



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2009-2010
The Pastor as Steward
Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors
Participants Guide

Participant Guides

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Session 1 How Green Is Our God!

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

On October 11, 2006 PBS aired a *Moyers on America* program titled “Is God Green?” “Green,” of course, refers to living with a concern for the earth’s resources. Moyers chronicled the increasing environmental activism among American evangelicals. Once the mission of liberal mainliners, taking care of the earth is more and more the work of conservative Bible-believers, Moyers reported.

At one point Moyers offered this comment on Tri Robinson, an activist evangelical pastor in Boise, Idaho: “It isn’t easy being green for a conservative, evangelical pastor. In fact, it took Tri Robinson 15 years of pastoring before he dared to preach his first sermon on the environment.” According to the Moyers report, a growing number of formerly silent Christians, including pastors, are answering the question, “Is God green?” with a resounding “Yes! And, therefore, so are we!”

Less than a year later, in the June/July, 2007 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, Matthew Nelson wrote an article by the same title, “Is God Green?” With theological clarity Nelson critiqued the anthropocentric (human-centered) and the ecocentric (nature-centered) ethics of environmentalism to claim instead a Scriptural, moral, and Christological center for environmental concerns. Nelson, too, could answer “Yes!” to the question, “Is God green?”

All this raises another question, “If God is green, does that make LCMS pastors green, too?”

This study introduces a series of nine Bible studies on stewardship from the pastoral perspective. Each study is presented with the prayer that grace will abound as the Holy Spirit works in the Word to shape pastors as stewards of God’s treasures – from the immediate mysteries at hand to the whole of creation.

For Conversation

1. What is your response to describing God as green? How about a green pastor?
2. What are the pitfalls of going green for a pastor or a congregation?
3. Ever preached a sermon on the environment? If yes, summarize it. If no, why not?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

○ A Green God

The Scriptures present God as deeply committed to preserving and redeeming His creation, tainted and threatened by sin.

- God as Creator, Owner, Provider, and Preserver of All Things
 - Psalm 24:1
 - Psalm 104:24-28
 - Matthew 6:25-27

- Human Responsibility to Manage and Care for the Earth and Its Resources
 - Genesis 1:26-30
 - Genesis 2:15
 - Micah 6:1-8

- The Impact of Sin on God's Creation
 - Genesis 3:17
 - Hosea 4:1-3

- Christ as Creator, Sustainer, Reconciler, and Consummator of Creation
 - John 3:16-17
 - Colossians 1:15-20

- All Creation Taken into God's Redemptive Plan
 - Romans 8:19-23



○ A Green Pastor

Long before being green was “in,” the New Testament presented pastors as stewards, eager to preserve, celebrate, and extend the treasures of God’s creation and new creation. See how “green” you feel after probing each of these passages. Note especially the variety of our roles as stewards.

- 1 Corinthians 3:5-7

- 1 Corinthians 4:1-2
- Philippians 4:2-3
- 1 Timothy 1:18-20
- 1 Timothy 2: 1-8
- 1 Timothy 3:4-5
- 1 Timothy 4:9-15
- 1 Timothy 5:22-23
- 2 Timothy 1:13
- 2 Timothy 3:14-15
- 2 Timothy 4:3-5



FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

From The Large Catechism on the First Article of the Apostles Creed

Moreover, we also confess that God the Father has given us not only all that we have and what we see before our eyes, but also that he daily defends us against every evil and misfortune , warding off all sorts of danger and disaster. All this he does out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a kind father who cares for us so that no evil may befall us...

Hence, because everything we possess, and everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given, sustained, and protected by God, it inevitably follows that we are in duty bound to love, praise, and thank him without ceasing, and, in short, to devote all things to his service, as he has required and enjoined in the Ten Commandments.

How much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article. We all pass over it; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator. (The Large Catechism, 17-21, *The Book of Concord* (Kolb/Wengert, p.433).

POINTS TO PONDER

Christian poet John Leax has a prayer poem titled “My Delight.” Read the poem on page 4 and then consider or discuss the following:

1. Where do I see extravagant grace at work in the world? At work in my ministry?
2. For Leax, the harmony between God’s pleasure and his own needs points to an inner harmony within the Trinity. What other harmonies in life, worth preserving, find their source in God?
3. What mood accompanies Leax’s awareness that he is a keeper of God’s pleasures?
4. When has a desire to call the ministry “mine” brought discord to my ministry?

5. Which am I more likely to do: hold my ministry tightly as my own or humbly be held by the one who owns my ministry?
6. Leax finds in creation an affirmation of Scriptural truth. How often do I use creation as a witness to the truth of the Scriptures?

My Delight

Though you have made the earth
for your delight,
I walk your woods and find
in hemlock, pine, and poplar
shelter
from the burning of your sun
and fuel to warm me
when your cold descends.
I find streaming from the hillside
clean water
that slakes my thirst,
and in the wildness of its flow,
trout that feed my hunger.
At your meadow's edge,
I pluck raspberries from the cane
and wonder at the thrasher
in the briars.
With every turn I find
extravagance—
the unending revelation
of your joy's abundance.
What other end should I imagine
for goldenrod and buttercup,
for bloodroot, trillium, and phlox,
for jack-in-the-pulpit

and Queen Anne's lace, for coltsfoot,
mullein, vetch, and lily,
for loosestrife and forget-me-not?
I am confounded.
What harmony within yourself
led you to make your pleasure
and my needs be one?
What awful purpose then
led you to place
your pleasure in my keeping?
What discord now tempts me
to seize what you have made
and call it mine?
The fitness of this place
for my abode portends
a grace beyond my strength to hold.
I must be held or fall.
With these words affirming
my delight, I yield
my inclination to name
my own what can be only yours.
Let my delight be as it must
yours and yours alone.
John Leax, "My Delight," *Out Walking:
Reflections on Our Place in the Natural World*
(Baker, 2000)

FOR CONVERSATION

1. Discuss the many ways in which the work of a pastor is the work of a steward.
2. In what sense is a pastor a preservationist? A caretaker? A defender? An activist?
3. Agree or disagree? The First Article of the Apostles Creed is often neglected in Lutheran teaching and preaching. Explain your response.
4. When has a desire to call the pastoral ministry "mine" brought discord to my ministry?
5. When might a "green pastor" become too green? In other words, when might a concern for preserving a blessing of God take a wrong turn?
6. How equipped do you feel to lead your congregation in its stewardship of God's resources?
7. Close with prayers for one another's personal and ministry needs.

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Generous Giving

Scriptural Truths to Guide Generous Giving among Christians

1. Focus of this Study

Every adult likely remembers as a child counting the seconds between lightning and thunder. As soon as lightning flashed across the sky, the counting would begin: “One-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three.” A count of one-thousand five meant that the lightning was one mile away. One-thousand ten, two miles away. How thrilling it was when the flash and the boom occurred simultaneously. “That was so close!” everyone would exclaim.

The twentieth century theologian Karl Barth is quoted as saying: “Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.”¹ Just as one expects to hear thunder after lightning, one expects to find gratitude in a person who comprehends grace. Grace begets gratitude, it might be said.

This study rests on the premise that God’s grace prompts gratitude and a natural outgrowth of gratitude is giving. Stated simply:

Grace inspires gratitude expressed in giving.

2. Scripture Search²

- **2 Corinthians 8:1-7**

¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. ⁶So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

- **2 Corinthians 8:8-9**

⁸I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. ⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

- **2 Corinthians 8:10-15**

¹⁰And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. ¹¹Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. ¹²For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have

¹³Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. ¹⁴At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, ¹⁵as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

- **2 Corinthians 8:16-24**

¹⁶I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. ¹⁷For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. ¹⁸And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. ¹⁹What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. ²⁰We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. ²¹For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

²²In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. ²³As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. ²⁴Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says faith produces "spiritual impulses," and gives examples of the good works these impulses produce.

Because faith truly brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in our hearts, it must also produce spiritual impulses in our hearts. The prophet shows what those impulses are when he says [Jer. 31:33], "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts."

Therefore, after we have been justified and reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God,

to pray for and expect help from him, to thank and praise him, and to obey him in our afflictions. We also begin to love our neighbor because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses. (Apology IV, 125)³

Hymn writer Edward Dayman captures the idea of “giving to one’s capacity”:

*We, Lord, would lay, at Thy behest
The costliest offerings on Thy shrine;
But when we give, and give our best,
We give Thee only what is Thine.*
(*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 438:4, Public Domain)

4. Points to Ponder

- **Grace** inspires **gratitude** expressed in **giving**
- Paul uses grace alone to motivate giving.
- Paul acts as solicitor by
 - Lifting up the joy of giving
 - Pointing out the example of others
 - Describing the need
 - Encouraging individuals to give to their capacity
 - Helping organize the appeal in the congregation
 - Sending others to help with the process of gathering the offering
- Paul is in a position to act as solicitor because he is in a trust relationship with the members of the congregation.
- Accountability is an indispensable part of gift solicitation and management.

5. For Conversation

- Define *giving*. Does your definition of giving include only money? Other things and money? Other things and not money?
- How do you approach the subject of the giving of money in your own preaching and teaching? Do you enjoy it, avoid it, do it grudgingly? What drives your decision to include or exclude giving in your preaching/teaching? What insights on the subject of giving do you personally gain from Paul’s approach to this topic with the Corinthians or from the readings in the Confessions?
- To what degree does your congregation understand the premise: **Grace** inspires **gratitude** expressed in **giving**?

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Notes:

1. <http://faith-theology.blogspot.com/2006/11/ten-propositions-on-karl-barth.html>
2. Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.
3. Kolb, R. & Wengert, T. J. *The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000.



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FUNDING THE MISSION

November, 2009

1. FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Forty years ago in our Synod most individuals, congregations and districts made use of what was known commonly as the “unified budget” to make Godly decisions concerning the distribution of their stewardship gifts of money. Individuals gave their gifts to congregations. A portion of those gifts was sent on for “work at large” (District), and another portion of that was sent to the national synod where these gifts supported our common good work together. Those days are gone.

Today there is much “direct gifting” and “personalized mission support.” This has resulted in a huge multiplication of the number of prayerfully made decisions at every level on how to fund the mission of God. In this study we discuss some of issues that have been forced upon individuals, congregation, districts, and the national synod since the demise of the “unified budget.”

This month we consider not the theology of Christian giving but the theology that rests behind the distribution of the Christian gift. Where does it go? And how do we divide it among so many opportunities to support the Lord’s work?

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Throughout the Old and New Testaments the distribution of the stewardship gifts from God’s people are referred to as tithes, offerings, and alms. How were each of these gifts distributed?

- Tithes
 - Read Deuteronomy 12:11-14 and Deuteronomy 14:22-27.
 - ❖ What was the chief purpose of the tithe under the Old Testament ceremonial Law?
 - ❖ Although we are no longer bound by the Old Testament ceremonial laws, what does I Corinthians 9:14 suggest concerning the “priests” of the New Testament church?

- Offerings: Consider the story of Cain and Abel's "offerings."
 - Read Genesis 4:3-5 and Hebrews 11:4.
 - ❖ Consider Abraham's "offering" of Isaac. Read Genesis 22:1-14 and Hebrews 11:17-19.
 - ❖ Consider the New Testament offering of the widow recorded in Luke 21:4.

Each of these speak of a stewardship gift with the characteristic of faith-filled sacrifice. Therefore we must look at the greatest offering ever made. See Ephesians 5:2.

- Alms
 - Consider Deuteronomy 15:7-11 and James 1:27.
 - Consider Jesus instructions in Matthew 6:1-4.
 - Almsgiving is not merely the giving of money but the giving of one's self. Read Acts 9:36.
 - And let's not forget Cornelius. Read Acts 10:1-2,,31,44.
 - And finally, Luke 12:33-34.

3. FROM OUR LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE

- Dr. Luther knew that the distribution of stewardship gifts would be a challenge. In a sermon on the last words of Luke 16:1-9, Luther spoke on "where to bestow your benefactions." As he said, "I do not want to condemn you for showing honor to St. Peter, for he is a member of God. But it is better to give your neighbor a penny than to build St. Peter a church of gold; for the former thing is commanded, the latter not. Here people are running to St. James at Santiago de Compostela (a popular shrine) in search of saints, while the paupers, who are genuine 'relics,' are left sitting and lying on the streets." (W 10 III, 282—SL 11, 1455).
- Even in days of the "unified budget" Lutheran Christians were urged to support special mission efforts through the LLL (*The Lutheran Hour*) and the LWML as well as special human needs such as Lutheran World Relief, Bethesda, and Wheat Ridge.
- If individuals need to make various decisions concerning the distribution of their stewardship gifts, what Biblical (theological) principles guide those decisions?

4. POINTS TO PONDER

- St. Paul spent close to ten years soliciting funds for what is commonly referred to as the Jerusalem collection. This was a collection he took up among the Gentile churches to help Judean believers who were facing harder than usual economic times as a result of a famine during the mid to late 40s. Paul and Barnabas made an initial famine –relief visit to Jerusalem in A.D.46 and delivered a monetary gift from the church at Antioch (Acts 11:29-30). The collection effort was successfully completed in A.D. 57, and the funds were delivered by Paul and a group of delegates chosen by the contributing Gentile churches. In Romans 15:26 Paul states that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia “were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.”
- Why did Paul do it? First, the need was genuine. The Jerusalem collection was first and foremost an act of charity. Second, the relief fund served as an important, visible expression of the interdependence of believers worldwide (2 Cor 8:14). Finally, the collection was a tangible representation of the heart of the gospel—that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, male nor female (Gal 3:28). “Their hearts will go out to you because of the surpassing grace God has given you” (2 Cor 9:14).
- It was this special appeal that caused Paul to author the two most famous chapters in Scripture on Christian giving. These principles guide individuals and congregations, as well as districts and synod, in making distribution decisions concerning the gifts of God’s people. As you have time, make a list of those guiding principles gained from 2 Cor 8 and 9. Here’s a start:
 - The Corinthians were following through on a commitment already made (I Cor 16:1-2).
 - Paul motivates by comparing attitudes, not dollar amounts; the Macedonians’ joy, not the size of their contribution.
 - The collection will not benefit Paul personally. He was not even sure it would be appropriate for him to travel to Jerusalem with the funds (I Cor 16:4).
 - The cause is an eminently worthy one. These are Christians of his own race who are in need of the basic necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing.
 - Paul is quick to point out that generous giving is an act of divine grace.It is only as God blesses and enables that we are able to give in the first place (II Cor 8:1).

Keep the list going. There are many distribution lessons to learn.

5. FOR CONVERSATION

- When my wife and I were first married we made a decision to adopt first fruits proportionate giving, and we started in the days of our poverty giving 5% of

everything the Lord had given to us for the work of His church. Almost all of it went each Sunday to our local congregation knowing that the congregation gave a double tithe to district/synod work at large and supported a Christian day school and several local social ministries. My wife and I also have always given to the LLL and the LWML, bought Wheat Ridge Christmas stamps, and gave to occasional special World Relief appeals.

We have grown in our first fruits proportionate giving and after 40 years of marriage and now give 13-14% of everything the Lord gives to us to the work of His church. Last year, when I did my income tax, those gifts were distributed among 28 different Lutheran ministries/agencies. Direct/personalized giving has been a rich blessing to us; however, the distribution decisions each year can become confusing as all the mailings, telephone appeals, and special needs seem to multiply. Talk to one another about your own experiences. What brings you joy? What confuses you?

- My district at one point passed on 42% of its unrestricted revenue to the national mission program. Today that percentage is down to 21%. What factors should go into district leadership decisions regarding their support of the national and international work of our synod?
- Isn't the congregational budget really a reflection of dozens of distribution decisions that the congregation makes concerning how they will take the gifts of God's people and support "the mission"? What does that budget say about the congregational priorities?
- In the *Blue Ribbon Task Force on Funding the Mission* Report on synod's web site we read:

22% of synod's congregations contributed less than \$1,000 to the unrestricted work of district/synod and 12% of synod's congregations contributed nothing to the unrestricted work of district/synod. Anecdotal evidence suggests most of these congregations make their decisions not because they can't offer some support, but because they choose not to.

What do distribution decisions like this say about our "covenants of love" to do together what we could never do alone? (See Article III, Objectives, of the LCMS Constitution.)

- Truth is, the Lord doesn't need our money. If He needed money He could raise up dollars from the stones in the parking lot. This lesson is not about doing something for God. it's about the honor of managing all of life and all of life's resources for the glory of the Lord. All 100%! Praise to the Lord !
- Close by praying for one another and for our stewardship of life and its resources.

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December 2009

Stewards of the Mysteries

Pastors are called to be stewards of the mysteries of God.

1. Focus of This Study

Do you love a good mystery? From childhood, many have read the adventures of the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew, then Sherlock Holmes, and even now may enjoy the mysteries of John Grisham and other current authors. A plain old story could begin by saying “The butler did it!” and then give the details. In a mystery, however, clues are combined with misdirection to make us think the pool guy did it until another clue shows that he was out of town. The clues keep accumulating until the last chapter reveals, perhaps to the reader’s surprise, that the butler did it. There’s a tension in the mystery which compels us to keep reading.

In Scripture and theology, there are mysteries. Although never to be seen as fiction or entertainment, the mysteries of the Bible compel us to keep reading. Since these mysteries don’t deal with what the butler did, but with what God has done, the pastor serves as the steward of the mysteries of God.

2. Scripture Search¹

- **1 Corinthians 4:1** (Theme Verse)
This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
- **Ephesians 1:9**
...making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ...
- **Ephesians 3:2-6**
...assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

- **Colossians 2:2-3**
...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- **1 Corinthians 15:51**
Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed...
- **Ephesians 5:32**
This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.
- **1 Timothy 3:16**
Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VIII: Person of Christ

"Next to the article of the Holy Trinity this is the greatest mystery in heaven and on earth, as Paul says, "Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great, that God was revealed in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3[:16]). For the apostle Peter [2 Peter 1:4] testifies clearly that even we, in whom Christ dwells only by grace, become 'participants in the divine nature' in Christ because of this great mystery."²

"Because the Holy Scripture [Col. 1:27] calls Christ a mystery, over which all heretics stumble and fall headlong, we warn all Christians that they not pry presumptuously into this mystery with their reason but simply believe with the dear apostles, shut the eyes of their reason, take their understanding captive in obedience to Christ, and take comfort and rejoice without ceasing in this, that in Christ our flesh and blood have been raised so high, to the right hand of the majesty and almighty power of God. In this way they will certainly find abiding comfort in every adversity and be preserved from harmful error."³

4. Points to Ponder

- The theme verse from 1 Corinthians 4:1 (compare Ephesians 3:7-9) speaks about the role of the pastor as "steward of the mysteries."
- The verses including Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 3:2-6 (compare Colossians 1:26-27), and Colossians 2:2-3, are related and speak about mysteries which have been made fully known by God.

² Kolb, R & Wengert, T.J. The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000. Page 622, paragraphs 33 and 34.

³ Ibid. Page 634, paragraph 96.

- The verses including 1 Corinthians 15:51, Ephesians 5:32, and 1 Timothy 3:16 are related and speak about mysteries which have not been made fully known and therefore, must remain mysteries.
- The Book of Concord includes both kinds of mysteries, urging us to note those which have been fully revealed and cautioning us against solving those which have not been fully revealed.

5. For Conversation

- The theme verse clearly describes the office of the ministry. Is the phrase “stewards of the mysteries” synonymous with “preachers of the gospel”? What dimension does “steward” or “administrator” add to the task of preaching?
- The second group of verses refers to mysteries which have been clearly revealed. Once we know the outcome, are they still mysteries? Where there is no need to solve a mystery, we are now compelled to believe the answer God has given. Can you give examples where people were going the wrong direction until the solution was revealed?
- The third group of verses refers to mysteries which have not been fully revealed and which should remain a mystery. What happens when people are not content to let a mystery remain a mystery? Since the Lutheran confessions deal with matters that were disputed, why does the Book of Concord contain numerous references to this last group?
- Close with prayer, thanking God that all of the mysteries concerning Christ that have been fully revealed to us so that we can make them fully known. For those which remain mysteries, we may want to include the collect from *Lutheran Service Book*, page 311, “For guidance in our calling.”

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FAITHFUL & AFIRE

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Participant's Guide

Making the Most of Time

Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Ephesians 5:15-17

Focus of this Study

While we all have 168 hours each week, some people just seem busier than others. Are you too busy? Do you ever wish, as an early cell phone commercial suggested, that you could “buy an hour?”

Scripture describes a holy tension experienced by God's people of old as they sought to accomplish necessary tasks before Jesus' return. While Jesus was here on earth, Jesus encouraged His people to simply relax in His forgiving arms. He echoed His Father's third commandment about resting. But when Jesus departed this earth, He charged His people with the demanding task of discipling the whole world. Most of us experience a similar tension just seeking to accomplish the necessary tasks of life much less the extra things we wish we had time for.

What does God in His Word say to you as a pastor about “making the most of time?” Your time! Or is it His?

Scripture Search

Read each passage and write a few notes as you react to these verses:

1. Deuteronomy 33:25 - *As your days, so shall your strength be.*
2. Psalm 90:9-12 - *Our days pass quickly – Lord, teach us to number them carefully.*
3. Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 - *There is time for everything*
4. Matthew 13:24-30 - *Enemy sowed look-alike weeds among the wheat while the farmers slept. Patience required here!*
5. Matthew 21:33-41 - *“They will respect My Son” (vs. 37).*
6. John 2:1-4 - *Jesus at Cana, “My time hasn't come yet.”*
7. Galatians 4:4-5 - *At just the right time God sent His Son!*
8. Romans 13:11-14 - *There is a time for sleep and wakefulness.*
9. John 9:4 - *If day is for work, what is night for?*

As you are thinking about the theme of this study, include additional verses which you believe are pertinent. For example: Genesis 3:17-19 - *Who/what was cursed? Adam, the ground, or his labor?*

From Our Lutheran Perspective

Small Catechism

- In His third commandment God urges us to “remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.”
- In confessing the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed, we acknowledge that God made everything, including time.
- In the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we ask, “thy kingdom come.”

Large Catechism (79-81)

- “*You are to hallow the day of rest.*”
Our word “holy day” or “holiday” is so called from the Hebrew word “Sabbath,” which properly means to rest, that is, to cease from work; hence our common expression for “stopping work” literally means “taking a holiday.” In the Old Testament God set apart the seventh day, appointed it for rest, and commanded it to be kept holy above all other days. As far as outward observance is concerned, the commandment was given to the Jews alone. They were to refrain from hard work and rest, so that human beings and animals might be refreshed and not be exhausted by constant labor. In time, however, the Jews interpreted this commandment too narrowly and grossly misused it. They slandered Christ and would not permit him to do the very same things they themselves did on that day, as we read in the gospel – as if the commandment could be fulfilled by refraining from work of any kind. This was not its intention, but rather, as we shall hear, it meant that we should sanctify the holy day or day of rest. (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, eds. [Fortress, 2000], pp. 396-397)

Luther’s Theology of Vocation

- Medieval Catholicism taught that only priests, nuns and those in other church-work professions have a vocation, a calling from God. The Reformation taught that all Christians have callings from God, including those who work in the so-called secular sphere. (Gene Edward Veith [*The Lutheran Witness*, July, 2001])

Points to Ponder

1. Review recent entries in your calendar (or check book). Which are wise uses of your time, and which are unwise?
2. When is the clock your friend and when is it your enemy?
3. Borrowing the title of Mitch Albom’s book, *For One More Day*, if you could spend just one more day with someone, who would it be, and why?
4. If you could re-live one moment or time in your life, what would it be and why?
5. Everyone has been gifted by God with the same number hours each week.
6. Why do you believe that if you want something done, you’ll ask a busy person?
7. Here are several commonly known drivers or stress-producing commands: Be perfect! Be strong! Hurry up! Try harder! You’re okay if you please everyone!
8. How do you respond to people who frequently echo the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland; “I’m late. I’m late. I’m late for a very important date?”
9. “The hurrier I go the behinder I get.” How is this true or untrue in your life?

For Conversation

1. Suppose you are sitting down with God over coffee and reviewing your calendar (# 1 above). Write down some of the things you think He would say to you about your current schedule.
2. Respond to the following quote, both personally and theologically: *“God put me on earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I am so far behind, I will never die.”*
3. Respond to the following quote: *“The only thing that is ‘done’ is a corpse!”*
4. Consider areas of your life which you feel may be out of balance, and what you can do to improve the balance in your life.

| | Doing too much | Doing too little |
|----------|----------------|------------------|
| Home | | |
| Work | | |
| Personal | | |

5. Now consider activities you would like to add in order to improve balance in your life

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Daily | |
| Weekly | |
| Monthly or less often | |

6. Now identify activities you would like to eliminate in order to improve balance in your life

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Daily | |
| Weekly | |
| Monthly or less often | |

7. Set personal priorities.

- Select four issues that are most stressful for you
- Put one into each of the four boxes below.
- With a partner in the group, talk about how you will handle each of these priorities

| | <i>You are able to change</i> | <i>You are able to change only with difficulty</i> |
|----------------------|---|--|
| High Priority | ONE – Most critical Issues <i>What changes can you make?</i> | TWO <i>How do you plan to cope?</i> |
| Low Priority | THREE Are you spending too much time on low priority issues? | FOUR – least critical issues Can you accept or forget about these issues? |

Closing

Psalm 23 – Antithesis

The Clock is my dictator, I shall not rest.
 It makes me lie down only when exhausted.
 It leads me to deep depression; it hounds my soul.
 It leads me in circles of frenzy for activities sake.
 Even though I run frantically from task to task,
 I will never get it all done, for my "ideal" is with me;
 Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me.
 They demand performance from me, beyond the limits of my schedule.
 They anoint my head with migraines; my in-basket overflows.
 Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life,
 And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever!

(From *Discipleship Journal*, November, 1990, page 60, by Marcia Hornok. Quoted on page 7 of *Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Salespeople*, by Todd M. Duncan, Nelson Books. Nashville, 2004.)

Now read the 23rd Psalm as written by David in the Holy Bible, with thoughts about how God has provided for you to make the most of your time.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

The Pastor as Steward

Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors

Participants Guide

February, 2010 Conserving Relationships

Pastors by definition are relational and therefore responsible for maintaining and building strong relationships.

1. Focus of This Study

All Christians are called upon to love one another (e.g., 1 John 3-4). This instruction is obviously as much for pastors as it is for laity. Love is described in very relational terms (not human feelings) in 1 Corinthians 13.

Pastors are by definition, God's definition, in a relational office, an office that offers God's love to his people. We are therefore responsible for building and maintaining strong relationships with those Christ has called us to serve. These relationships are not just about horizontal, human emotional connections but exhibit to others that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is incarnate within us. Others, both unbelievers and believers, congregation members and those outside our congregation, are looking for relational evidence that we genuinely believe what we teach and confess about God's love and peace.



For Conversation (or Self-Reflection)

Do I sometimes approach my role as pastor as if I were a "Lone Ranger," mysterious and emotionally aloof from those I serve? How, specifically, might I do that?

To what degree do I sometimes use the relationships I've developed with others to protect myself and my role rather than to be a 'Seelsorger' (German, soul healer) for others?

What are my motivations for sometimes being impatient, less than gentle, or less than compassionate with others for whom my Lord Jesus gave His life?

How can my life better model the grace, peace, and love Jesus exhibited to his often-failing disciples?

2. Scripture Search

- We LC-MS pastors often view ourselves as the “protectors of the faith and of sound doctrine,” and well we should. Twenty-five of the 27 books of the New Testament have at least one direct admonition to protect against false teachings. We live in a larger American church context that de-emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine. However we sometimes neglect how this protection of sound, healthy doctrine is taught by the Apostles as a relational enterprise. Take Paul’s teaching in Titus 1 as an example. In verses 5-6 Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town; these elders must be above reproach with stable marriages and families. Now notice how many times Paul emphasizes the relational qualities of the men who are to be appointed (NASB with **relational descriptions bolded and in italics**):

Titus 1:7-9: “For the overseer must be **above reproach** as God’s steward, **not self-willed, not quick-tempered**, not addicted to wine, **not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good**, sensible, just, devout, **self-controlled**, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that **he may be able both to exhort** in sound doctrine and **to refute** those who contradict.”

- There are many verses we cite for ordinations and installations of pastors (see *LW* or *LSB Agendas*). How do many of these verses focus pastors on the importance of relationships?
 - John 21:15-17: “Take care of my sheep”
 - 1 Timothy 4:14-16: “Watch your life and doctrine closely”
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17-21: “We are Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”
 - 2 Timothy 4:1-5: “Correct, rebuke, and encourage – with great patience...”
 - 1 Timothy 3:1-7: Expands on the Titus 1 verses
 - 1 Peter 5:2-4: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care... not domineering... but being examples to the flock.”

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

- From the *Smalcald Articles*, Section 4, Concerning the Gospel, Luther notes that God’s grace comes to us in five ways: Spoken word, baptism, Sacrament of the Altar, power of the keys, “and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters. Matthew 18[20]: “Where two or three are gathered...” (Kolb & Wengert edition, p. 319)
- Luther (in a 1544 letter):

- Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the church; for if they have no such heart, they soon become lazy and disgusted, and suffering, in particular, will find them unwilling. The Lord indicates this very beautifully in John 21 when He makes Peter a preacher and, before doing so, asks him three times: “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” (v. 15ff). As though He would say: Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother toward her children – a mother, who walks through fire to save her children – you will not be fit to be a preacher.



Labor, work, unthankfulness, hatred, envy, and all kinds of sufferings will meet you in this office. If, then, the mother heart, the great love, is not there to drive the preachers, the sheep will be poorly served (from Plass, *What Luther Says*, p. 932).

4. Points to Ponder

- In the first pages of *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer reminds us:

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’ (Ps. 133:1)... It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him....

“The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. Longingly, the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his ‘dearly beloved son in the faith,’ Timothy, to come to him in prison....

“The believer feels no shame, as though he were still living too much in the flesh, when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God’s spiritual-physical creatures. The believer therefore lauds the Creator, the Redeemer, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of a brother. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God” (pp. 17, 19-20).

- Relationships with fellow Christians, even the difficult ones, are truly gifts to us from God. After the pure Gospel of Ephesians 2:8-9, we are reminded (v.10), “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” All stewardship, including the stewardship of conserving relationships, flows from our response to the grace of Jesus Christ. Relating in peace, love, and unity with fellow Christians, as far as it is possible for us to do (Romans 12: 18), are those good works God has prepared in advance for us to do.

5. For Conversation

- M.D.’s who prescribe potentially life-saving medications or procedures to their patients are sometimes ignored (even fired) if their relational skills (“bed-side manner”) are poor. In what ways is the importance of relational skills of pastors similar to those of M.D.’s? In what ways might the vocations’ relational skills be different?
- Pastors do differ in their EQ (the new term for emotional intelligence), personalities (e.g., introversion and extraversion) and social skills. In what ways do the Biblical emphases of love, gentleness, peace, etc., transcend EQ and social skills? In what ways do they not transcend social skills? In what ways are relational skills culturally dependent (e.g., what is simply assertive on the East Coast of the USA may be considered aggressive in some rural Midwest settings)?
- Just like some children are ‘easier to love’ than others, some parishioners are “easier to love” than others are. How does the Gospel of Jesus Christ empower you as a pastor to love those who are, at times, difficult to love?

- Share with one another situations in which you showed an extra measure of patience and gentleness with someone in your parish – and found this extra effort resulting in a noticeable pastoral effect.
- Brother pastors can mutually encourage one another in the Gospel, building each other up so that each can better share the Gospel and feed the ‘sheep’ God has placed under their care. Discuss among yourselves how you are already mutually encouraging one another and how you might strive to do that more intentionally.



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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

The Pastor as Steward Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors

Participant's Guide

All Creatures Great and Small March, 2010

1. Focus of This Study

“Daddy, will our dog Lucky be in heaven when we get there?”

Approximately 46 million of us are bird watchers. Another 100 million people visit zoos and aquariums every year—more people than attend all sporting events in America combined.

What are the issues?

- For what purpose did God create such an extravagant diversity of nonhuman creatures (fish, animals, birds, etc.) since Adam and Eve did not need them for food or clothing?
- What place do other nonhuman creatures have within the story of how God created, reclaims, and renews his creation?
- Why do we find ourselves fascinated by and drawn to other creatures, a phenomenon that Edward Wilson, the Harvard entomologist, calls “biophilia,” a love for living things?
- What are our stewardship responsibilities toward other creatures, both tame and wild?



2. Scripture Search

- An “ecological doxology” (Joseph Sittler) — **Psalm 104:10-31**

- “Where the wild things live” — **Job 38-40**



- Showing compassion for God’s creatures: **Deuteronomy 22:1-4; 6-7**; **Leviticus 22:27-28**; **Matthew 12:11-12**; **Luke 14:5**; **Luke 13:15-16**

- The restoration of creation’s harmony: **Mark 1:13**; **cf. Genesis 9:10, 12, 15, 17; 8:12**; **Isaiah 11:6-11**; **Hosea 2:18**. **Cf. Isaiah 56:17; 55:12-13**.

3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

- We usually translate the first article of Luther’s Small Catechism, “God has created me *and* all creatures.” But it should read, “God created me *together with* [sampf] all creatures.”
- “Perhaps the human being would find a helper suitable among these brothers and sisters—for that is what they are, the animals who have the same origin as humankind does.”... “As far as I know, nowhere else in the history of religions have animals been spoken of in terms of such a significant relation” (Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 96-97).ⁱ
- “Delight is the basis of right use.”... “To enjoy a thing is to permit it to be what it is prior to and apart from an instrumental assessment of it, and some things are to be so enjoyed” (Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, pp. 53, 56).ⁱⁱ

4. Points to Ponder

- God is a God of extravagant generosity. When the famous evolutionary biologist J. B. S. Haldane was asked what he had learned about the Creator from his work, he replied, “He [God] had an inordinate fondness for beetles!”
- The existence of God’s wild creatures reminds us that everything on earth does not exist to serve our needs alone. Instead, many of them exist for God’s delight, are valued by Him, and are cared for him apart from any use that they may have for us.
- All creatures are given a place and purpose within God’s creation (Psalm 104) and ultimately sing His praises as part of the choir that is all of creation (Ps 148).
- Other creatures may not have been created in the image of God but they are fellow creatures with whom we share a common origin, are made of the same stuff, share a common life pattern, and have been given the promise of a new covenant.

- We have no warrant to cause the extinction of any species (through habitat loss, invasive species, pollution, population, overharvesting). This diminishes creation and us.



5. For Conversation

- Wendell Berry, the Kentucky farmer and agrarian essayist, commented that, once material sufficiency is met, “life itself, which is a *membership in the living world* (italics added), is already an abundance” (*The Way of Ignorance*).
- Richard Bauckham suggests that Deut 17:14-20 might provide a paradigm for our exercise of dominion. Israel was to choose a king from among the brothers so that he would not become a tyrant. We look after creation as “creatures among fellow creatures.”
- Animals were not on the dinner menu for Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 & 2. Eating them is not a commandment but a concession after the Flood. Wendell Berry suggests that when we eat them, we eat “the broken body of creation.” How and what we eat determines how the animals we eat were raised and treated. What might this suggest for the way we eat today?
- Matthew Scully, a speech writer for George W. Bush, suggested that it is “by default that Peter Singer and others with no religious faith are left to champion the causes of animals” because we [Christians] have so little to say on practices that we know are inhumane and cruel (*Dominion*, 135). Why have Christians said so little on this topic?
- Robert Frost: “The question that he frames in all but words; Is what to make of a diminished thing.’ Jonathan Rosen asks, “How do you relate to nature when so much of it is gone? ... How do you embrace the natural world in an era of urbanization?”ⁱⁱⁱ
- If God makes a covenant with not only human beings but also all the animals, what might this suggest for how we think about the eschatological age to come?
- The following prayer is attributed to St. Basil the Great, key author of the third article in the Nicene Creed:

O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship
 With all living things, our brothers the animals
 To whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion (of humankind] with ruthless cruelty
 So that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song,
 Has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that they live not for us alone
 But for themselves and for thee,
 And that they love the sweetness of life.^{iv}

ⁱ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 96-97.

ⁱⁱ Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, pp. 53, 56.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rosen, 153-154.

^{iv} St. Basil the Great, in *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*, ed. Dorothy M. Stewart (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 6. Quoted in Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 46.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies — 2009-2010

The Pastor as Steward Stewardship Bible Studies for Pastors Participant's Guide

TO OUR GOOD HEALTH

April, 2010

I. Focus of the Study

J. I. Packer once wrote in an article in *Christianity Today*:

Twice it has been my privilege to introduce Joni Eareckson, who is a quadriplegic...Each time I have ventured to predict that her message would show her to be the healthiest person in the building—a prediction which, so far as I could judge, came true both times.

Describing exactly what constitutes “good health” or what makes a person “healthy” is a difficult thing to do. There will always be a variety of opinions about which criteria should be considered and which are most important.

When the World Health Organization (WHO) was created in 1948, health was defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Increasingly, the world has come to think of health in a more holistic way, involving far more than the physical well-being of the individual.

For Conversation

- What are the primary factors in achieving/maintaining health?
- Why would a country like ours with so many blessings not be the healthiest place to live?
- What are the main factors that contribute to people being unhealthy?

2. Scripture Study

- In the Old Testament, health is related in a fundamental way to a relationship with God that demands obedience. Disobedience produced disease and made manifest a disrupted relationship with God.
 - Psalm 38:3-8, 17-18
 - Exodus 15:26

- Exodus 23:25-26

- Deuteronomy 7:12-15

- The above passages all deal with the relationship between health/sickness and sin. You may want to look at some specific examples of God's judgment upon Miriam (Numbers 12); David and Bathsheba's son (2 Samuel 12:15ff); Elisha's servant, Gehazi (2 Kings 5:25ff), and David (2 Samuel 24:10ff).

- *Shalom* is the Hebrew word that comes the closest to describing what we usually mean by health (well-being), but it means far more than just physical well-being. It encompasses the fullness of well-being in all dimensions of life.
 - Numbers 25:12

 - Malachi 2:5

- Health in the New Testament is blessedness and holiness:
 - I Thessalonians 5:23-24 (the only verse in the New Testament where the three terms, body, soul and spirit are brought together),

 - Matthew 5:1-10

- St. Paul introduces the idea that our bodies deserve special attention because they are the "temples of the Holy Spirit."
 - I Corinthians 3:16-17

 - I Corinthians 6:18-20

 - Romans 8:9-11



3. From Our Lutheran Perspective

- From the *Large Catechism*, on Baptism:

Think about it. Imagine there was a doctor somewhere who understood the art of saving people from death or, even though they died, could restore them quickly to life so that they would afterward live forever. Oh, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain. No one could find access to him because of the throng of the rich! But here in Baptism there is freely brought to everyone's door such a treasure and medicine that it utterly destroys death and preserves all people alive.

We must think this way about Baptism and make it profitable for ourselves. So when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, "Nevertheless, I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body." For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body—which can grasp nothing but the water—is sprinkled and, in addition, the Word is spoken for the soul to grasp. Now, since both, the water and the Word, make one Baptism, therefore body and soul must be saved and live forever (I Corinthians 15:53). The soul lives through the Word, which it believes, but the body lives because it is united with the soul and also holds on through Baptism as it is able to grasp it. We have, therefore, no greater jewel in body and soul. For by Baptism we are made holy and are saved (I Corinthians 6:11). No other kind of life, no work upon earth, can do this. (The Large Catechism, 43-46, Concordia, *The Lutheran Confessions*)

4. Points to Ponder

- The Scriptures think of health as much more than physical and mental well-being. Health also involves the wholeness of our emotional, social, and spiritual potential.
- God's presence in His grace makes possible true health and hope.
- The healing miracles of Jesus are signs of both the human predicament of sin and the redemption Jesus initiates in His kingdom.
- Sickness and healing in the Scriptures are not presented from a medical or scientific point of view, but always in terms of the relationship between the Creator and His creatures.
- God did not create people to experience disease. Sickness is the result of an alien invasion of sin. Jesus came to destroy this alien power, and His ministry of healing the sick and diseased is a sign of His redemptive power.



Rembrandt, *Jesus Heals a Leper*, 1655

5. For Conversation

“Life has taught us to endure many things, but disease presents a challenge that renders us vulnerable. Disease is a sign that all is not well; it is the symbol of our human frailty. We yearn for the aliveness we feel when we are healthy.” (Garth Ludwig, *Order Restored*, p.11.)

“Men may be sound in body and agile in mind, and yet be devoid of wholeness...Any really effective ministry of healing must begin with a full appreciation of the nature of sin and the scope of its devastation...Advocates of healing recognize man’s frustrations, his loneliness, his feeling of a great void in life; but they rarely sound the depths of man’s basic ailment, which is the disruption and distortion of the very relationships in which he was created to live.” (Martin Scharlemann, *Healing and Redemption*, p.28-9.)

- What does the Biblical understanding of health say about pastoral care?

“A Christian congregation serves as a potent therapeutic community when it develops its various resources for liberating men from the exaggerated individualism and consequent isolation which characterizes so much of our contemporary life.” (Scharlemann, *Healing and Redemption*, p.104.)

- How can we help to make the local congregation a more caring, healing community?
- How does the exaggerated individualism of our culture impact the issue of health?

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FAITHFUL & AFIRE

The Pastor as Steward
LCMS Circuit Bible Studies, 2009-2010

Participant's Guide

Gifts and Graces

*Pastors are called to equip the saints,
helping God's people identify and use their gifts and talents in ministry.*

Focus of this Study

One of the first questions posed in this year's initial Circuit Bible Study, "The Pastor as Steward," was this one: "If God is green, does that make LCMS pastors green, too?" Now that we've arrived at the last study in this series, how about this question: "What makes an LCMS pastor blue?"

Could it be the burden of his responsibility? Might the "blue" LCMS pastor be blue because of the unrealistic demands and expectations many in his congregation may have of him? Or could he be blue because he has been trying to do the ministry too often by himself?

The focus of this study is an examination of the pastor as equipper of the saints. Pastors serve in a variety of roles in their congregations. Above all they are charged with preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. Pastors also have the awesome responsibility and joy of helping people discover and use their gifts in ministry.

For Conversation

1. What is your response to being a "blue" pastor? Have you ever been there? If so, what have you discovered about how you become blue?
2. How would you rate yourself as an "equipper of the saints?"

Scripture Search

- Ephesians 4:11-12
¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- Ephesians 2:10
¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- Read 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12
- Romans 12:4-8
⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.
- Luke 10:1, 17-20 (see also Luke 9:3-5)
¹After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.... ¹⁷The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." ¹⁸He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

From Our Lutheran Perspective

We confess in the third article of the Apostle's Creed: "And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

Martin Luther, in writing about the communion of saints (he preferred "community" of saints), says in the Large Catechism:

*I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. (The Large Catechism, 51-52, *The Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, pp. 437-438)*

Interestingly, the only appearance of Ephesians 4:11-12 in the Lutheran Confessions is found in the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope:

*"When he ascended on high...he gave gifts to his people." Among those gifts belonging to the church he lists pastors and teachers and adds that such are given for serving and building up the body of Christ. (Treatise on the Power and Primacy, 67, *The Book of Concord*, Kolb/Wengert, p. 341)*

Points to Ponder

- God has entrusted to pastors a tremendous responsibility—to equip his people for the work of ministry.
- Pastors are equipped to equip. The very means of grace which equip us are those means by which we equip the saints.

- Every member of your church is a “masterpiece” of God. These “works of art” are being fashioned by God to do the good works that God has prepared in advance.
- Every member of your church has been given gifts by the Holy Spirit to be used for the building up of the Body of Christ.
- Though there are a variety of different gifts, there is a unity as the Body of Christ operates with these gifts in love.
- Jesus did what the apostle Paul so frequently talked about—in the three years of His earthly ministry He spent huge amounts of time teaching and equipping His disciples for their work of ministry.

For Conversation

1. While congregations are in many ways alike, they are also in many ways different. Do you think the size, location, or style of ministry in a congregation affects the pastor’s ability to equip the saints? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. What would a congregation filled with fully equipped people look like (no, you can’t say “heaven”!)? Or to ask it another way, how can you know whether or not you are making progress in the equipping of your people?
3. Jesus spent three years equipping twelve men to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Does this model have any relevance for you today? Does it make sense to you to consider gathering a dozen people around you and investing heavy amounts of time and teaching to prepare them?
4. What practical ways have you found to help people identify their gifts and talents so that they can build up the body? Are there helpful resources you have assisted you in this?
5. How often do you get the feeling that the members of your congregation have expectations of you which you cannot possibly meet? How much of this do you think is related to the idea that the “pastor is supposed to do the ministry,” and the people are there to be served?”
6. Share a “success” story of someone the Lord blessed you to equip. Reflect on the component parts of God’s preparing grace in this person’s life. How did the equipping happen?
7. Returning to the opening, what is your “blueness” status these days? On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate yourself on the Pastor-Blue-O-Meter: (1=Zero Blueness: I am experiencing the joy and peace of the Lord on a daily basis and feel appreciated and energized by the members of my church; 10=Deep, dark blueness: I am having an extremely hard time right now finding joy in the ministry and feel little or no appreciation from the members of my church.)

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