

DANCING

A Social Document from the Augustana Lutheran Church



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

1954 Minutes

To the Individual Member of the Church

The decision to take part or not to take part in dancing must remain the responsibility of the individual. It is not a problem apart from other problems, but rather one of the phases of the total integration of life in the light of God's Word and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14).

A Christian must exercise the strictest self-discipline that he fall not into temptation without even a recognition that it is a temptation, ever keeping in remembrance the admonition, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

A Christian must also pray for the grace of both humility and courage in his confession when for the sake of conscience his conduct goes counter to the accepted pattern of his environs, exposing him to the contumely of his associates. "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2).

A Christian must also be charitable in his judgments of other Christians who, also in good conscience, have arrived at other decisions in regard to their participation in dancing. If he is convinced that his brother is in error and therefore in danger, let him counsel with him in love and in all humility in the spirit of the Apostle Paul who wrote, "I write not these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children" (1 Corinthians 4:14).

A Christian is mindful of the fact that the lives of many young men and women have been ruined because of the temptations and pitfalls associated with the modern dance. Therefore, he must be careful lest by his own example he contributes to the delinquency of others or gives offense to weaker brethren. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31-32.)

To the Pastors and Congregations

No moral or spiritual problem can be settled simply by rationalization or dialectic. The problem of dancing cannot be solved by congregational resolutions or ecclesiastical regulations. We realize that our pastors and congregations are faced with a factual situation in the social and community life of today in which the dance is seemingly accepted by the majority as a normal social pastime. This requires of them a keen insight, unbounded sympathy and infinite patience that they may be of real help to the youth of our church in meeting the difficulties and overcoming the temptations not only of the dance but also of other involvements caused by the social pressures of our age.

Pastors and parents in particular are urged to counsel youth and to warn against the pitfalls and snares to which so many others have fallen victims, in order that our youth may be enlightened and strengthened spiritually to make their own intelligent, Christian resolve in regard to social behavior.

Congregations are urged to scrutinize diligently and constantly their corporate acts so as to keep themselves above all suspicion of partaking in anything that may give offense. To this corporate discipline belongs the use of the church property which has been dedicated to the worship and service of God. That property must not be used as the scene of any questionable amusements or diversions. By the same token neither the congregation, nor any of its auxiliaries will sponsor a dance at any other location. Here is applicable the saying "Let the church be the church." Any compromise with the world on this score is always subversive of the real mission and influence of the church.

It is understood and accepted that the decisions and actions of individual members of the congregation in regard to dancing are a matter of individual conscience. Each one has the right to make his own choice and therefore he is not subject to discipline unless he is "guilty of deliberate sin, or despises the means of grace, or openly denies the Christian faith, or violates any provision of this constitution" (Congregational Constitution, Article IV, Section 4, Paragraph 1).

To the Administrators of the Church Schools

Our schools have been founded and maintained by the church with much prayer and at great sacrifice to serve as nurseries of God's kingdom, to prepare and send forth men and women to serve Him, in the ministry of the Word, the ministry of mercy, and all the walks of life.

We recognize that our schools have their peculiar social problems, even more difficult of solution than those of the congregations. This is true because of the character of the college community life in which such a large proportion of the students, often the majority, lives detached from the normal family life and separated from the previous environment of the "home town." The social diversions must be found largely within the horizons of the college community. This is an entirely new experience for most of the students.

We are cognizant of the fact that a large proportion of the students who come from our own congregations have come out of homes and communities in which there has been acquiescence in regard to participation in high school and other social dancing.

We are not unmindful of the large number of students at some of our colleges who are not members of the church, whose differing points of view are rooted in rather sharply differentiated approaches to the Christian life and attitudes toward Christian conduct. The steady, liberalizing pressures of the local community make their impact on the college campus. It is obvious that the college campus becomes not only a human laboratory with all the precipitations and exuberances of youth but also a vortex of the dynamic movements and newfangled notions of our age.

For these very reasons it is of prime importance that our Church schools retain their essential Christian character. Only thus can and will they truly serve our Church and our youth. Therefore, we urge upon our school administrators not to yield in any essential of Christian faith or life to the secular spirit of the modern age, but to maintain for our Church schools the same high standards of corporate responsibility and action that we have enjoined upon the congregations in the foregoing paragraphs of this statement.

It is precarious and inadvisable for the church to adopt rules and regulations in detail for our colleges. This comes within the authority of the boards and presidents elected to administer the affairs and discipline of these institutions. However, in response to the request of college authorities that the church speak on the subject of dancing we do agree on the following general precepts.

Our college administrators and faculties are urged to use every effort to keep the recreational life of the college family on as high a level as possible; appealing to the noblest impulses and motivations of youth, with constant application of the Word of God, and keeping in remembrance that these young people have been entrusted to their care by parents who have confidence in the unique Christian character of our Church schools.

Since the official program of the college ought to serve all its students, and some are opposed to the dance, the church is not agreed that dancing should be sponsored as a school activity, but inasmuch as a large proportion of our students do dance and since dancing is a part of the activities of some student groups, the administration of the college shall so supervise these activities that they do not reflect adversely on the standards of the church and school.

In an age of crisis such as this, with its dominant note of threatening tragedy and with its compelling challenge to this generation of youth preparing itself for future leadership in the shaping of the world's destiny, we also appeal to our youth in our Church colleges to gird themselves for the conflict that lies ahead in all seriousness. It

is not the time to ask, "Shall we dance?" as if that were a question of paramount importance.

In giving this directive to those in charge of the administration of our colleges the church also realizes its responsibility for their adequate financial support in order that they may fulfill their mission as Church schools and maintain their Christian emphasis, lest they be forced to seek their support from other sources with resultant loss of their pristine character and objectives.

Lastly, we call upon all the members of our church, old and young, to join in fervent prayer for the realization of the kingdom of God among us. The problem of dancing is but one of the symptoms of the inroads of secularism upon the church. There are greater, more fundamental problems.

There is only one way by which evangelical liberty may be attained. "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). In that liberty we will also find freedom from "every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1)