

LCMS reelects its president: Kieschnick holds on

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The incumbent president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod has been reelected to another three-year term—essentially ending a long debate over his backing of a New York minister who took part in a post-September 11 event that some church leaders said violated LCMS rules against participation in interfaith and ecumenical services.

Some members of the 2.5-million-member denomination had thought Gerald B. Kieschnick should be ousted from his position after he supported the participation of David Benke in the nationally televised ceremony at Yankee Stadium.

But by winning 52.8 percent of the vote at last month's triennial convention in St. Louis, Kieschnick defeated a principal opponent in the controversy, Daniel Preus, who had 31 percent, and three other candidates. Preus also was defeated in his run to keep his first vice presidential seat by William Diekelman, a district president from Owasso, Oklahoma.

LCMS spokesman David Strand said Kieschnick is ready to move beyond the Benke debate and help the denomination focus on issues such as mission outreach and Christian education. Though he added it would be unrealistic to think that "everyone in the Synod is suddenly walking arm-in-arm and whistling the exact same tune . . . the Yankee Stadium matter is over," he told RNS. "While there may still be some hard feelings among certain people, the sense seems to be that the synod is coming together to focus on the real business at hand."

At the meeting that ended July 15, delegates voted narrowly to raise \$100 million over the next six years as part of an initiative to share the gospel with 100 million people abroad. The 653-533 vote reflected the concern of many delegates about launching the campaign amid financial troubles that caused the LCMS to reduce its national ministries staff and make other budget cuts.

Delegates also adopted a resolution by a 672-479 vote that called for continued discussion with representatives of the mainline Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on scriptural, theological and church topics. ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson said he was “profoundly grateful” for that decision as well as for the recommendation by Missouri Synod executives to maintain their cooperative arrangements for military chaplaincy.