukka, Cody Kesti, Jeremy Keranen, and Phil Siljander, April 22, 2026, 12:17 a.m.
[38] Letter of Arvin Pirness, on behalf of the LLC Board of Directors, to CCLLC, June 26, 2026 (enclosed); read into the record at the LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:04:38.
[39] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:06:27.
[40] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:06:27–00:06:57.
[41] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:35:24.

answer "to the living congregation."[42] That is not deliberation. It is ratification. The leadership sets the direction in advance, keeps the matter off the agenda so that no congregation can instruct its delegate, and then records the vote.

Where does this control come from? From a doctrine the LLC will not state plainly: that it cannot err – not its Board, not its delegates, not its congregation boards (unless, apparently, the LLC Board finds a "different spirit" in them, like they did with Minneapolis, Wolf Lake, and CCLLC) – because their decisions *are* the Holy Spirit. It was said plainly by Don Lahti, a former member of the LLC Board, at the LLC Board Members' Workshop of April 13, 2019: "When they criticize the LLC, they are criticizing God himself."[43] Your own chairman put it in print in January 2023: "the congregation cannot err on any point of doctrine either."[44] An LLC minister preached in May 2024 that one who believes the kingdom "made an error" is "between two kingdoms," and "if you're between two kingdoms, it is so that God's Spirit no longer dwells in you."[45] And my own sister, attending the Annual Meeting at Rockford, said that to state the expulsion decisions may have been, as Luther says, guided by "the spirit of the devil," and not the Holy Spirit, is "blasphemy of the Holy Ghost."[46]

The LLC creed has been rewritten: Father, Son, and LLC. This is not the faith of the Apostles' Creed, the Augsburg Confession, or Luther, who wrote of the fathers and the church that we are "not to rely on them as though they were infallible. After all, the church, too, must pray daily: 'Forgive us our trespasses'; the church, too, believes in 'the forgiveness of sins'"[47], and again: "The church is indeed holy, but it is a sinner at the same time. Therefore it believes in the forgiveness of sins and prays: 'Forgive us our debts.'"[48] A church that cannot err has no need of the forgiveness of sins. A church that prays "forgive us" has confessed that it can err.

Two weeks before the meeting, CCLLC asked the LLC Board to place three items of new business on the agenda. The Board acknowledged the request and flatly refused it, because, in its own words, the Board disagreed with the items. Its letter of June 26, 2026, said simply: "we will not be adding your proposed items to the agenda." This also had the convenient effect of ensuring the congregations and their delegates would not know the matters planned to be discussed at the

[42] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 02:11:23–02:11:52 ("there's a long history of these discussions and differences and we feel that these things have resulted in heresy. We believe that the Holy Spirit has revealed this to the living congregation of God. When there's differences of spirit . . .").
[43] LLC Board Members' Workshop, Monticello, April 13, 2019, evening session at 01:49:25.
[44] Valde Palola, remarks to the SRK Speakers' Meeting, published in Päivämies, January 25, 2023, and translated in the LLC's Voice of Zion, March 2023, "News from SRK Work Areas."
[45] Neil Waaraniemi, sermon at Menahga on Romans 8:12–17, May 12, 2024, LLC sermon-archive recording at 27:16 ("They believe that God's kingdom made an error, but they still gather with one they consider an erring congregation") and 28:48 ("if you're between two kingdoms, it is so that God's Spirit no longer dwells in you"); excerpt at youtube.com/watch?v=7NKlbeqCV-o, 1:05 and 2:46.
[46] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:34:04.
[47] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 261.
[48] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 109.

meeting. This is the same Board that claims that the congregations decide matters and the Board does not direct them.

The Board left no alternative for CCLLC but to raise the three items as motions from the floor, with congregation delegates having no opportunity to receive input from their respective congregations. The three motions made by CCLLC were:

> *First, that the Annual Meeting affirm "that under Constitution Section 5 and Bylaws Article 2, Sections 1 and 9, no member congregation may be expelled* ***unless the LLC first states the specific doctrine of the Constitution from which the congregation is alleged to depart, and shows that departure from the Holy Word of God,****" and acknowledge that the 2022 removals of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations were carried out without meeting that standard.*[49]

This is exactly what the LLC's own Constitution and Bylaws already require, and for good reason. Clinging to the Holy Word of God – the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) – as the creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and the catechisms of Luther instruct, one can avoid being deceived by the devil and carried away in reverie, convinced that because a majority breaks the law, it is not a breaking of the law at all. Unity in darkness is no virtue.

> *Second, that before any vote to expel a member congregation, "the board of directors shall provide to that congregation and to all delegates a written statement identifying the specific doctrine of the Constitution at issue, setting forth the passages of the holy word of God said to be violated, and describing the efforts made to show the congregation its error and to restore it," and that the congregation be given a reasonable opportunity to respond in writing and in person before any vote is taken – which is no more than what Minnesota law already requires.*[50]

This second motion was intended to ensure that the same violation of Minnesota law that the LLC committed when it expelled Minneapolis and Wolf Lake with no prior notice or opportunity to be heard would not be repeated. The delegates refused to agree to the motion, but ironically now appear to attempt to follow precisely what this motion sought. This is a clear acknowledgment by the LLC Board that it knows it violated the law in expelling the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations. Otherwise, why would they do it any differently with CCLLC?

> *Third, that because no doctrinal error was ever stated or shown from the Holy Word of God to justify their removal, the Annual Meeting rescind the 2022*

[49] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:29:56.
[50] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:37:07.

expulsions of the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations and restore them to membership.[51]

The Bible teaches: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." *1 John 1:9*. The SRK, and the LLC Board and delegates to the 2022 meeting, should ask: was it sin when the LLC Board and delegates broke the law in 2022, when they banished the Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations? Was it wrong to expel them, against their will and with no articulated difference in doctrine, based upon a feeling that the "spirit" felt different?

Not one of the motions received a second. Not one delegate of the LLC's member congregations would second a motion that said, in substance: we will follow the Holy Word of God, our own Constitution, and the law of the land.

What the delegates did instead is why I write to you. From the floor of a corporation business meeting, they pronounced judgment on souls. Of Phil Siljander, the chairman of CCLLC, a delegate from Prescott Valley, Arizona, Jared Huhta, reported to the assembly:

> *"And his testimony was not that of a believer. . . . He showed us clearly that he was not a believer. And I believe Briar has done us the same favor today. I would do him the favor, if he's still here, to let him know that he is not a believer. He is not traveling with us. I think his testimony, what he read, doesn't answer to any of our spirits, those of us that are believing."*[52]

> *". . . to let you know, Briar, that you are not a believer, that if you want to repent from unbelief, the opportunity is there to believe even that sin forgiven, that sin of unbelief."*[53]

I did not know Jared Huhta prior to the Annual Meeting and am not sure I have ever spoken with him – most certainly not on any matters relating to faith; nor had he ever spoken to Phil Siljander prior to the Southwest Area Board meeting of March 14, 2026. Yet, he confidently and in full eagerness assumed his seat on the throne of judgment, declaring us to not be "believers." What was the doctrinal error? None was stated by him or any attendee. What passage of the Holy Word of God had we transgressed? None was cited by him or any attendee. The meeting at which Phil Siljander was questioned, and from which Jared Huhta judged that he was not a "believer," is also available at laestadianrecord.org. The testimony I gave at the Annual Meeting was Scripture, Luther, and the LLC's own Constitution, read aloud. Those words are what I believe. Jared Huhta outright rejected them ("I think his testimony, ***what he read, doesn't answer to any of our spirits,*** those of us that are believing"[54]). He said he spoke on behalf of all those at the meeting believing.

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[51] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:34:06.
[52] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:44:43–00:45:29.
[53] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:46:23.
[54] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:44:43–00:45:29.

Not one person corrected him or distanced himself from this assertion. We can assume only that their silence was an endorsement of his rejection of the Word of God and words of Martin Luther that I read.

After four years of witnessing this spiritual abuse, it did not surprise me that none of the delegates voting to expel CCLLC, much less those specifically condemning me as "not a believer," has ever had a single discussion with me about my faith in Jesus Christ, my belief in God's Word as the highest authority, and my unity of spirit in each of the doctrines professed by the LLC's own Constitution. It is a sad irony that precious few can even be bothered to read the documents that constitute (by the Constitution) the LLC's doctrine, proclaiming ignorance of God's Word a virtue and the desire to learn of Christ a forbidden attempt to "elevate" oneself. Compare this to Christ's own words: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." *Matt. 11:29*.

The judgment rendered at the LLC annual meeting was that it "doesn't answer to any of our spirits." The delegates also averred, again and again, that the LLC corporation is the Kingdom of God. Recalling the 2022 vote, one said:

> *"And that motion carried. Those congregations were removed from LLC membership and those members . . . that's just a formality whether they belong to the LLC . . . but they had left God's kingdom."*[55]
>
> *"There's peace and harmony and unity in God's kingdom. There isn't division in God's kingdom. And God's kingdom's not this sort of kingdom where you can litigate your way back into it."*[56]
>
> *"If he truly does want to somehow, you know, come back to God's kingdom, or that's the desire, then I'd say repent and believe the gospel."*[57]

Then, by a show of hands, the delegates carried a motion (after a few rewrites) that "from this body of delegates, we would encourage the LLC Board and staff to move forward with whatever steps are necessary for the expulsion or expelling of Coastal California Congregation."[58] No doctrine of the Constitution from which CCLLC is alleged to depart was stated. No passage of Scripture was cited. The grounds given were that "they no longer walk with us."[59]

The LLC Board Still Refuses to State a Reason for Expulsion

As I write this letter, the Board's written notice has arrived – dated July 22, 2026, though sent in a manner that reached me only on August 31 (Arvin Pirness, Executive Director of the LLC,

[55] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:05:27–01:05:50.
[56] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:09:47.
[57] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:11:42.
[58] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:26:28 and 02:17:30.
[59] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:23:48.

elected to not send the letter to my email, through which we were corresponding, and through which he directed the LLC's lawyer, Jeffrey Lambert, to communicate with me; and the message reached the spam folder because it was sent to "Undisclosed Recipients").

Mr. Pirness's July 22 letter, attached here, states:

> The proposed action [to expel CCLLC from the LLC] is based upon the statements that CCLLC is no longer acting in accordance with the LLC Constitution, Bylaws, and decisions of the LLC. It is stated that the congregation no longer shares the unity of faith and spirit described in Section VI of the Constitution and has not complied with decisions made by the LLC as contemplated by Article II, Section 9 of the Bylaws, including, but not limited to the following:
>
> - has publicly rejected the decisions of the LLC Annual Meetings;
> - has sought to overturn prior decisions of the delegates regarding membership matters;
> - continues to conduct itself in a manner that the delegates believe is inconsistent with the unity of faith and spirit described in Section VI of the Constitution and Article II, Section 1 of the Bylaws; and
> - is no longer acting in accordance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and decisions of the LLC as described in Article II, Section 9.[60]

Mark the words "including, but not limited to." Even these four conclusions are not the whole charge. Apparently, the Board still wants to come up with new reasons. It says: "We are bound and determined to kick you out. We just haven't figured out what for yet." This is why I say, as Luther did, that the whole proceeding is not of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not seek to kick out a person confessing the same faith (but rebuking those acting inconsistent with that faith), let alone kick out a whole congregation. What is this same faith? What is this "true unity of the Church"? As the Augsburg Confession states:

> *The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.* ***And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.*** *Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4:5–6.*[61]

It comes as no surprise that, yet again, despite my pleading that the LLC Board or *any* meeting delegate point to what they disagreed with in my confession of faith, they say not a word about

[60] July 22, 2026 Letter from Arvin Pirness.

[61] *Augsburg Confession* Article VII, available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/275/275-h/275-h.htm#link2H_4_0008.

God or doctrine, upon which the entire Constitution of the LLC sits! They do not say that CCLLC understands the doctrine of justification by faith differently than they do, nor do they state where they disagree about the many teachings of the Bible and of Luther's writings that I shared with them (which is how the believers who are members of the CCLLC believe). They do not say how that is different from the Constitution or how it is different from how they believe. Indeed, they refuse to state even how they, themselves, believe at all. Instead, their basis for stating they will expel CCLLC is because CCLLC has "rejected the decisions of the LLC Annual Meetings," citing to Bylaws Article II, Section 9.

More than four years ago now, in August 2022, I set out for the LLC Board and for every congregation exactly what the LLC's own Constitution and Bylaws require before a congregation may be put out. Article II, Section 9 of the Bylaws permits expulsion only of a congregation that "does not comply or act in accordance with the Constitution and the Bylaws **and** fails to comply with the decisions made by the LLC." Both elements must be true. In other words, the same conduct must both fail to comply or act in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws *and* fail to comply with the decisions made by the LLC. If, for example, a decision is made by the LLC that is contrary to the Constitution, failure to "comply with" (whatever that means) such a decision is decidedly *not* grounds for removal.

Section V of the Constitution supplies the only measure by which any such failure may be judged: "**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.**" I told them what that means in practice: name the doctrine, show the departure from the Word, identify the decision disobeyed. Four years later the Board has the procedure in front of it – borrowed, at last, from those letters – and still does none of it.

Worse, the citations Mr. Pirness offers in his letter are wrong. The notice's third stated reason rests on "the unity of faith and spirit described in Section VI of the Constitution and Article II, Section 1 of the Bylaws." Article II, Section 1 is the admissions clause. It governs which congregations "are accepted as members" and how "prospective member congregations must submit written applications"; it has nothing to do with expelling a member already admitted. I told the LLC Board this in 2022, yet four years later, Mr. Pirness still cites to this section as purported grounds for expelling congregations. The expulsion clause is Section 9, and Section 9 says nothing about "spirit" at all. It speaks of compliance with the Constitution, the Bylaws, and decisions.

As for the Constitution itself, neither Section V nor Section VI contains the words "unity of faith and spirit," and neither makes "spirit" a test standing alone, and for good reason (as discussed below). Section V defines the faith by the Holy Word of God, the three ancient creeds (the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Catechisms, and names the Word the "only measure." Section VI confesses one Kingdom of God, "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." The Spirit of Section VI is the Spirit who works through the preached Word; Spirit and Word together (Eph. 6:17), never a "spirit" that one group senses and another lacks, to be measured by whether a man's testimony "answers to our spirits." And the Constitution does not leave "unity" undefined, because the Augsburg Confession it names does the defining. Article VII: "to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:5–6). That is the unity of faith the LLC's Constitution confesses. Has anyone alleged that CCLLC differs from the LLC on the doctrine of the Gospel as professed in the confessions? On the sacraments? No one has. What is alleged is that CCLLC has not agreed with decisions of men, has not sat quietly under them, has not answered to "our spirits." Those are "human traditions . . . instituted by men," and the Confession says in so many words that agreement in them is not necessary to unity.

In other words: to say that the law was not followed in 2022, or that two congregations should not have been put out when no doctrinal difference was ever identified, is not itself a departure from the unity of faith, and it is not a ground for putting anyone out. It is a disagreement about the acts of men, and the Confession places such disagreements outside the unity of the Church altogether. Measured by the standard the LLC itself professes, the unity of faith between CCLLC and the LLC is intact; what is broken is uniformity of submission to violations of the law of man and the law of God. CCLLC confesses every word of Sections V and VI. The notice does not say otherwise. It cannot, because in four years no one has said what CCLLC believes wrongly. Indeed, no one has ever bothered to discuss this with CCLLC aside from blatantly labeling the entire congregation as "unbelievers" and pursuing the same crusade it has become all too accustomed to pursuing: the spiritually abusive casting of judgment.

The Southwest Area Board meeting of March 14, 2026, shows the method, repeated dozens of times by the LLC and its members, in a single sitting. The charge from the committee's minutes was the same: a recommendation to remove Coastal California "due to years of non-communication and spiritual heresy."[62] Phil Siljander answered the only question that matters: "So are you asking how I believe? My faith has not changed. I believe the same way."[63] He then asked who had reached out, when, and what was said: "I don't recall very many reach-outs";[64] "I think some of this information is incorrect. I think that causes a lot of confusion."[65] The Board's answer: "I don't know that these procedural matters are so important at this point."[66] Phil proposed the obvious remedy: "a separate conversation, meeting with the members, and then everything could be discussed."[67] It was not taken up. Instead, the committee proceeded to arrange for the floor motion. The recording of the Southwest Area Board meeting is at laestadianrecord.org.

[62] Southwest Area Board meeting, March 14, 2026, recording at 00:41:25.
[63] Southwest Area Board meeting, March 14, 2026, recording at 00:33:19.
[64] Southwest Area Board meeting, March 14, 2026, recording at 00:40:56.
[65] Southwest Area Board meeting, March 14, 2026, recording at 00:42:19.
[66] Southwest Area Board meeting, March 14, 2026, recording at 00:43:18.
[67] Southwest Area Board meeting, March 14, 2026, recording at 00:45:17.

The only "decision" that the LLC Board apparently claims CCLLC has rejected is the 2022 expulsion itself – the very act my letters showed to be contrary to the Bylaws and to the law. Ironically, before the 2026 Annual Meeting, CCLLC as a congregation had never even done that; I had, in my own name. Their crime was considering asking the LLC to pause and discuss actual matters with the recently ostracized congregations to at least understand whether there was even a doctrinal difference. Disagreeing with or having concern about an unlawful act is not a failure to "comply with the decisions made by the LLC"; it is the duty of a member. A Board that had a doctrine to name would name it. A Board that has only a feeling about a spirit must ask its lawyer to scour for a reason to kick CCLLC out.

Then, the LLC Board sets forth its "reasons," consisting of four conclusions with not one doctrine of the Constitution identified, not one passage of the Holy Word of God cited, not one decision named. Take them one at a time.

1. ***CCLLC "has publicly rejected the decisions of the LLC Annual Meetings."*** This accusation names no decision and provides no context. The only one I can surmise it means is the 2022 removal, and I have addressed that above: asking openly whether an act violated the law and the Constitution is not rejecting it; it is a member's duty.

2. ***CCLLC "has sought to overturn prior decisions of the delegates regarding membership matters."*** Again, the LLC Board does not say what it means. This presumably describes a motion. CCLLC asked the delegates, as new business under Article II, Section 8 of the Bylaws, to reinstate two congregations. New business is a standing item of every Annual Meeting, and a motion is the one lawful way a member asks a body to reconsider anything. If making a motion is now grounds for expulsion, the Annual Meeting is not a meeting but a ceremony and the Bylaws' promise that the delegates decide any matter is a dead letter.

3. **CCLLC's conduct is "inconsistent with the unity of faith and spirit described in Section VI of the Constitution and Article II, Section 1 of the Bylaws."** This rests on the two provisions I have just shown do not say what the Board says they say. Article II, Section 1 relates to *admitting* members, not expelling, and, moreover, references the "spirit and doctrine confessed . . . in Sections V and VI" of the Constitution. They do not leave room for inventing new "spirits" by which to judge.

4. ***CCLLC "is no longer acting in accordance with the Constitution, Bylaws, and decisions of the LLC as described in Article II, Section 9."*** This is not a reason at all. It is Section 9's own words handed back as a finding, with no provision identified and no act described.

Four conclusions, then, and one substance: CCLLC has said, openly, that the 2022 removals were wrong. That is the whole of the charge. The question I put to you below is therefore not hypothetical. It will be answered, one way or the other, when the LLC attempts yet another expulsion.

Two things about that notice deserve your attention. First, the Board that declared in print that the 2022 removals "did not violate the law" now promises to grant the very things that were withheld then: written notice, stated reasons, an opportunity to respond. An organization does not adopt these safeguards by coincidence; the fact that it now grudgingly follows (or at least pays lip service to) the process described by Minnesota law is a clear admission that it knew and knows what it did in 2022 broke the law and is wrong. Second, even the borrowed procedure is failing on its own terms: the letter announcing the October 1 meeting is, on its face, not a meeting notice at all. It states no time, no place, and no means of attending; it was sent by email only, to a congregation mailbox never designated for notice, 71 days before the meeting and outside the 60-day limit Minnesota law sets; and the LLC's governing documents contain no authority for the "virtual" meeting it announces (one also questions why the LLC Board deems this matter so inconsequential that a video call will suffice to kick out CCLLC). Meanwhile, since July 2, 2026, CCLLC has asked to inspect the LLC's records bearing on this very matter. The LLC hired a lawyer to refuse the request and put the condition in writing: "In the event the Delegates do not vote to expel CCLLC, we can then discuss a response to your request."[68] This, again, is the LLC choosing to violate Minnesota law on a wholly new ground, telling CCLLC that it will not provide the records it is required by law to provide. It is a sad state of affairs when a judge must be asked to enforce the law against the LLC.

In sum: the notice is not a lawful notice, and the meeting it announces cannot lawfully be held; its "reasons" are four conclusions resting on an admissions clause that does not apply and a section of the Constitution that says the opposite of what the Board needs it to say; the one "decision" CCLLC is accused of rejecting is the unlawful act itself; and the records CCLLC needs in order to answer are to be "discussed" only if the expulsion fails. Strip away the borrowed procedure and what remains is what was there in 2022: no doctrine, no Scripture, no hearing. Just a "spirit."

The Spirit of the Enthusiasts

Listen to the recording of the 2026 Annual Meeting and count. In two hours and seventeen minutes of a meeting called to decide whether a congregation remains a member, "spirit" ("my spirit," "our spirits," "a different spirit") was made the ground of judgment twenty-six times by sixteen different speakers. Not once was a doctrine named. Scripture was quoted four times, by my count, and every time against the man rather than the teaching: Ephesians 4, that some are "darkened in their understanding"[69]; Matthew 12 and the blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, turned on me for having

[68] Letter from Jeffrey W. Lambert, counsel for the LLC, to Briar Siljander, copying Arvin Pirness, July 17, 2026 – Exhibit E to CCLLC's enclosed response.
[69] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:20:38.

"come here to accuse us of following the devil"[70]; Mark 4, "seeing they may see and not perceive"[71]; and from the chair, 2 Timothy 3, "a form of godliness" that denies "the power thereof"[72]. Not one verse was offered to show what CCLLC believes wrongly. It is the Enthusiasts' use of the Word exactly as Luther described it: they "shouted nothing but 'Spirit, Spirit.' They confused everyone and strengthened and taught no one."[73] Not once was a section of the Constitution read.

The presenter who opened the matter said it plainly: "it's apparent from what he shared that my spirit does not agree with his spirit," and that this was why "the Southwest congregations . . . did want to bring that here to discuss whether or not Coastal California should remain as part of an LLC member congregation"[74]. The mover of the motion: "his testimony, what he read, doesn't answer to any of our spirits, those of us that are believing"[75]. What I had read was the Holy Word of God and the words of Martin Luther. Asked to say what error CCLLC holds, he answered: "He seems to want to convince us of some specific error that we participate in. But at the end of the day, I don't feel that I'm going to gain anything by getting into an argument with Briar over this issue. We feel that he's wrong. He feels that we're wrong"[76]. That delegate was Jared Huhta of Prescott Valley, who made the motion. When another delegate suggested that I was "attempting to build another lawsuit"[77], I answered him plainly: "There's one good way to not get another lawsuit – it's to follow the law."[78] Is the LLC above the law? Is it right to ignore it? Apparently, if the "spirit" guides the LLC Board and delegates to break the law, it is acceptable – just a technicality. No. It is wrong. And it is telling of the hearts and minds of those who, leaning on their own understanding, would ignore the clear instruction from the Bible.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Rom. 13:1–2.

Then the chairman closed the matter, and in closing said the thing that decides this letter: "Many scripture portions, many portions of Luther's writings, these were not the reason why [there] weren't seconds to those motions . . . We believe that the Holy Spirit has revealed this to the living congregation of God"[79]. Read that twice. The presiding officer of the LLC's Annual Meeting, Ray Waaraniemi, stated on the record that Scripture and Luther were not the reason – that the reason was a revelation to the congregation apart from them. That is not the Constitution's standard; it is

[70] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:33:33.
[71] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:36:47.
[72] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 02:16:10.
[73] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 80.
[74] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:42:24.
[75] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:45:29.
[76] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:24:56–01:25:40.
[77] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:08:52–01:09:19.
[78] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:17:07.
[79] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 02:10:53–02:11:52.

its opposite. Section V makes "the Holy Word of God . . . the highest authority and only measure according to which all doctrines and teachings in said Corporation are to be examined and judged." Section VI knows the Spirit only as the One who dwells in the Church "wherein He causes repentance and the forgiveness of sins to be preached." Spirit and Word, together. Luther has a name for a spirit that judges apart from the Word, that "reveals" a heresy no one can name, that "does not agree" with a testimony made of Scripture. He called it the spirit of the Enthusiasts, and against it he wrote what your fathers and ours confessed:

> [W]e must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may [thus] be protected against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare. For [indeed] the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with [in] his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word.[80]

Luther knew this spirit now employed by the LLC; he spent years answering and attempting to correct it. He named their method exactly: "they do not come through the external Word to the spirit but from the spirit they come to the external Word"[81] – the Word judged by the spirit rather than the spirit by the Word, which is what it means to say that Scripture read aloud "doesn't answer to our spirits." He said what God will not do: "He does not want to deal with us through spirits without teaching or public word, as some mad prophets nowadays foolishly assert."[82] He said of those who despise the external Word and "through diabolical revelation boast of the Spirit apart from the oral Word" that "they know neither what the Spirit nor what the Word really is!"[83] He explained why God gave his people a written law to judge by, and **not a feeling**: the law must be "externally quite clear," for otherwise "it would have been enough to say that they must judge 'according to their own spirit.'"[84] This is the same law that rests in Section V of the Constitution.

Luther's words are an indictment of the Rockford meeting's method, and they expose the root of the wrong doctrine that tore apart the fabric of believing children of God in the LLC over the past

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[80] *Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Art. VIII, ¶ 3, available at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/273/273-h/273-h.htm#link2H_4_0007.
[81] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 195.
[82] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 32: Career of the Reformer II. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 272.
[83] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 15: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 197.
[84] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 33: Career of the Reformer III. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 91.

eight years. I have put these words before the LLC already. In August 2022 I quoted to its Board and to every congregation Luther's sermon on John 3:

> Christ does not want to give you the right to run to and fro in search of the Spirit, to lose yourself in reverie and say: "I have this by inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Actually, it may be the devil who inspired you! Thus they alleged in the edict issued at the Diet of Augsburg: "The church is holy; therefore it follows that its proclamations are holy and given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Christ does not recognize such inspiration. He binds us solely to His Word. He does not want to see the Holy Spirit divorced from His Word. Whenever you hear anyone boast that he has something by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it has no basis in God's Word, no matter what it may be, tell him that this is the work of the devil. Christ does not bind you to anything but His mouth and His Word. He does not want to leave you wandering aimlessly about; He wants you to hear His Word. He declares: "The words which I speak are spiritual. Therefore if you want to obtain the Holy Spirit, you must adhere to My words; for they are spirit and life."
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> God has so ordered it that the Holy Spirit ordinarily comes through the Word. Christ Himself states this here. Therefore whenever you are faced by anything, even though it appears so attractive and holy that you imagine it to be an angelic being, take it, and hold it in the light of God's Word. Examine it to see whether it is founded on Holy Writ, whether or not God has commanded and ordered it. If it is a mere fancy, a token of particular zeal, or a pious thought, but lacks God's Word, spit on it. Unless it happens that God chooses to enlighten you particularly, as He did Moses, beware! Since God has confirmed the ministry of preaching, be on your guard against any such devotion or fancies as the devil may well suggest to you, even though they are sweet enough to induce you to weep large troughs full of tears.[85]

Four years later the chairman of the LLC's Annual Meeting closed the matter with the Catholics' reasoning of the Augsburg edict that Luther condemned, in his own words: "We believe that the Holy Spirit has revealed this to the living congregation of God." I quoted Luther on the office of the Spirit – that He "will be in and with the Word," that Christ "sets bounds for the message of the Holy Spirit Himself," and that when a man "proclaims his own thoughts and notions" apart from the Word, "that betrays the presence of the loathesome spirit of lies"[86]. I quoted Luther's warning that the papists "dare to say: The church cannot err; as if Christ were lying when he says that the elect (who alone are the church) are to be led astray,"[87] and his picture of men who, when "one

[85] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 174.
[86] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 363.
[87] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, pp. 193–94.

shoves the Word of God under their noses . . . cry out with their ears plugged tight: You do not understand it correctly."[88] The chairman said of the Scripture and Luther I had read: "these were not the reason." And I quoted the apostles: "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1); "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Not one of these passages has been answered, in four years, by anyone. At Rockford they were not answered either. They were declared not to be the reason – still only a "different spirit."

This is not my caricature of their teaching; it is their teaching, preached and published. In August 2024, Sam Roiko, an LLC Board member and minister, told his congregation that the question "which is higher . . . God's word above the congregation or is God's congregation above God's word" is "an absurd question" because the two are "one and inseparable" such that (quoting an older brother with approval) "you can even take these Bibles that are written here and burn every single one of them . . . . But yet God's word is still in God's congregation."[89] Mr. Roiko stated this belief plainly: the LLC (and SRK) – those physical congregations – cannot err because they are the equivalent of the Word. Its actions (and those of its Board) cannot be judged or measured by the Word because they ***are*** the Word; whatever the congregation says, the Word has said.

Martin Luther disagrees with Sam Roiko. Luther writes:

> *Even today many are misled by their claim that the church does not err. But you answer them thus: "Oh, yes, the church does err and can err and be mistaken. You cannot collect the church into one spot or into one compact group. The Christian Church is catholic, dispersed over all the world and often found in a place where one would least expect it. Therefore Christ alone is infallible. But the Christian Church is fallible.*[90]

The Augsburg Confession that both organizations profess draws exactly the line that Mr. Roiko's sermon erases: the Church is "the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly"[91]. The Gospel makes the Church, and by the Gospel the Church is known. And Article VIII says plainly what every visible assembly contains:

> Although the Church properly is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless, since in this life many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the saying of Christ: The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Both the

[88] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 36: Word and Sacrament II. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 185.
[89] Samuel Roiko, Elk River, August 19, 2024, on Revelation 10:9–11; the LLC's own archive recording is linked at laestadianrecord.org.
[90] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 258.
[91] *Augsburg Confession*, Article VII.

> Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.[92]

Mark what the Confession does with that fact. It does not send the hearer to search the preacher's heart; it says the heart cannot be searched, for "many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled" in every visible assembly, including the LLC's churches, and that nothing hangs on it, because Word and Sacrament are "effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ," not by the spirit of the man who delivers them. The LLC has turned this on its head. From the floor of a business meeting it pronounces who "is not a believer," which is to claim to see what the Confession says is hidden; and it tests preaching by whether it "answers to our spirits," which is to hang the Gospel on the man rather than on Christ's institution. Neither works in the LLC's favor. We cannot judge the hearts of the LLC's own speakers, including each speaker whom the SRK calls a "trusted brother" – any of them may lead a double life – and it does not matter: if they preach the Word, the Word they preach is still Christ's Word, and His promise stands, no matter the evil of the man who carries it. That is the Confession's comfort, and it is the same comfort the LLC denies to everyone it has put out. To say that a corporation of congregations is "never without God's holy word," and that asking whether the Word stands above it is "absurd," is to make the visible body infallible – the very claim of Rome that the Reformation was fought over, now made in Minnesota in the name of the Reformers. It is the question Section V of the LLC's own Constitution answers in the opposite way: the Word is "the highest authority and ***only measure*** according to which all doctrines and teachings in said Corporation [i.e., the LLC] are to be examined and judged." A body that cannot be judged by Scripture is not under Scripture.

In the LLC, reading of Scripture is not encouraged; it is discouraged. The pastor of the Phoenix congregation at the time, Eric Mattila, stated: "It is certainly easy for any one of us to read God's Word and begin to demand and be proud and say that God's Word says this. But if we begin to have an understanding that is different from the congregation of God, that is different from the voice of the Holy Spirit, we must submit our understanding. We must put our trust in the congregation, Mother . . . . She will never lead us astray."[93] But the congregation he calls Mother, the one who "will never lead us astray," is the same congregation that, by Luther's word and your chairman's own, must pray "forgive us our sins." A congregation that can err is not a guide that never errs; to make her understanding of the Word the measure of the Word is to place the reader above the thing read. Within two weeks of the removals, a member of the LLC's own staff, Jon Bloomquist, answered from the pulpit the very charge this letter makes: "accusations that has been made against us is that we have lifted God's congregation above God's word. I do not believe that . . . what is really in question here is that they are not willing to accept but have rejected the understanding of God's word which is held by God's congregation. They have their own

[92] *Augsburg Confession*, Article VIII.
[93] Eric Mattila, sermon at Phoenix, December 6, 2021, LLC sermon-archive recording at 42:26.

understanding of it."[94] That is the charge admitted in the act of denying it: the measure is not the Word, but the congregation's understanding of the Word.

The chairman of the Phoenix congregation, Shannon Simonson, who led the charge against Phil Siljander at the Southwest Area Board meeting of March 14, 2026 (the recording of that meeting is also at laestadianrecord.org), and who was present at the Annual Meeting, when previously confronted in conversation with the words of the Bible, answered before three witnesses: "I don't give a rat's hide what your Bible says. Tear that thing up and burn it for all I care." I invite him to correct this statement. A church whose ministers preach from the pulpit that the visible (as differentiated by the Bible and Luther from the invisible) congregation and the Word of God are one and inseparable, and whose congregation chairman says flippantly that the Bible may be burned because what the congregation says is what matters, has said, in its own words, what Section V forbids: that the congregation, and not the Word, is the measure. They have confused the invisible Church that God alone sees with the corporations that men run. Enthusiasm has been substituted for Lutheranism.

The Harmful Effect of the Ban on the LLC and SRK

Luther also wrote on what the LLC has actually done to these congregations (put them under what he calls "the ban") and what an unjust ban is. In his Sermon on the Ban (1520), he draws the distinction the LLC has erased. There are two fellowships. The first "is inward, spiritual, and invisible, for it is in the heart . . . No man, be he bishop or pope, nor any creature or even angel may either grant or take away such fellowship. Only God himself, through his Holy Spirit" gives it. The second "is outward, physical, and visible," and it is the only one any human authority can touch: "A bishop or pope may exclude someone from this fellowship . . . This is called putting someone under the ban."[95] The LLC removed two congregations from its rolls, canceled their ministers, and forbade its members to hear them, and then announced from the floor that they had been removed from the Kingdom of God. Luther says that is precisely the thing "no man, be he bishop or pope," can do. The ban, he continues, "is a pure and motherly punishment," which "makes no one either worse or more sinful"; "when it is **justly imposed**, it is instituted only to restore the inward spiritual fellowship, and **when it is unjustly imposed it is to be corrected**."[96]

Luther then answers the maxim the LLC now lives by – that the congregation's judgment must be feared whether just or unjust: "the one who imposes the ban is always in greater danger than the one who is under the ban."[97] He continues:

[94] Jon Bloomquist, sermon at Menahga, July 14, 2022, LLC sermon-archive recording at 32:15–34:59. The Minneapolis and Wolf Lake congregations were removed on July 2, 2022.
[95] Luther, Martin. "A Sermon on the Ban" (1520). Luther's Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 8 (§§ 2–3).
[96] Id. at 11 (§ 9).
[97] Id. at 15 (§ 13).

> To no one is the ban more harmful and dangerous than to those who impose it – even though it is imposed rightly and solely because of transgression – because they never give this a thought, are completely without fear, and do not consider how they themselves are perhaps worthy of a hundred bans before God, just as the Gospel of Matthew 18[:23–30] says of the servant who owed ten thousand talents to his lord and still would not have patience with his own servant regarding a hundred pennies.[98]

And to those who have unjustly banned, he says: "your unjust ban is harmful to no one but to yourself alone, body and soul."[99] He goes further: "the unjust ban is much more desirable than the just ban or the outward fellowship. It is a noble and great merit before God, and blessed is he who dies under the unjust ban. **For God will eternally crown him who is put under the ban for the sake of truth.**"[100] Those who teach only fear of the ban, he says, "disclose their blind and blasphemous intention of ruling the people of Christ by force and at the same time of making the free Christian church a captive of fear."[101]

Measure the LLC's bans by that. No doctrine was named, and efforts to request that the doctrinal differences be stated were stonewalled, so no improvement of a "sinning neighbor" was sought; the only thing the LLC sought from CCLLC was that it pledge full support for the prior improper ban. If their spirit does not answer to what you say, then under the ban you go. The speeches at the Annual Meeting supporting the ban made clear that the church's members have been made "a captive of fear." Minneapolis and Wolf Lake, and now Coastal California, have lost nothing that men can take from them, because men cannot take it; and those who imposed the ban without a doctrine, without a hearing, and against the law of their own state have taken on themselves exactly the danger Luther describes.

SRK Support of the Prior Expulsions

At least one SRK representative was at the meeting: Jussi Rentola, who told the delegates he was "completely unaware of what has happened in California." He rose nonetheless and said of the 2022 expulsions:

> *"Nevertheless, the matters went that way, as we have learned, and these two congregations separated themselves from this mutual congregation. And we understood in Finland that the question was not of legalities or laws, but the Spirit of God . . ."*[102]

[98] Id. at 11 (§ 8).
[99] Id. at 14 (§ 12).
[100] Id. at 20 (§ 19).
[101] Id. at 16 (§ 14).
[102] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:47:51.

> *"God protected that the kingdom of God was able to stay pure in a golden candlestick."*[103]

Not of laws, and, as the recording shows, not of doctrine either. Your representative told the delegates he was unaware of what had happened in California, and then pronounced on it in your name. Scripture has a word for this: *"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." Prov. 18:13.* So I ask you directly: is this how the SRK judges? Is "my spirit does not agree with his spirit" the measure by which a congregation is found to have left the Kingdom of God? If it is, say so, and say what has become of Section V of the LLC Constitution. If it is not, then your representative and the LLC's delegates spoke in your name a doctrine you do not hold, and it falls to you to say so.

Another speaker, also originally from Finland, Jouko Haapsaari, said to me:

> *"You did as best as you could to describe how you believe . . . You must have used hours to put out that explanation. But I hope you understand that we believe differently. We don't hate you. We're not pushing people out. But we believe differently."*[104]

The irony, of course, is that he said this while a motion to "push[] people out" was pending at that very meeting. But Mr. Haapsaari said more, perhaps, than he intended: "[w]e believe differently." That is precisely my question to you, the Board of the SRK: do you believe differently – differently from the Holy Word of God, the creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and the catechisms of Luther that your congregations and the LLC's Constitution confess?

These were not the first of your voices to speak. Your support of the expulsions has been public, in print, and under names, for four years.

In September 2022, your Executive Secretary, Arto Tölli, took part in the joint SRK–LLC–SFC meetings at your office in Oulu. These were meetings attended in part (by your chairman's own published account) by the entire SRK Board of Directors. The LLC reported to its congregations that "[t]he meetings were of one mind" and that "the discussions spoke how years of division has led to a heresy in North America."[105] Your own Päivämies reported the same day, under Harri Vähäjylkkä's byline, that the division in North America "has resulted in a heresy," and that "[t]here has been no doubt that we believe exactly the same way."[106]

In January 2023, your chairman, Valde Palola, in opening remarks at the SRK Speakers' Meeting,[107] endorsed the removals: "Based on discussion at the 2022 [LLC] Annual Meeting, the

[103] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:49:16.
[104] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 01:56:59.
[105] Email from Arvin Pirness, for Jim Jurmu, Sam Roiko, and himself, to all LLC congregations, ministers, and Board members, "SRK-LLC-SFC Joint Meetings in Finland," September 30, 2022.
[106] *Päivämies*, Sept. 30, 2022.
[107] Published in *Päivämies* on January 25, 2023, and translated in the LLC's *Voice of Zion* of March 2023.

assembled delegates, based on [LLC] bylaws, ultimately removed two member congregations from the central organization." In the same remarks he taught: "Isn't the answer that it is God's congregation, where the Holy Spirit opens the unchanging and infallible Word of God? **Thus, the congregation cannot err on any point of doctrine either.**" And of the many who wrote to you for help, as I did: "We have also received many messages and emails expressing a different view of the current situation. . . . [W]e have found the messages from the other party to be different." You did not respond to any of those messages, did you?[108]

On this point your chairman named his authority, and he should be taken at his word. For the teaching that "the congregation cannot err" he cited, by name, Luther's The Bondage of the Will, quoting: "it is impossible for the congregation to err in even the smallest point of faith." But that is a sentence Luther wrote to prove the opposite of the use made of it. He set it under the heading his own editors gave the passage – "The True Church, Which Does Not Err, Is Hidden from Men's Sight" – and the Church he says cannot err is the one "ruled by the Spirit of God," hidden and known to God alone: "it is impossible for the Church to err, even in the smallest article." In the very next breath Luther names who does err: the visible, named church. Of Israel he writes that "not a single king is listed who did not err," while God preserved "seven thousand" whom no one could see; the apostles all fell away; and he says it of the councils and the popes expressly, that they are "nonetheless called the Church, although all of them . . . are anything but the Church." The Bondage of the Will, then, does not say that the delegates assembled at Rockford cannot err. It says that the body everyone calls the Church is precisely the one that does, and that the Church which cannot err is the hidden remnant that no vote convenes and no membership roll contains. Your chairman has cited the very passage in Luther that most completely undoes the use he makes of it.[109]

Do You Believe This Way?

You send representatives to these meetings. You broadcast your speakers to North America, and the LLC publishes your support of its actions. Your chairman publicly endorsed the 2022 removals. So answer now, openly, the questions your silence has left open:

1. Do you believe that a majority vote of delegates at the annual meeting of a nonprofit corporation is the decision of the Holy Spirit, incapable of error – so that to ask whether the vote complied with the Holy Word of God, the corporation's own Constitution, or the law of the land is "unbelief" from which a person must repent?

2. Do you believe that men may pronounce from the floor of a meeting that a person or a whole congregation "is not a believer," without stating a single doctrinal error from the Holy Word of God – because his testimony "doesn't answer to any of our spirits"?

[108] *The Voice of Zion*, March 2023, "News from SRK Work Areas," first published in *Päivämies*, January 25, 2023.
[109] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works Vol. 33: The Bondage of the Will (1525), pp. 199–201.

3. Do you believe that the LLC or SRK (or the combination of them) is the Kingdom of God, so that removal from a corporation's membership rolls is removal from God's kingdom? Luther confessed that the holy Christian 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," and that "baptism, the sacrament, and the gospel are the signs by which the existence of the church in the world can be noticed externally" – not membership in any earthly corporation.[110]

4. Do you believe that a Christian organization may refuse (to the point that not one delegate will second the motion) to affirm that it will obey the law of the land under which it is incorporated? Christ says, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21), and Paul, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1).

5. Do you still confess, with the LLC's Constitution, Section V, "that the Holy Word of God is the highest authority and only measure according to which all doctrines and teachings . . . are to be examined and judged"? And with it, the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and the Small and Large Catechisms of Luther? Your chairman once confessed exactly this. In 2012 he wrote that "**the teaching of continuous revelation is problematic – it lowers, in a certain way, the authority of Scripture,**" and that by the Reformers' sola scriptura principle "the holy Scriptures alone are the norm of doctrine"[111]; that same year he wrote that **the congregation "is indeed holy, but it is at the same time sinful," and therefore prays, "Forgive us our sins"**[112] (quoting, nearly word for word, Martin Luther's Lectures on Galatians: "The church is indeed holy, but it is a sinner at the same time. Therefore it believes in the forgiveness of sins and prays: 'Forgive us our debts'").[113] Yet in January 2023 he located the authority for interpreting God's Word in the visible congregation (the SRK and LLC) and taught that "**the congregation cannot err on any point of doctrine either.**" Which is the SRK's confession: what your chairman wrote in 2012, which agrees with your rules, the LLC's Constitution, and Luther; or what he taught in 2023, which gravely mischaracterizes Luther and which agrees with what was spoken by the delegates at Rockford?

6. Do you disagree with anything I wrote in the two enclosed letters (August 3, 2022, and June 1, 2023)? Do you disagree with what Wolf Lake and Minneapolis confessed on the doctrine of justification, on the robe of righteousness, or on the place and authority of the congregation? If so, say where, and show it from the Word.

7. Do you believe that a congregation board, or a majority of delegates, or even congregation members, can err? And when the LLC removed two congregations without the notice, reasons, and hearing that its own Bylaws and the law of its state require, was that an error, or the act of God?

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[110] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 39: Church and Ministry I. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Fortress Press, 1999, p. 75.
[111] *Siionin Lähetyslehti* 7/2012.
[112] *SRK Vuosikirja 2012*; republished at srk.fi/fi/nain-me-uskomme/artikkeli-valde-palola/.
[113] Luther, Martin. Luther's Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan et al., Concordia Publishing House, 1999, p. 109.

8. The LLC teaches that only members of the LLC, the SRK, and their sister organizations are saved and acceptable to God. Does the SRK agree? It would be well for the SRK to state its position in clear terms of its own so that every member of every congregation in Finland and North America may know what it confesses.

9. Finally, and most simply: in the two enclosed letters, and in the testimony I read aloud at the July 3 meeting, I quoted the Holy Word of God and the writings of Martin Luther at length, and rested the whole argument on those quotations. I asked the delegates directly whether anyone disagreed with any of those passages, as quoted or as applied. No one identified a single error.[114] So I ask you the same question, exactly: Is any passage of Scripture or of Luther quoted in the enclosed letters, or read at that meeting, misquoted? Is any misapplied? If so, identify it and show the error from the Word. I will receive the correction with thanks. If not, then say plainly that the quotations are true, and answer how an organization whose Constitution confesses these very writings has expelled, and is now expelling, congregations that fully believe them.

These are not easy questions, and an admission of error can be hard to make. But they must be answered if truth matters and if God's Word matters. It is easy to set up a straw man. It is easy to take a side, especially one where close friendships have formed over decades. It feels good, warm, and safe to go along with, and be embraced by, a majority. But we obscure God's Word at our peril. *"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." John 12:42–43.*

I bring these questions with hope and in prayer because your chairman has himself, over many years, preached and written the very answers I am asking you to give. In 2017 he told Finland's national radio that when we speak of the congregation, "we speak of Christ's congregation, which is worldwide . . . all children, wherever in the world they are born . . . are born also as members of God's invisible congregation," not of any organization's membership roll.[115] Opening the 2023 Summer Services at Kauhava, he preached that "the core question in all this is whether we consent that the written word of God, the Bible, is life's highest rule."[116] And in 2025 he publicly rebuked the bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland for changing the church's practice without procedurally adhering to its constitutional order, calling the perceived error "extremely serious."[117] There is a reason our organizations provide for procedure: procedures are checks on the power of man, which always corrupts. On the Word being above every organization, on the congregation erring and praying "forgive us our sins," on the kingdom of God that no corporation contains, and on the duty of a body to follow its own order, I am not asking your chairman to adopt

[114] LLC Annual Meeting, Rockford, Minnesota, July 3, 2026, recording at 00:53:12 and 01:18:22.
[115] Yle Radio 1, *Horisontti*, summer 2017.
[116] Saara Junes, 'Suviseurat avattiin Kauhavalla…,' Päivämies, June 30, 2023, available at https://www.paivamies.fi/uutiset/suviseurat-avattiin-kauhavalla--luomistyo-raamatun-merkitys-ja-jumalan-sanan-valo-korostuivat-tervehdyksissa-6.42.17816.32b5c3c7e8.
[117] *Kotimaa*, June 26, 2025.

my words. I am asking him to stand by his own. What was spoken at Rockford and what was taught at your Speakers' Meeting in January 2023 cannot be squared with them.

Do not answer that these are American questions about an American corporation. The standard is the same in Oulu as in Monticello and Rockford. Your own registered rules commit the SRK to work "in accordance with the Holy Bible and the Evangelical Lutheran faith, confession, and doctrine" (SRK säännöt, § 2). The Church Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which your chairman himself invoked in those same January 2023 remarks, requires that all doctrine in the church "be studied and evaluated according to the holy Word of God." And the LLC's Constitution, Section V, confesses that "the Holy Word of God is the highest authority and only measure according to which all doctrines and teachings . . . are to be examined and judged." Three organizations profess one and the same measure. I ask nothing more of you than that you apply it.

If you do not believe what was spoken at Rockford, then say so openly, as openly as this letter, and correct your sister organization, whose members hear your speakers and trust your fellowship. If you do believe this way, then say that openly too, so that every member of every congregation in Finland and North America may examine that doctrine against the Scriptures, as the Bereans did. The example of the Bereans is an important one. Faced with the preaching of Paul, who "reasoned with them out of the scriptures," they did not, like the Jews, attempt to bring the masses against him. Instead, "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed . . . ." *Acts 17:11–12*. The Bereans did exactly as the governing documents of the LLC and SRK require: seek the Word of God and study the scriptures, and from that judge what is said. Sadly, instead of taking this course, the LLC Board, like those at Thessalonica, "stirred up the people." *Acts 17:13*.

What may not continue is what has continued for four years: silence from Oulu while men in Minnesota pronounce, in your fellowship's name, who is and is not a child of God. And if the SRK and LLC truly believe that these congregations "believe differently," there is an honest way to say so: amend the LLC's Constitution and the SRK's governing documents to strike the Lutheran confessions they no longer hold, and remove "Lutheran" from the corporate name and practice. Then we may all agree that we believe differently. Until that day, CCLLC professes exactly what the Constitution professes, word for word. Does the LLC? Does the SRK?

Why I Have Copied the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

The congregations of the SRK live, worship, and hold membership within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and the SRK's speakers include its ordained ministers. The confession of that church is the same Holy Word of God, the same three ecumenical creeds, the same Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and the same catechisms of Luther that the LLC's Constitution confesses. It is the very standard I have asked the SRK to apply. Because the questions in this letter concern the confession of the church within which you work, I have copied the

Archbishop of Turku and Finland and the Bishop of Oulu, in whose diocese you make your home. They deserve to see these questions and your answer.

Closing

This letter may be difficult to absorb. It is not easy to write. But the Bible teaches clearly that *"[o]pen rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." Prov. 27:5–6. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Rev. 3:19.* A rebuke that is of God is given openly, to the face, in love, and, above all, *"**with all longsuffering and doctrine**." 2 Tim. 4:2.* That is the difference between what I have tried to do in these letters and what has been done to the Minneapolis, Wolf Lake, and Coastal California congregations. I have set down the passages of the Word of God and the words of Luther on which I rely, in writing, under my own name, and asked to be shown where they are wrong. The answer has been a spirit; no doctrine, no Scripture, no name, no hearing; rather, a "rebuke" arranged in secret, delivered without longsuffering, and empty of doctrine. Paul says that the one who is "spiritual" restores a brother *"in the spirit of meekness." Gal. 6:1*. I write in love – the love that is willing to be counted an enemy for telling the truth (Gal. 4:16) – and I ask you to receive it as it is given. These sins, like all of our sins, are forgiven through Christ. But we must not persist in them. We must not live in them. *"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Heb. 10:26–27.*

As I have said, the LLC plans to ban CCLLC at an October 1, 2026, meeting. Although that meeting is not properly called and should not proceed (unless the LLC there, too, intends to violate Minnesota law), I ask that you state your position on these questions this month, so that there is no ambiguity. I remain willing, as I have been since August of 2022, to meet or speak with any of you, in love and before God. ***"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." 1 Peter 3:15.***

In God's Peace,

Briar Siljander

Enclosures:
(1) Letter to the LLC Board of Directors and Member Congregations, August 3, 2022
(2) Letter re Improper Expulsion, to the LLC Board of Directors, its Member Congregations, and the SRK Board of Directors, June 1, 2023, with a Finnish translation made in October 2023
(3) Letter of Arvin Pirness, Executive Director, LLC, to CCLLC, July 22, 2026 (Notice)
(4) Letter of the LLC Board of Directors to CCLLC, June 26, 2026
(5) Email of Keith Kesti, Chairman, Southwest Area Mission Committee, April 22, 2026
(6) Response of the Coastal California Laestadian Lutheran Church to the LLC's Notice of July 22, 2026, September 3, 2026, with Exhibits A–I

(7) Email of Arvin Pirness to the 2026 LLC Delegates and Member Congregation Chairmen, "Communication from CCLLC," September 8, 2026

The enclosures, the full recording and an unofficial transcript of the July 3, 2026, Annual Meeting, the recordings of the December 7, 2019, Wolf Lake meeting, the April 13, 2019, Board Members' Workshop, and the March 14, 2026, Southwest Area Board meeting, the typed transcripts of the March 26, 2021, Menahga and May 13, 2022, and Wolf Lake meetings are available at laestadianrecord.org.

cc (with enclosures):
The Archbishop of Turku and Finland, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
The Bishop of Oulu, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
Board of Directors, Laestadian Lutheran Church, Monticello, Minnesota (Attn: Arvin Pirness, Executive Director)
Member Congregations of the Laestadian Lutheran Church