

Unchanging Truth in Changing Times

*The Complete Collection
of the What About Pamphlets*

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The Office of the President

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Preface

The What About pamphlets are anchored in the unchanging truth of God's Holy Word and the faithful exposition of that Word provided in the Lutheran Confessions. Unchanging truth in changing times is precisely what these summaries of Christian doctrine are all about. When President Barry issued the first four What About pamphlets in 1996, little did he realize how popular they would prove to be. Twelve million copies later, they continue to be used throughout the English-speaking world in churches and schools, parish meeting rooms, small-group Bible studies and in private homes. They are found in hospitals and nursing homes, colleges, universities and seminaries. Military chaplains use them around the world on board ships and at various military installations. Prison chaplains have used them in state and federal facilities. They are used in parish evangelism programs and a wide variety of community events. More uses for the What About pamphlets have been found than were imagined by President Barry when he first thought of producing them.

When the What About series began, hundreds of parish pastors were asked, "If you could have some clear doctrinal pamphlets to give people as you go about your ministry, what would be helpful?" The response to that question provided us with the titles in this series. You will notice that the What About series begins with the most important issue of all: the Gospel, followed by one on the Bible. These two are followed by a series on the six chief parts of Luther's Small Catechism, encouraging the reader always to return to this foundational confession of the Lutheran Church. The rest of the What About series present brief statements on key doctrinal and ethical issues. A number of titles of the What About series were devoted to anti-Christian cults and groups, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism and Islam.

President Barry was keenly interested in *what* was said in these pamphlets and *how* it was said. No matter where he traveled in the Synod, the subject of his What About pamphlets was sure to come up. He received countless expressions of thanks from laypeople and pastors alike who told him how much the church needed these clear, to-the-point expressions of Christian truth. Some of the most appreciative comments received came from pastors in other churches. For example, a pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America wrote a letter to the *Lutheran Witness* following the special issue devoted to Dr. Barry's death.

Many of us in the ELCA greatly appreciated Dr. Alvin L. Barry. I especially admired the way in which he was able to explain divisive doctrinal and social issues in his many, "What About" pamphlets—the one on "The Differences Between the ELCA and the LCMS," for example. In producing this material, he proved to be an outstanding communicator on behalf of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He always combined pastoral sensitivity and precision of terminology with uncompromising faithfulness to our Lutheran Confessions, as they are fully based on Holy Scripture. By God's grace, Dr. Barry was a true teacher and pastor for God's people in our time! *Soli Deo Gloria*. (Letter to the *Lutheran Witness*, July 2001, p. 4).

It is important that the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation be recognized and thanked for providing the funds that made it possible to distribute the What About pamphlets for free to all those who requested them. The Schwan Foundation's support, encouragement and devotion to faithful, genuine Lutheranism has proven to be such a blessing to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and many other Lutheran entities and agencies throughout the world.

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The blessing of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, attend all who use these faithful expressions of unchanging truth in changing times.

Rev. Paul T. McCain
August 2001

Introduction

Unchanging Truth in Changing Times

by Paul T. McCain

Jesus said, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38).

Walk into any large bookstore and you will find walls of books about personal enlightenment, pop-psychology, self-help, self-improvement, meditation, Eastern religions, and the ever-popular subject of spirituality. Many people are searching for truth today. They try to find it by peering within themselves, trying to find meaning in the fleeting emotions they work so hard to experience from one day to the next. Too many try to find meaning and purpose in the very things that will only continue to let them down: pleasure, power or possessions. We are constantly tempted to look for truth in the wrong places. We confess that at times we have not only looked in the wrong places, but believed the lies we found there. We are following in the footsteps of our first parents who doubted God's Word and thus fell into sin, plunging all the world into the darkness of sin and death. Where then is the truth? What is it? How may it be found?

What Is Truth?

Pilate's question, "What is truth?" demands an answer. Truth that lasts, truth that changes us forever, is found only in the One who is truth incarnate: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). This bold claim has scandalized peoples of all times and all places ever since that small group of Jesus' first followers took His message out from the city of Jerusalem, into the surrounding lands of Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost parts of the world. This great mission task continues to this very day and hour. The apostles and the first disciples were beaten, tortured and killed by various groups that rejected their message as utter foolishness and profoundly offensive. The same thing continues to today whenever this message is declared:

All human beings are sinful. From the moment of our conception, we are at war with God and enemies of God. We are slaves of our sinful desires, thoughts and actions. We des-

perately need God's forgiveness, which He gives, freely and completely, through Jesus, His Son. Jesus was true God and true Man, born of a virgin in the land of Palestine. He lived a life in complete obedience to God's will, thus doing for us what we can never do. He was executed on the Roman instrument of torture and death, the cross. His death was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. His blood cleanses us from our sins, all of them. Jesus came out of the grave alive after three days, confirming and demonstrating His absolute and final victory over sin, death and all the forces of Satanic evil.

God the Holy Spirit calls us to trust and believe that we are forgiven by God through Jesus Christ and thus we receive the gift of eternal life forever in heaven. Our Lord cares and guides and leads us throughout this life, sustaining and nurturing us through His Word and Sacraments. Christ Jesus replaces our cold, stony hearts of unbelief with living hearts that trust in Him and express that faith in thankful service to others.

This message, this good news, is the heart and soul of Christianity. It is still disregarded and even violently resisted in many parts of the world. It runs contrary to the common opinion that human beings are basically good, with the ability to save themselves through their own efforts. Ironically, never has this good news message been proclaimed without causing division, conflict and turmoil. Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23).

The Growth of the Church and the Scandal of Division

Jesus' followers moved through the known world of their day, starting congregations of Christian believers every-

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where they went. These congregations were led by men who were given the task of continuing to hand down the teachings of Jesus Christ by proclaiming His forgiveness through preaching and teaching His Word and administering His Sacraments. These small congregations of believers drew people from all walks of life into a living and active faith, expressing itself in works of love with the goal of bearing witness to Jesus their Lord.

From the very early days, false teachers arose within the church, twisting and distorting the teachings of Christ, either adding something to the Word of God or trying to take something away. With each false teaching, the church had the opportunity to speak the truth clearly. When finally Christianity was legalized in the fourth century, the church faced new pressures and challenges that came with official toleration and then even popularity among the people who recognized the social, economic and political benefits of being a part of the church. Sadly, in 1054 A.D., there was a major split between the churches of the West and the churches of the East, a division that remains to this day.

For the next five centuries the Western Christian church endured various storms and crises, attempting to preserve the faith in times of intellectual decline and cultural chaos, but always moving the Gospel out among peoples in the world who had never heard it. A profound error was made by the church when it located its authority and power in the person of the Bishop of Rome. The Pope, as he came to be known, claimed to be the one, and only one, who could speak as God Himself, setting himself, as it were, in the very temple of God, ordering and enacting regulations and insisting on teachings that were never given to the church by her Lord and His apostles (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Thess. 4:3-4).

During the Middle Ages, the good news about Jesus Christ and the teachings of God's Word became increasingly obscured under layers of papal doctrine. The people of the church were plunged ever further into superstitious darkness. They could not even understand the worship service since it was recited in a language they did not know. There were pockets here and there of quality Christian teaching, but for the most part, the common people were headed ever further into the darkness of ignorance about the most basic truths of the Christian faith. Efforts to reform the direction and leadership of the church during the later Middle Ages met with only minimally lasting results. What was needed was a sweeping renewal and rediscovery of the the core teachings of the church, drawn from, and founded on, the Apostolic and Prophetic Scriptures. The Gospel had to come to light again in the church. During the 16th century, Martin

Luther and his followers were intent not on starting a new church, but in reforming the existing church and bringing it back to its Gospel center. They were eventually expelled from the Roman Catholic Church and therefore had to stand against it, forming what would become known as the Lutheran Church.

The Lutheran reformers realized that as long as Rome continued to insist on false teaching, the Gospel was being neglected, forgotten or set aside. It had been replaced with teachings that elevated man's ability to work to earn God's favor and love, thus always throwing man back onto himself, making him either hopeless, or self-righteous, and in either case ignorant of the comfort and promise of Christ. They acknowledged and thanked God that, in spite of error, He had preserved His Word and the message of the Gospel. They knew that there were Christians in the Roman Catholic Church. The same is true today, among not only the Roman Church, but among all erring churches. People sometimes ignorantly accuse faithful Lutherans of believing that they, and they alone, are the only Christians in the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Unfortunately, at the same time that the Lutheran Reformation was bringing the Gospel to light again, there arose various erring Protestant splinter groups, which led to the bewildering number of denominations today. The various Protestant churches all trace their origins to either the so-called "Reformed" church, or the more radical groups from the days of the Reformation, with a variety of splinter groups originating from these Reformation-era churches. The number of denominations and various sub-groupings within denominations strikes the outside observer as hopelessly confusing, and indeed, the divisions in Christendom are scandalous. Though it is relatively easy to explain the various denominations with a brief review of church history similar to this one, the scandal of Christian division remains real and offensive. It is not what our Lord intends for His people. But is the solution to be found in the trends we notice today? A pell-mell rush into various ecumenical agreements and declarations of "full communion?" No.

Equally as scandalous as the divisions within Christendom are attempts to resolve the differences between Christians on the basis of what is known as "reconciled diversity." Many ecumenical agreements today are based on an agreement to disagree about teachings of God's Word. Better is the approach followed by those churches that are intent on upholding Christian truth: honest expression of disagreement with the intention of bearing witness to the truth of God's Word and working toward actual agreement,

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and, where this is not possible, refusing to express a fellowship in the Gospel and all its articles that does not exist (see 1 Cor. 1:10 and Rom. 16:17).

The Greatest Threat to the Church Today

Overshadowing all these issues today is a near-total capitulation to the worldview of liberal theology that we find in many of the so-called “mainline” churches. It has resulted in a skepticism about any specific truth claims and a rejection of the insistence that there is one, and only one, saving truth, found and located in Jesus Christ alone. This trend has worked its way deeply into all major church bodies, Catholic and Protestant alike. What many well-intentioned laypeople do not realize is that in many Christian denominations, including the larger Lutheran churches in the United States and around the world, the Bible is no longer regarded as actually being God’s Word. Readers should know that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod continues to insist that the Scriptures *are* the Word of God, infallible and inerrant.

The miracles of both Old and New Testament are considered by many theologians and pastors within liberal churches to be largely fictional accounts. The events in the life of our Lord recorded in the Gospels are not considered to be factual, but rather myths created and repeated by the first Christians to overcome their dismay about the death of their leader, Jesus. Other scholars, in an attempt to modify such radical views, today emphasize that the factuality of the Biblical accounts is not the issue, but rather what those texts mean to the reader. According to this view of the Bible, the factuality of the texts are not the point, but rather the response these texts, true or not, elicit from the reader. The Bible becomes authoritative only in a way similar to the authority we would attribute to any ancient legend or myth that has the power to move us to belief and action.

Let’s take but one example of how the predominant liberal view of the Bible results in ecumenical agreements based on agreement to disagree. For example, why should there be any church-divisive disagreements today about Jesus’ words, “This is my body” and “This is my blood” if we can no longer be certain Jesus actually said these things? If we do not believe that Christ actually said these words, there is no point in letting disagreement about them stand in the way of full communion. And the same principle works itself out in many areas of Christian teaching.

Churches today that have compromised the faith by rejecting the historic truths of the Bible, tolerate and even praise false teachers in their midst. We notice many symptoms of this: toleration of the murder of unborn children

through abortion, the acceptance and even advocacy of homosexual relationships, the ordination of women and now even homosexual clergy, and so forth. While these issues may receive the most attention in the media, they remain symptoms of a much deeper problem—doubt about the reliability and truthfulness of Holy Scripture, God’s Word.

Confronting the Challenges Today

These are the changing times in which we today live. We may wish to hide ourselves from this reality, or pretend that it is not so, but if we do, we are only deceiving ourselves. More than ever do we need God’s unchanging truth. Christians who want to remain faithful to God’s Word must actually learn and study the doctrines of the Bible, acquaint themselves with the basics of church history, and become familiar with modern trends and current issues facing the church. They need to receive high-quality and in-depth instruction in Christian truth from their pastors and other church workers. Faithful parents need to work carefully with their children, and by prayer and meditation on God’s Word, teach them the basic truths of the Christian faith, using Luther’s Small Catechism. Lutheran laypeople need again to become familiar with the Book of Concord, thus coming to know what it is to be a genuinely confessional Lutheran.

People are hungry for substance in their spiritual lives. They may not be able to articulate precisely what that substance is, but they are hungry for it—particularly younger people. Many of them have had enough with the empty entertainment of popular culture. They are not impressed by attempts to mimic this culture. They are looking for authentic spiritual reality, not an imitation of TV culture. Churches of the so-called “mainline” continue their rapid decline in large part because there is finally no reason for them to exist if they can not offer anything much different than can be found in any social club or organization devoted to charity and friendship. When churches are no longer willing or able to say with certainty that Jesus Christ is in fact the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, born of a virgin mother, and that His death was the sacrifice for the entire world’s sin, and that he did truly bodily rise from the dead, there is no point in proclaiming Him at all. The world doesn’t need a spiritual master, an enlightened teacher, or a good role model and leader. It needs a savior from sin and death and hell. The world needs Jesus Christ.

Truth liberates. Lies enslave. To reject Christ’s truth is to become a slave to ignorance, fear, sin, and death. This slavery results finally in separation from God in hell, forever under

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His judgment and condemnation. But there is freedom. Our Lord promises us, “If you continue in My Word, you are truly my disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:31-32). Churches are under enormous pressure, even churches that wish to be and remain genuinely historic, confessing Lutheran churches. The pressure comes from outside the church, but also from within. Our Lord warned us against false teachers, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15).

How do we resist pressures on the Lutheran church to compromise and water down its insistence on the Biblical truths that have been confessed since the time of the Reformation? We resist these pressures by remaining firmly anchored in the truths of God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures. The stormier the times, the more the need for a strong anchor to hold us fast to God’s Word. The Lutheran Confessions are that anchor. The Lutheran confessors themselves understood this when they wrote in the introduction to the Book of Concord of 1580:

The most acute and urgent necessity demands that in the face of so many invasive errors, aggravated scandals, dissensions, and protracted divisions a Christian explanation and accord of all the disputes that have arisen come into being—one well founded in God’s Word and one according to which the pure teaching will be differentiated from the false and everything will not be left free and open to restless, contentious people, who do not want to be bound to any fixed form of pure teaching so as to excite scandalous disputes at will and to introduce and defend absurd errors from which can only result that in the end right teaching will be entirely obscured and lost and that nothing else will be transmitted to future generations than uncertain opinions and dubious, disputable imaginations and views” (Preface to the *Book of Concord*, paragraph 22, Kolb/Wengert, p. 14).

The first Lutherans learned that definitive statements of Christian doctrine are necessary in order to keep the church firmly fixed on the Word of God. Every generation of Lutherans must learn that lesson as well. God’s Word moves Lutheran Christians to say with joyful confidence and all boldness, “This we believe, teach and confess” and also to say, “This we reject and condemn.” This twofold aspect of confessing God’s Word, declaring the truth and rejecting error, characterizes all who desire to remain genuinely Lutheran.

Patient Joy and Calm Strength

We dare never give in to a tendency that has become all too common in some circles. When we see the great challenges that lie before us, we are tempted to despair and indulge in self-pity and hand-wringing. Though we are always on vigilant watch, and though we do realize the urgency of the mission task our Lord has given, we go about our various callings in life with patient joy, and with calm strength. Why? Because we know that the Lord whom we serve is always praying for His church, is always with us, and will always guide, guard and govern His church on earth. With King Jehoshaphat we are comforted by God’s promise, “Do not be afraid or discouraged . . . for the battle is not yours, but the Lord’s” (2 Chron. 20:15). Therefore, the “panic mode” that seems to grip some concerned Christians is not what our Lord desires for His people. We are ever realistic, never pessimistic. We are marked by the joy of the Lord, which remains our strength. In that strength—in His strength—we move ahead patiently and carefully, faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, eagerly engaged in the church’s great mission task.

For people searching for spiritual renewal, Christ gives new birth through the washing of water with the Word in Holy Baptism. For those seeking a personal relationship with God, Christ gives His body and blood, under the bread and wine, for forgiveness, life and salvation. For those struggling with the burden of guilt, Christ speaks the sure and certain word of absolution. For those who feel lost, without direction, and without hope, the Lord comes to them through preaching and teaching and meditation on the Holy Scriptures, which are like a refreshing stream of cool water, a true lamp in the darkness of life.

While many search for spiritual direction, seemingly from every self-help guru who appears on the afternoon talk shows, our Lord continues to send faithful pastors who shepherd, lead and care for Christ’s church with His Word and Sacraments. In an era of remarkable advances in communication technology, people feel more lonely and isolated than ever before. Here again, they find what they are looking for in the Lord’s church. Together, as brothers and sisters of our Lord, they bear one another’s burdens, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice. They care for one another, loving even as He has loved us. Resting beneath all these treasures and gifts lies God’s unchanging truth in Christ, which all Christians are given to share and proclaim.

There is truth. God has revealed it. God has given it through His Word, which never can err or deceive. There are many truth claims competing for our attention, but only One

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who ever claimed to be *the* truth (John 14:6). Him we praise and honor. Him we serve and obey. Him we follow and on Him our hope is built. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. And so, with sure and certain hope, grounded and rooted in His life, death and resurrection, we proclaim Jesus Christ to be the One who has smashed apart Satan's chains that held us captive as a result of sin, setting us free to be His people, serving Him now and forever. To Him be all praise, honor and glory, who with the Father, and the Spirit, reigns ever one God, world without end. Amen.



What About . . .

The Gospel

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This pamphlet has been prepared to show you how much we need the Gospel, why it is such good news, how we receive it and how we respond to it.

Why do we need the Gospel?

We cannot really understand how good the message of the Gospel is until we understand how bad our situation is without it. We are poor miserable sinners. We sin daily and deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment.

Without Jesus Christ, our situation would be totally hopeless. The Scriptures describe human beings as dead in trespasses and sin. Without the mercy and cleansing of God through the blood of Jesus Christ, there awaits for us only everlasting punishment in hell. Thus, we need the Gospel—desperately!

What is the Gospel?

The word "gospel" is a translation of a Greek word that means, "an announcement of good news." The Gospel is the good news that God the Holy Trinity decided not to abandon humanity when Adam and Eve first fell into sin. God decided then and there that sin and death would not have the last word. He promised to send a Savior.

When the time was right, God sent His Son into our world to be born of the Virgin Mary. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfect life for us. On the cross, He received the penalty and punishment for the sins of the whole world, offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus rose from the dead, victorious over our ancient enemies: sin, death and the devil.

Therefore, each Christian is able with great joy and confidence to declare before the whole world: "My Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

What glorious good news! The one, true eternal and all-powerful God came into our world to live, suffer, die and rise again for us. We, who are unholy and unrighteous, receive the forgiveness of all our sins and thus receive the perfect holiness and righteousness of Christ our Savior—as a free gift—purely because of His love for us. That is good news! That is the Gospel!

How do we receive this great salvation in our lives today?

How do we personally receive the forgiveness Christ won for the entire world? How does what happened on the cross nearly 2,000 years ago flow into our lives today?

Here too there is very good news. God, through His Gospel, offers us forgiveness and help against sin in more than one way. God is surpassingly rich in His grace. He gives His Gospel to us through His Word, through Baptism, through the Sacrament of the Altar, and through confession and absolution. These are the ways God enters our lives today to apply to us personally the great salvation Christ won for the world.

The Holy Spirit works through the Word of the Gospel to create and sustain faith in our heart that Christ is the Savior of the world, and thus our Savior too. The Bible is the Word of God, written down for our learning and edification. The Scriptures are filled with the good news of Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us. Through the almighty, Spirit-filled Word, God gathers us into His church, which is truly the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is present, effective and active through the Word when it is proclaimed, heard and meditated upon.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is water included in God's command and combined with God's Word; or as St. Paul says in Holy Scripture, "The washing of water with the word." Through Baptism, we are made partakers of Christ's death and resurrection. Therefore, we know that Baptism works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal life to all who believe. Since Baptism is connected to the Word and promise of God, it is truly a life-giving water, rich in grace—a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.

Christ has provided a special application of the Gospel through confession and absolution. Confession is admitting our sins to God and receiving His forgiveness from our pastor, as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. Thus, by divine ordinance, Christ Himself has entrusted absolution to his Christian church and commanded us to absolve one another from sins.

The Lord's Supper is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink. In the Lord's Supper, Christ's body and blood are given to us as our treasure

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and gift which sustains our faith and life in Him. If you are heavy-laden and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the Sacrament and receive refreshment, comfort and strength.

Those who want to be forgiven by God and who want to enjoy His presence in their lives, hunger and thirst for the Word and Sacraments. With the Psalmist we say, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” God has provided the means to receive Him. So, Christians hunger and thirst for God’s Word, absolution, the Sacrament, etc. We have the certainty that God meets us and gives us what we need in His means of grace. The forgiveness Christ won for the world on the cross is applied to us personally by God through His Word and Sacraments. What a joy for us to know that where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Thus, we believe that we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith. In the same way, He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all of our sins, and the sins of all believers.

How does God cause us to respond to His Gospel?

We love God because He first loved us. Our Lord is at work in us both to will and to do what is pleasing to Him. Christians look to the Ten Commandments to know what is pleasing to God and wish to serve Him in gratitude for the great salvation that is theirs in Christ.

From the Word of God we learn that God wants us to put Him first, above any other person or thing, to respect His name and not misuse it, to hear and obey His Word. Children are to honor and obey their parents and others in authority. We are to look out for the welfare of others, doing nothing to hurt or harm our neighbor. We are to live sexually pure and decent lives, with husbands and wives loving and honoring each another. In looking out for our neighbor’s welfare and helping him to improve and protect his property and business, we are also to take care not to lie about our neighbor, but to help, support and defend him in every need, and, finally, we are to be content with what we have been given, and not want what is not ours.

What a joyful privilege we have to serve God and others! He gives us the opportunity to bear witness to our faith through both our words and our deeds.

How is the Gospel obscured?

The Gospel is obscured by well-intentioned people who

want to encourage a life of good works, and end up making Christians think that it is by their works that they are saved. This is a great danger. Through His Word and Sacraments, Jesus is constantly working in our lives to forgive our sins and strengthen our relationship with God. God always receives the credit for our salvation. He is the one working in us. This is not something we can do. Our good works are the result of God’s love in our hearts and lives. Our good works in this life do not save us, only Christ saves us. Works serve our neighbor and show to the world that we are grateful for God’s mercy in our lives.

Another way the Gospel can be obscured is when too much emphasis is put on an emotional response to the Gospel. Some Christians believe that unless they have some sort of ecstatic, charismatic experience, or feel some sort of “spiritual high,” they are not really Christians. It is truly sad that some people look into their own hearts for the security that they are children of God, instead of putting their hope and trust in the objective work of Christ for them, and in the means God uses to come to them—His Word and Sacraments.

If we find ourselves beginning to ask, “Am I doing enough?” or thinking, “It doesn’t matter what I do, for God will forgive me anyway,” then we are at risk of losing Christ and His forgiveness. We look always to Jesus and put our hope and trust in Him. He is our Savior. And, that’s good news!

All blessing, honor, thanks and praise to Father, Son and Spirit, the God who saved us by His grace. All glory to His merit! O triune God in heaven above, you have revealed your saving love. Your blessed name we hallow.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Bible

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible continues to be the best selling book of all time. Throughout the ages, the Bible has provided inspiration, comfort and guidance to those who have read it. But is the Bible merely an inspirational book? It is this, but so much more!

Let's spend a few moments reviewing some important truths about the Bible.

What is the Bible?

The word "Bible" is from a Greek word that means "book." What is this "good book"? That question has a two-part answer.

First, the Bible is actually a collection of books—66 of them to be exact—from the first book, Genesis, to the last, Revelation. These books cover thousands of years and were written in either Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. There are many different kinds of writing in the Bible: historical narrative, prophecy, poetry, speeches, letters and so on. From a merely human perspective, there is no question that the Bible is a masterpiece of literature.

Second, the much more important answer to the question, "What is the Bible?" is this: The Bible is the Word of God. The Bible is the collection of the thoughts—even the very words—that God gave to the authors of the Biblical books. The Bible is a gift God has given to His church. It is not a collection of ancient fables and myths. The Bible is the sure and certain means that God the Holy Spirit uses to communicate God's Word to us today.

How did we receive the Bible?

The Bible itself explains how we received it. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). We read elsewhere that, "Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).

Because people knew that the Bible was the actual Word of God, it was copied and re-copied with painstaking care and attention to detail, letter by letter, word by word. Though today we no longer possess the actual, original text of the Bible, we can be certain that the Holy Spirit has preserved the Word of God for us. Careful study of the many thousands of copies of

the New Testament reveals that though there are minor differences between the various copies, there is no place where any key teaching of the Bible is contradicted.

Our English Bibles are translations from the original languages. When we use reliable translations, we can be sure that we have the true Word of God. Whatever the Word of God is in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, it is also the Word of God in English, or in any other language, as long as the translation is faithful to the original languages. Reliable translations include the King James Version, the New King James Version, the old Revised Standard Version, the New International Version and the New American Standard Bible.

Why is the Bible so important?

Someone may say, "The Bible is important to me because it tells me what to do" and another person might say, "The old stories remind me of my childhood" or "The Bible is a guidebook for daily living." These answers all have a grain of truth, but they miss the real reason why the Bible is so important: It is the sure and certain source for knowing who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us.

Jesus said, "The Scriptures testify about me" (John 5:39). The main message of the Bible is the good news of God's work to reconcile the world to Himself through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Throughout Old and New Testaments, the central message of the Scripture is the account of how God was in the world preparing it to receive His Son and then what His Son did when He was here. It also tells how the church received this glorious message of salvation, and how it grew and spread throughout the known world. Luther once compared the Bible to the swaddling clothes the baby Jesus was wrapped in. Thus the Bible is Christ-centered.

Our Lord Jesus said, "If you remain in my Word, truly you are my disciples" (John 8:31). The divine authority and reliability of the Bible does not rest on the persons God used to write the Bible, nor on the endorsement of the Bible by the church, but rests entirely on the fact that it is the Word of the Lord. How do we know this? This confession of the Bible's complete authority is part of the certainty of the faith God gives to us as a gift.

Real human beings were given real words from God to write down. As our Lord Jesus Christ was both true God and

What About the Bible?

true man, so the Bible is truly the Word of God and also the writing of human beings. Even as our Lord Jesus took on human flesh free from sin and error, so God used human beings to provide a written revelation of Himself that is free from error. Thus, we believe that the Bible is both incapable of error (infallible) and free from error (inerrant).

The Bible has a very important distinction one needs to keep in mind in order to understand the Bible correctly: the difference between Law and Gospel. The Bible reveals God's perfect holiness and righteousness, and His expectation of perfection. His Law, summarized best in the Ten Commandments, reveals our sinful rebellion and our inability to save ourselves. The Gospel is the joyful news that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us complete forgiveness from our sins through His life, death and resurrection for us. The proper distinction between Law and Gospel is the key to understanding the Bible correctly.

The most important message of the Bible is not the Law of God. The Bible is not merely a collection of principles for daily living. The Bible is not a textbook that answers every possible question we may have. Nor for that matter is the Bible a book that predicts every last detail about the future. The central and most important teaching in the Bible is the Gospel, the good news of God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the message that predominates throughout the Bible, from Old Testament to New Testament. Thus the Bible is Gospel-centered.

We know that the Bible was not given merely for the sake of itself. We are not saved because we own a Bible. We are saved by our Lord Jesus Christ, who is revealed in the Bible. We believe the Bible because it is the Lord's Word. We believe in Him, thus we believe His Word to be true. We receive what He has given. He has given us the Scriptures. Thus, the Bible is the foundation and touchstone for everything that the church believes, teaches, confesses and practices. Why? Because the Bible is the inspired, Christ-centered and Gospel-centered Word of the Lord.

How Do We Use the Bible?

The Bible is foundational for the church's ministry. The Bible was never intended to stand alone or apart from the community of faith we call the Christian church. It is sad when some people think that, if they just read the Bible, they can stay away from church. We receive our Lord's gifts with joy and do not say, "We want this, but not that." It would be misleading if our high respect for the Scriptures was used to drive a wedge between the Bible and the church. The church is the gathering of God's people around the Lord's Word and Sacraments. The

Scriptures are the sure and certain revelation of God's Word and thus are to be read, studied and meditated on by Christians at church and at home.

We Lutherans realize that Scripture must be interpreted according to the central truth of the Bible, the Gospel, not picked apart and made to teach things that actually conflict with the Gospel. Therefore, we pay close attention to the grammar and words of the Bible, seeking out the intended meaning, which is the plain sense of the text. We recognize that God the Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures to create and sustain the church as it comes together around the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments.

Whenever the Word of God is preached, taught, studied, read, learned or meditated on, the Holy Spirit is actively turning people from their sin and drawing them to Christ for their salvation. Thus, we will want to be in the Word daily. At home we read and meditate on the Word through our private and family devotions. At church, our hymns and liturgy are anchored in the Word of God. Our pastors preach to us on the basis of the Scripture lessons appointed for each Sunday in the church year. Our school teachers lead our children into a deeper knowledge of the Word of God. In Sunday school, children learn the biblical accounts and thus have a foundation for their lives. In youth and adult Bible studies, the Scriptures are studied in a variety of ways so they can inform and enlighten us and help us understand how we live out our lives as God's people.

What a blessed gift the Holy Scriptures are to us and to all people! Everything God wants us to know about Himself is contained in His Word. Through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit reveals the truth about our sinful condition and the joyful news of God's saving work for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Truly, God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Ps. 119:105). For that reason we pray, "Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word."

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Small Catechism

What is the Small Catechism?

The Small Catechism, written by Martin Luther in 1529, is a collection of questions and answers on six topics: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Our Father (the Lord's Prayer), the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar. Luther wanted the Catechism to be used by the head of the household to teach the family the Christian faith and life.

Also included with the Small Catechism are daily prayers, a table of duties for Christians in their various callings in life, and a guide for Christians to use as they prepare to receive Holy Communion. Most editions of Luther's Small Catechism also come with an explanation of the Catechism, which is a longer collection of questions and answers with extensive quotations from the Bible. These explanations have a long history and were added during Luther's lifetime.

Why did Luther write the Small Catechism?

Luther answers that question in the preface to the Small Catechism:

"The deplorable, miserable conditions which I recently observed when visiting the parishes have constrained and pressed me to put this Catechism of Christian doctrine into this brief, plain, and simple form. How pitiable, so help me God, were the things I saw: the common man, especially in the villages, knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach. Yet all the people are supposed to be Christians, have been baptized, and receive the Holy Sacrament even though they do not know the Our Father, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments and live like poor animals of the barnyard and pigpen. What these people have mastered, however, is the fine art of tearing all Christian liberty to shreds."

You can tell how strongly Luther felt about the need for a clear explanation of the Christian faith and life!

Luther also wrote what is known as the Large Catechism. The Large Catechism is yet another excellent resource that most adults find very helpful after studying the Small Catechism. Your pastor can help you obtain a copy of the Large Catechism.

What is the benefit of the Small Catechism?

The Small Catechism is an excellent summary of what the Bible, God's Word, teaches us. The shape of the Catechism is the shape of the Christian life: Repentance (Ten Commandments), Faith (Creed), Prayer (Our Father), Forgiveness of Sins (Baptism, Absolution, Lord's Supper), then daily prayer and our daily work. It is very important for us to learn by heart the truths of God's Word as summarized and beautifully explained in the Small Catechism.

God uses the precious truths of His Word to keep us strong and growing in our faith in Jesus Christ. The Catechism helps us understand God's Law, which shows us our sin, and how we are to live as His people. The Catechism beautifully articulates the Gospel, the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection for our salvation.

Luther realized that the truths of God's Word, as summarized by the Small Catechism, were matters of eternal life and death. They are the most important truths we can ever know. It is genuinely unfortunate when people think they no longer need the Small Catechism and say to themselves, "That's enough of that; now I can move on to more important things."

How can the Small Catechism be used in the life of the individual Christian?

Luther offers us good advice when he writes in the Large Catechism, "Every morning and evening, and whenever I have time, I read and say word-for-word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the Catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism, and I gladly do it." The Small Catechism is intended to be a prayer book for individuals and families. As we meditate on the various portions of the Catechism, we look for instruction from God, then look for what we can thank God for, then for what we need to confess to God and, finally, we finish our prayerful meditation by asking God for His blessing and mercy so we may live according to His Word. It is in this way that daily use of the Catechism is a powerful tool for the Christian life.

How can the Small Catechism be used in the home?

The Small Catechism was designed to be the family's Christian handbook. In fact, some have referred to the Small

What About The Small Catechism?

Catechism as the “layman’s Bible” because it provides such an excellent, brief, clear summary of God’s Word on the essentials of the Christian faith.

Families can use the Catechism in their daily devotions. Luther provided suggested prayers for the family to say at the beginning and end of meals, and for each member of the family to pray when they go to sleep and when they wake up.

Families that use the Catechism find it helpful to pray the Lord’s Prayer together and then to say the Apostles’ Creed together. Then they continue to work on the explanation of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession and Holy Communion. Gradually, over the months and years, the entire family will be able to recite the Catechism from memory and discuss together its meaning.

How can the Catechism be used in congregations?

The Catechism is a key resource in confirmation instruction for both children and adults. The Catechism can be used in so many other ways as well. It is an important resource for Bible classes and other groups that meet at the church. Wouldn’t it be good for every group that meets regularly in a Lutheran congregation to begin their meeting by reviewing a part of the Catechism and then concluding that review with prayer?

Many congregations make it a practice to print out a portion of the Catechism and recite it during the Sunday worship service. Other congregations devote the seasons of Advent and Lent to a careful review of the Catechism’s six chief parts during their mid-week services. Still other congregations will spend time during the non-festival half of the church year devoting special attention to reviewing the Catechism. There are pastors who use the Catechism as the subject of children’s talks during the worship service. That is certainly a fine practice.

Other congregations have been richly blessed by using the Catechism and its explanation in adult Bible classes, or other study groups. Study groups have found much to discuss and learn by working their way carefully through the Catechism.

Many people have discovered that the Catechism is also a very helpful resource for witnessing to others about Jesus Christ and all that He means for us. Being able to repeat the explanation to the Creed is a good way to tell others what Jesus is all about and how one receives salvation in Christ.

What is the benefit of learning the Catechism by heart?

There is a great deal of benefit! The Catechism is learned by regular and repeated reading, discussion and prayer. The head of the house should lead the rest of the family in speaking

the various parts of the Catechism and so, slowly but surely, learning the Catechism by heart. One week, for instance, the family can work on the First Commandment and its meaning, or the First Article of the Creed and its meaning, and so forth.

Learning the Catechism by heart is vital for teaching the Catechism. Perhaps every word will not make sense at first. That is not a problem. Just keep working on learning them. Understanding will come in time, but learning the words must begin right away. We are making a serious mistake if we wait to have children memorize the Catechism until they can understand every word. We need to learn to speak the language of our faith before we can understand it. Families might be surprised at how quickly children can memorize the words of the Catechism and then learn to understand them.

Martin Luther was very concerned that this be done. He wrote in his Preface to the Small Catechism, “So adopt whatever form you wish, and then stick with it at all times. . . . keep to a single, fixed and permanent form and wording, and teach them first of all the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, etc., according to the text, word for word, so that they can repeat it after you and commit it to memory.”

Where can we obtain copies of the Small Catechism?

You may purchase copies of the Small Catechism from Concordia Publishing House by calling their toll-free number, 800-325-3040.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Ten Commandments

*Here is the tenfold sure command, God gave to men of every land, through faithful Moses standing high, on holy Mount Sinai. Have mercy, Lord! **

This pamphlet will help you study the Commandments and use them in your daily life.

We recognize sin in our lives as we examine ourselves according to the Ten Commandments. Sin takes a gift God has given and uses it in a way God does not want it used. Each commandment also teaches us how God's gifts are used to His honor and glory.

I—You shall have no other gods.

I, I alone, am God, your Lord; all idols are to be abhorred. Trust me, step boldly to my throne, sincerely love me alone. Have mercy, Lord!

Where the heart is right with God, all the other commandments follow. When a commandment is broken, this is symptomatic of the fact that the human heart, by nature, is turned away from God. God made us to be His own. He has given Himself to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever claims our greatest loyalty, fondest hopes or deepest affection is our god and takes the place God alone wants to have in our lives. Through the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts true fear, love and trust in God above all things. (Is. 42:8; Matt. 4:10; Prov. 11:28; Ps. 118:8; John 14:15; Phil. 2:13).

II—You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

Do not my holy name disgrace, do not my Word of truth debase. Praise only that as good and true which I myself say and do. Have mercy, Lord!

The Lord gave us a great treasure when we were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The name of our Lord is above any other name, in heaven or on earth. With God's name, comes His power to save. Using the name of the Holy Trinity as a curse word, or swearing by it for dishonest or frivolous purposes, or using it to mislead people about His Word, is sin.

How good to know that we can call on the name of the Lord at any time, and in any situation in life, for any need. Because the Lord opens our lips, we declare His praise as we pray and give thanks in His holy name. (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:15; James 3:9-10; Lev. 19:12; Jer. 23:31; Ps. 50:5; Ps. 103:1; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 2:10-11).

III—Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Celebrate the worship day, that peace may fill your home and pray, and put aside the work you do, so that God may work in you. Have mercy, Lord.

God has blessed us with the gift of His Word. We honor God when we gladly hear the Word of God preached and we hold it sacred. We also honor God's Word when we use it in our daily prayer. We are tempted at times to think: "I can be a Christian without attending church." That is as true as saying, "I do not have to eat today to live." But how long can we live without eating? We are able to go to church, because God is at work in us with His gifts so that we hold His Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. (Acts 2:42, 46; Heb. 10:25; Matt. 12:8; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:9-10; John 8:47; Luke 10:16; Is. 66:2; Ps. 26:8; Acts 2:42; Col. 3:16).

IV—Honor your father and your mother.

You are to honor and obey your parents, and masters every day, serve them each way that comes to hand; you'll then live long in the land. Have mercy, Lord!

God has given us parents, pastors and other authorities for our good. They serve as His representatives. Through them, God richly blesses us, and our world, with orderly authority, as opposed to the chaos that sin brings. By honoring parents and others in authority, we honor God. (Prov. 23:22; Rom. 13:2; Eph. 6:2-3; 1 Tim. 5:4; Rom. 13:7; Col. 3:20; Titus 3:1; Prov. 23:22).

V—You shall not murder.

Curb anger, do not harm or kill, hate not, repay not ill with ill. Be patient and of gentle mind, convince your foe that you are kind. Have mercy, Lord!

Human life is the crowning gift of God's creation. We are not to end human life through murder, abortion, euthanasia or suicide. Prejudice, bigotry and abuse of those less fortunate are forbidden. We recognize that we can "murder" a person with our thoughts, certainly with our words, and then most dramatically with our actions. As God's representative, the government has the authority to execute criminals and to wage just wars in order to punish evildoers, protect us, and maintain order. As we continue to receive mercy and kindness in Christ, so we support our neighbors when they need help. (Gen. 9:6; Matt. 26:52; Jer. 1:5; Prov. 31:8; Matt. 5:22; 1 John 3:15; Eph. 4:26; Rom. 13:4).

What About the Ten Commandments?

VI—You shall not commit adultery.

Be faithful, keep the marriage vow; the straying thought do not allow. Keep all your conduct free from sin. Be self-controlled and disciplined. Have mercy, Lord!

God has given marriage, our sexuality, and our family as great blessings. This commandment confronts us when our thoughts, words and actions fall short of the sexual purity God demands of both the married and unmarried. God wants all people, both married and single, to honor and uphold marriage as His gift. In Christ, we are set free to live sexually pure and decent lives, and to honor and cherish the husband or wife God gives us. (Gen. 2:24-25; Mark 10:6-9; Heb. 13:4; Titus 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

VII—You shall not steal.

You shall not steal or cheat away what others worked for night and day; but open up a generous hand to feed the poor in the land. Have mercy, Lord!

Everything we have is a gift from God, a trust from Him to be used for His honor and glory. This is turned around when we do whatever it takes to get what we want. Christians are led by the Spirit of God not to steal or cheat but instead to do what is necessary to help others keep and improve what is theirs. (Eph. 4:28; Phil. 2:4; Heb. 13:16; 1 John 3:17).

VIII—You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

A lying witness never be, nor foul your tongue with calumny. The cause of innocence embrace, the fallen shield from disgrace. Have mercy, Lord!

Our good reputation is another gift from God. God gives some the duty to judge behavior and to punish evildoers, but if that is not our calling in life, we have no right to tarnish other people's reputations. We have the duty to speak in such a way about individuals or situations that we are putting the best construction on them and speaking about them in the kindest possible way, even as God treats us kindly, with mercy and compassion, through Christ our Lord. (Eph. 4:25; James 4:11; 1 Cor. 13:7; 1 Peter 4:8).

IX and X—

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

The portion in your neighbor's lot, his goods, home, wife, desire not. Pray God he would your neighbor bless, as you yourself wish success. Have mercy, Lord!

Being content with the material gifts God has given us is the theme of these last two commandments. The Lord will

provide for all our needs. We are free to help our neighbor and wish him well, rejoicing with him in his good fortune, or helping him in need. As Christ has served us, so we serve others. With these two commandments, we find ourselves back again at the first, for the heart that fears, loves and trust in God is content with the gifts God gives. (Rom. 7:8; 1 Tim. 6:8-10; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6; Heb. 13:5).

How does God use the Ten Commandments in our lives?

You have this law to see therein, that you have not been free from sin, but also that you clearly see, how pure toward God life should be. Have mercy, Lord!

Lord Jesus, help us in our need; Christ, you are our go-between indeed. Our works, how sinful, marred, unjust! Christ, you are our one hope and trust. Have mercy, Lord!

The Ten Commandments cause us to ask ourselves the following questions: Do I fear, love and trust in anything or anyone above the Triune God? Have I honored the Lord's name on my lips and in my life? Have I gladly held His Word sacred, listened attentively to the preaching of that Word, and made use of it in my daily life? Have I honored and obeyed all the authorities placed over me? Have I maintained the purity of my marriage and my sexual life in my thoughts, words and deeds? Have I stolen property or not helped my neighbor protect his? Have I gossiped, either by listening to it, or spreading it myself? Have I been content with all that the Lord has given to me?

The Law is a blinding reflection of our sin. The Law of God is what the Holy Spirit uses to make us realize how much we need the forgiveness Christ won for the world and now distributes through His Word and Sacraments. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, to turn to Christ Jesus, who is our only hope, for He has fulfilled the Law perfectly for us and died so that our sin would be forgiven. Through His resurrection from death, He conquered death. In Christ, we have been adopted as the Lord's own dear children.

Therefore, God uses His Law in three ways: First, like a curb, by which outbursts of sin are controlled. Second, and most importantly, like a mirror, to show us our sin and our need for a Savior. And then, like a guide, to teach us what is pleasing to Him. Living in the forgiveness won by Christ, throughout our lives we pray, "Have mercy, Lord!"

* The italicized verses in this pamphlet are from Martin Luther's hymn on the Ten Commandments, *Here Is the Tenfold Sure Command*, Hymn 331 in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Apostles' Creed

What does it mean to confess the Christian faith?

There is nothing more sure or certain in this life than the word and promise of God. With the words of the Apostles' Creed, Christians through the ages have responded to God's Word to them. With the Psalmist we pray, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall confess your praise" (Ps. 51:15). The word "creed" comes from the Latin word, "credo," which means, "I believe." To "confess" means to make a declaration of what one believes. When we confess the faith of the Christian church in the words of the Apostles' Creed, we are confessing our belief in who the Holy Trinity is, and what God has done for us. Each section, or article, of the Apostles' Creed speaks about the work of one of the persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each article of the Apostles' Creed is our opportunity to speak back to God, and to each other, the mighty deeds of the Holy Trinity by which He has created us, by which He has redeemed us, and by which He keeps us in the one true faith until life eternal. This is a very important dimension of our faith and worship of God.

What do we confess about God the Father?

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth."

We all believe in one true God, maker of the earth and heaven. "Our Father," he would have us say; children's place to us has given. He has pledged always to feed us; body, soul, to keep, to nourish. Through all evil he will lead us, guards us well that we may flourish. He cares for us by day and night and governs all things by his might.¹

That there is a god is a truth known to all human beings simply from the very existence of all things. This is called the natural knowledge of God. There is nothing very remarkable about believing that there is a god. Only a fool says, "there is no god" (Ps. 53:1). The real issue is not that people believe in no god, but that they are tempted to believe in a god who is not the one, true God. Or, that they are tempted to put in the place of the true God, "gods" of our culture, like money, success, popularity or pleasure.

The first article of the Apostles' Creed declares that Christians believe, teach and confess that the one, true god is none other than the One who has made the heavens and the earth, and everything in them. But more than that, He is our

Father who provides and cares for us as a father cares for his beloved children.

We believe that He has made us and has given us all the good things we have in this life. This He has done purely out of the love He has for us as our Father. He not only gives us life, He also defends us, guards us, and protects us during this life, so that we will join Him in heaven for all eternity. There is nothing in us that makes us worthy of the good things God gives us. It is all from His love as a father. How glorious it is to know that the same God who created heaven and earth also created each one of us and cares for us personally.

What do we confess about God the Son?

"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead."

We all believe in Christ, His Son, whom as Lord we are addressing, of equal Godhead, throne, and might, source of every grace and blessing. Born of Mary, virgin mother, by the power of the Spirit, made true man, our human brother through whom sonship we inherit; He, crucified for sinful men, through God's power rose to life again.

We are able to believe that God is our Father, because of what His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, came into this world to do: to live perfectly in our place, to suffer and die to pay for the sin of the world, and then to rise victorious over humanity's most ancient and most evil enemies: sin, death and the devil.

Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God from all eternity, was born of the Virgin Mary, to offer up to the Father His precious body and blood for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. Through this sacrifice, the Son of God won for us reconciliation and peace with God, a peace that had been shattered by sin, both the original sin common to all human beings and the sin that is unique to each of us.

At the Father's command, Christ came into this world to do all this for us so that we would be His very own by faith, serving Him and living for Him. Our hope is in the One who rose from the grave and now lives as our Savior for all eternity. How

What about the Apostles' Creed?

blessed we are to have been brought to the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and that in Him we have the full and free forgiveness of all of our sins and the promise of eternal life forever with Him in heaven.

What do we confess about the Holy Spirit?

“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.”

We all confess the Holy Ghost, who grants comfort, grace, and power. He, with the Father and the Son, robes us for the triumph hour, keeps the Church, his own creation, in true unity of the spirit; here forgiveness and salvation come to us through Jesus' merit. The body risen, we then shall be in life with God eternally. Amen.

The Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, three persons, equal in majesty and together being of one essence, truly does love us as His own dear children. The Holy Spirit calls us into fellowship with the Trinity, by the powerful means of grace that God has given: the Word and Sacraments. With the Word and Sacraments, He keeps the entire church on earth in the one, true and saving faith.

As Luther explains in his Large Catechism, the Holy Spirit works in our life through the church because the church “is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it He illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.” In the church, the Spirit of God is daily pouring out the forgiveness of sins in rich measure so that on the last day we will rise from dead and join all believers in Christ in eternal life. Daily we want to thank and praise God the Holy Spirit for His work in our lives.

Why do we use creeds?

Some church bodies shy away from making formal statements of faith. The Lutheran church is not hesitant to use the historic, universal (ecumenical) creeds. We use the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. These three ancient creeds are how we confess the one, true faith of the Christian church and they help us to identify with all believers in Christ throughout all ages.

The historic creeds are, as our church recently stated in convention, “the cherished possession of the entire church down through the ages and are not just the expression of any one individual. The church has maintained the confession of these creeds and has even suffered martyrdom rather than deny the faith confessed in them.” Therefore, the use of the historic Christian creeds is a very important part of Lutheran

worship services. Because we know that personal, individual statements of faith are oftentimes subject to imprecise and even erroneous confessions of the faith of the church, we discourage the use of informal statements of faith in the public worship of the church.

Creeds serve as a way to make sure that the church continues to believe what the Word of God teaches. The treasure of truth in the Word of God is what we wish to confess and to stand for as a church. It is based on these truths, as confessed in the Apostles' Creed, that the people of God are led to serve Him in both word and deed.

When we confess the Apostles' Creed, and the other historic creeds, we confess the faith of the Christian church. We do so with joy and confidence. With these words on our lips and in our hearts, we have the assurance that we are speaking back to God the truths He has first spoken to us. And thus, with confidence in the Lord's sure and certain Word, we say, “This is most certainly true.”

1. Martin Luther, *We All Believe in One True God*, Hymn 213 in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Lord's Prayer

What About . . . The Lord's Prayer

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, reconciles us to God and thus makes it possible for us to come to God in prayer. Prayer is a marvelous privilege from the Lord. He not only commands us to pray, but He invites us to pray to Him. He wants our prayers. What a fantastic blessing prayer is! The Lord's Prayer is the prayer above every other prayer because our Lord Jesus Christ personally gave this prayer to the church. Let's spend a few moments here exploring the Lord's Prayer.

The Introduction:

Our Father who art in heaven.

Our Father, who from heaven above has told us here to live in love. And with our fellow Christians share, our mutual burdens and our prayer, teach us no thoughtless word to say, but from our inmost heart to pray.¹

What a marvelous blessing! We are able to come to the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the maker of all things, both seen and unseen, the all-powerful and almighty God, and call Him "Father." By nature, we human beings are not inclined to faith, trust and love in God. Instead, the Scriptures reveal we are by nature children of wrath, in rebellion against God, fallen and lost. Thanks be to God through Christ our Lord we are able to call God "Father." What is more, He even wants us to come to Him in prayer. We pray to our heavenly Father with boldness and confidence, through Christ Jesus, our Lord, knowing that He will hear and answer our prayers, according to His good and gracious will.

Our Father who art in heaven. . . You who loved us enough to send your only begotten Son to save us from our sins, I now come before You in prayer, even as Your Son has taught us to pray.

The First Petition:

Hallowed be thy name.

Your name be hallowed. Help us, Lord, in purity to keep your Word, that to the glory of your name, we walk before you free from blame. Let no false teaching us pervert; all poor deluded souls convert.

God surely does not need our prayer to make sure His name is kept holy. It is holy in and of itself, and it is holy among

us when we teach His Word in all its truth and purity, and live holy lives according to His Word. Anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God is actually profaning and blaspheming the holy name of God.

Hallowed be thy name. . . By grace You have brought me into Your kingdom of salvation. Ever keep me in the true faith and help me through my words and actions to hallow Your name.

The Second Petition:

Thy kingdom come.

Your kingdom come, guard your domain and your eternal righteous reign. The Holy Ghost enrich our day with gifts attendant on our way. Break Satan's power, defeat his rage; preserve your church from age to age.

Again, God's kingdom does not depend on our prayers, but we pray here that His kingdom would come among us in all its grace and truth. God's kingdom does not come because we make it come, but because the Holy Spirit is working powerfully in us so that we believe His Word and live godly lives here in time and eventually in all eternity.

Thy kingdom come. . . Lord, use me mightily to share your saving Gospel with others.

The Third Petition:

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Your gracious will on earth be done, as it is done before your throne, that patiently we may obey in good or bad times all you say. Curb flesh and blood and every ill that sets itself against your will.

God will have His way with us and with the world, that is sure and certain. Here we are praying that His will may be done among us. We are asking God to prevent anything in our lives—including the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature—from placing an obstacle between us and the will of God. We ask that He would give us strength to keep us steadfast in His Word until our death. This is what God's good, gracious will is all about.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. . . Daily cause Your holy will to be done in my life, and when the world would entice me to turn from You, give me the strength to remain faithful to You.

What about the Lord's Prayer?

The Fourth Petition:

Give us this day our daily bread.

Give us this day our daily bread, and let us all be clothed and fed. From warfare, rioting, and strife, disease, and famine save our life, that we in honest peace may live, to care and greed no entrance give.

We are asking God to lead us to recognize all the fantastic blessings He showers on us in this life, and so lead us to thank and praise Him for these blessings, which include all that we need or require in this life.

Give us this day our daily bread. ...Thank You for all of those temporal blessings You daily pour out into my life, and which I can so easily forget.

The Fifth Petition:

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Forgive our sins, let grace outpour, that they may trouble us no more; we too will gladly those forgive, who harm us by the way they live. Help us in each community to serve with love and unity.

Here we ask our heavenly Father not to see our sins, or deny our prayer on account of them. We recognize and here confess that we are not worthy of any of the abundant gifts God gives us and that we surely do not deserve His blessing, but only His punishment, because we sin. Through Christ our Lord, who gave Himself for us, we are able to ask God to grant us His mercy, for the sin that daily we commit. Being forgiven so graciously by God, we want to forgive and do good to people who sin against us.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. ...Help me to be forgiving of others, even when this is difficult, always remembering how forgiving You have been of me.

The Sixth Petition:

And lead us not into temptation.

Lead not into temptation, Lord, where our grim foe and all his horde, would vex our souls on every hand. Help us resist, help us stand firm in the faith, armed with your might; your Spirit gives your children light.

Here we are asking that God would protect us from temptation and keep the devil from attacking us through the world and our own sinful flesh. We are asking that we not be led astray into false belief, or despair, or other shameful sins. We know we are attacked daily and tempted to live contrary to God's will. We have the sure promise from God that Christ has overcome the world for us and will, in our final hour in this life,

grant us final victory over them.

And lead us not into temptation. ...Lord, help me to resist and overcome the temptations that assail me in this life.

The Seventh Petition:

But deliver us from evil.

Deliver us from evil days, from every dark and trying maze; redeem us from eternal death, console us when we yield our breath. Give us at last a blessed end; receive our souls, O faithful friend.

We are praying here that the Lord would rescue us from every evil in this life, evils that have to do with our body, our soul, those things God has given us, our good name and so forth. We ask that when the time comes for us to be taken home to be with the Lord, God would extend His loving protection over us and take us from this valley of sorrow to be with Him forever in heaven.

And deliver us from evil. ...Keep from me all those hurts and evils in life that would assail me, and ever give me the power always to resist the evil one.

The Conclusion:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Amen, that is, it shall be so. Make our faith strong that we may know we need not doubt but shall receive all that we ask, as we believe. On your great promise we lay claim. Our faith says "amen" in your name.

At the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, we express a confident hope in the truth that our Lord is the mighty One, whose kingdom and power and glory are for all eternity. With these words we are saying to the Lord, "You are a great and glorious God."

With the word, "Amen" we are saying, "Yes, yes, it shall be so." And thus, with the certainty that rests on the promise of God that He both invites and hears our prayer, we conclude the prayer He taught us. We say, "Amen" that is, "Yes, Lord, you have commanded me to pray to you and you promise to hear me."

Amen, amen, may all these things we have prayed be so, for Jesus' sake.

1. Martin Luther, *Our Father Who from Heaven Above*, Hymn 431, *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Holy Baptism

Suppose for a moment that there was a doctor who had such incredible talent that he could prevent people from dying, and bring those who had died back to life, never to die again. Just imagine how people would do whatever they could to be treated by this doctor! Now consider that in Holy Baptism, God actually does give us the gift of eternal life! Let's learn more about this marvelous blessing.

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word.¹

What's so special about a handful of simple water? Nothing, until God connects His Word to it! In Baptism, that is exactly what God is doing. He combines His life-creating and life-giving Word with the waters of Holy Baptism, and thereby we are born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:5).

What is that Word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Our Lord commands Baptism. It is not optional, nor is it simply a nice "extra." God's Word takes on many forms, according to His good and gracious will. The Word is preached, taught, and proclaimed. It is read, studied and meditated on. It is shared by Christians, with non-Christian and fellow believer, alike. And it is that Word of God, His promise, that makes Baptism what it is.

God Himself is present as His name is joined to the water, with all His power and all His blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation. Christ consecrates the water of Baptism with His Word, so as we in Baptism stand with Christ in the water, the Father calls us His beloved children, the Holy Spirit is given to us, and heaven is opened to us.

Those who receive Baptism after they have been brought to faith by the preaching or teaching of the Word also receive all the blessings God has attached to Baptism.

What benefits does Baptism give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words

and promises of God declare. Which are these words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

In and through Baptism, God cleanses us from all of our sins, snatches us from the power of Satan, and gives us everlasting life. It is all God's doing as He gives us His blessing. It is His promise. In Baptism, our Triune God imparts to each of us personally the gifts the Lord Jesus Christ won for the world through His life, suffering, death, and resurrection. Please see especially Gal. 3:27; Col. 1:13–14; 1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5–7 and 1 Cor. 6:11.

How can water do such great things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's Word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three: "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying" (Titus 3:5–8).

Of course, simple water can't do such great things, but the water of Baptism is not simple water! Baptism is one very special way God delivers to us the blessings Christ won for us. Baptism is not something we do, but something God does. Therefore, it is far more than a symbol. It is a sacred act in which God Himself is at work forgiving sins, giving new life in Christ and bestowing on us the Holy Spirit with all of His gifts. Baptism gives us the faith through which we receive these gifts. God the Holy Spirit works faith in the promises attached to Baptism.

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Where is this written? St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "We were there-

What About Holy Baptism?

fore buried with Him through Baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:4).

In Baptism we are buried with Christ, and in Baptism we are raised with Christ. His death and resurrection are made our own, and because of that fact, through our entire life, we are able to say, “I am baptized!” Having been buried with Christ into His death we do not have to be afraid of the tomb in which we will rest one day. Christ has already been there. In Holy Baptism we have passed through His grave into His resurrection.

As Luther says in his *Large Catechism*, “If I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body. ...No greater jewel can adorn our body and soul than Baptism. ...Baptism is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a human work, but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith.”

What does Baptism have to do with our daily life?

Everything! Our entire life is a life lived trusting in the promises of God, given to us in and through Holy Baptism. We are constantly returning to Baptism. In moments of temptation and suffering in our lives, when all seems to be crashing down on us, and in particular in those moments when our sin and the guilt of those sins haunt us, we are able, as Luther says, to “Pull out our Baptism and wave it under the devil’s nose and say, ‘I am baptized. ...I have God’s bath. It is Christ’s own blood.’ It is a bath blessed and mixed with the blood of Christ.”² We can’t return to the cross of Christ, nor should we attempt to imagine ourselves back there. No, we turn instead to the “here and now” reality of God’s work in our lives. We return to our Baptism. For it was there and then that God buried us with Christ and raised us with Him to a new life.

In his *Large Catechism*, Luther says, “Every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sins, God’s grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts.” And: “If you live in repentance, therefore, you are walking in Baptism, which not only announces this new life, but also produces, begins and promotes it. In Baptism we are given the grace, Spirit and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and grow strong. Therefore, Baptism remains forever. ...Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism.”

Why are infants and young children baptized?

They are baptized for the same reason adults are bap-

tized—because of the command and promise of God. What is promised in Baptism is given to all who receive it; therefore, infants and young children also have the promise of God. They, too, are made children of God. They, too, are included in the words “all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus specifically invites little children to come to Him (Luke 18:15–17). But most important, as sinners, infants need what Baptism gives.

By His word, God created all that is seen and unseen. By His word, our Lord Christ called a dead man from the tomb (John 11:43–44). The unborn child, John the Baptist, leaped in his mother’s womb when he heard the word of God (Luke 1:41–44). Why is there any doubt that in and through the Word and the promise of Baptism, God works a similar gift of faith in the infant? If we misunderstand Baptism to be our work, then we will always cast doubt on it. When we recognize that it is not our work, but God’s gracious promise and work, we realize that infants are to be baptized and receive the treasures offered in and through Baptism.

Sadly, there are individuals and church bodies that deny Baptism to young children and infants. They do not believe that these little ones need what Holy Baptism gives. They do not believe what the Bible teaches so clearly, namely, that God saves us through Baptism. As a result of these false teachings, they deny both to themselves and to others the power, blessing and comfort of Holy Baptism. That is tragic, for it is a most serious offense against God to deny what He plainly declares in His Word: “The promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:39) and “Baptism now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21).

Conclusion

“We see what a great and excellent thing Baptism is, which snatches us from the jaws of the devil and makes God our own, overcomes and takes away sin and daily strengthens the new man. It always remains until we pass from this present misery to eternal glory” (*Large Catechism*).

The meaning, power and promise of Holy Baptism rest entirely on the One who lived perfectly in our place and who suffered and died as the sacrificial ransom for the sins of the world. He rose victorious over death and the grave. In Holy Baptism, we receive all the blessings of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Thank God for His gift of Holy Baptism!

1. The words in italics are from Luther’s *Small Catechism*.

2. WA 47:651,10-19,32-36.

— Dr. A. L. Barry

President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Confession and Absolution

Are we poor, miserable sinners?

Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14 confronts each of us with an important question: Am I a poor, miserable sinner?

The Pharisee in the parable is not alone. We too are often unaware of our sinfulness, or don't want to admit it. How easy it is for us self-righteously to compare ourselves with others. Thanks be to God, that the second man, the tax-collector, is not alone either! Jesus Christ is with him. When Jesus calls, sinners come. They receive His forgiveness, life and salvation. And thus, we too say, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner," for Jesus is the friend of sinners. The precious gift of our Lord's absolution is what confession is all about.

In confession and absolution, Jesus Christ, who poured out his life-blood as the perfect and complete sacrifice for all sin, pours into our ears the life-giving promise of absolution, "My son, my daughter, go in peace, your sins are forgiven." Trusting that promise, we say, "Amen. Yes, Lord, it is true." Thanks be to God!

What is confession?

*Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.*¹

It is hard to say, "I was wrong. I am sorry. Forgive me." God's Word makes it clear that the "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In confession and absolution, God's Word is having its way with us, moving us to confess the truth about ourselves and our need for His forgiveness.

Because of Jesus Christ, confession and absolution is a blessed, joyful, happy exchange! "For our sake He made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). When Jesus hung on the cross, He became sin—for us. He was the ransom for sin. God poured out His just wrath on Christ. Christ won peace between God and man. In confession, Christ takes the burden of our sin and gives us in exchange His complete forgiveness and love.

Absolution is the ongoing work of Holy Baptism, in which our old, sinful nature in Adam is drowned and the new man in Christ arises. Through Holy Absolution we receive "the gift of God," which is forgiveness of sins and "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. Which are these? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything or done any harm?

Confessing our sins in the Divine Service, we hear the Lord's servant, our pastor, absolve our sins in the name of Christ. Privately, we go to the pastor for confession and absolution precisely for those sins we are most aware of and those sins that are particularly troubling to us. These we confess to our pastor and hear the words of Christ, "I forgive you."

By what authority does the church forgive sins?

The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

After His resurrection from the dead and before His ascension into heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ breathed on His apostles and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:22-23).

Sometimes visitors in a Lutheran service of worship are surprised to hear in the general confession and absolution our pastors saying: "Upon this your confession, I, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Our Lutheran Confessions help us to understand why our pastors speak this way: "It is not the voice or word of the man who speaks it, but it is the Word of God, who forgives sin, for it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command" (AC XXV.3).

Absolution is the Lord's life-giving, sure and certain word that does for us what no surgery, medicine, therapy, counseling, or advice can do for us. The Lord's word of absolution doesn't cover up or hide our sin. Nor does it give us only a temporary relief that soon fades away. Our Lord's word of absolution reconciles us to God the Holy Trinity.

What About Confession and Absolution?

Luther put matters well when he wrote, “It would be far too great for any human heart to dare to desire if God Himself had not commanded us to ask for it. But because He is God, He claims the honor of giving far more abundantly and liberally than anyone can comprehend like an eternal, inexhaustible fountain which, the more it gushes forth and overflows, the more it continues to give. He desires of us nothing more ardently than that we ask many and great things of Him; and, on the contrary, He is angered if we do not ask and demand confidently” (*Large Catechism*).

What do you believe according to the promise of God?

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

Burdened and weighed down by sin, we are able to go to our pastor and confess our sins, knowing that by virtue of his office, he has been called to speak the word of Christ to us and in the stead of Christ to forgive our sins. Through the Christian congregation, Jesus Christ calls men to the office of the ministry He has given to His church, the office of the keys. Thus, our pastors carry out this office publicly, on behalf of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the Christian congregation. Also, all Christians extend the forgiveness of Christ to one another privately as they console fellow Christians sorrowing over sin.

At times, our pastors, with considerable sorrow, may have to tell a person not to attend the Lord’s Supper until he or she has repented of sin. If the situation continues without repentance, the pastor may have to declare to the person, on behalf of the congregation that has made this decision, that he or she is excluded from the church until there is repentance.

Excommunication is a last resort to help a person recognize the extremely dangerous situation he has placed himself in because he will not repent of his sin. It is a final attempt to win someone back from Satan’s influence.

Is confession and absolution a Sacrament?

Although Holy Absolution has no visible element, it definitely does have Christ’s institution. The Lutheran Confessions refer to Holy Absolution as a Sacrament (LC IV.74; Ap. XIII.4). The Lutheran Confessions also wisely point out that “No intelligent person will quibble about the number of sacraments or the terminology, so long as those things are kept which have God’s command and promises” (AP XIII.17).

Luther speaks often about Holy Absolution, connecting it with the oral proclamation of the Gospel and with the ongoing living out of Holy Baptism. While it is customary in

Lutheranism to speak of two Sacraments—Baptism and Holy Communion—we do well to keep in mind this important truth: “God is surpassingly rich in his grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren” (SA III.4.1).

What is private absolution and what is its benefit?

Our Lutheran Confessions say, “It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained in the churches and not be allowed to fall into disuse” (AC XI). The founding father of the Missouri Synod, C. F. W. Walther, said that a pastor, in an evangelical way, through careful instruction and encouragement, and through praising private confession and absolution, should work toward the goal where private confession and absolution is used in addition to general confession and absolution.²

Private confession and absolution is a very important tool in the practice of pastoral care. Pastors use confession and absolution in a variety of situations—for example, in the midst of marital and family difficulties, and in other such pastoral counseling situations. Private confession and absolution is used by pastors to bring forgiveness and healing into the lives of those who come to them with troubled and anxious hearts.

Our church’s hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*, contains a suggested order for private confession and absolution (pgs. 110–111). This order may be used in the context of a visit with your pastor. The order of private confession and absolution suggests that specific sins be confessed, but certainly does not require it. Another important point is that pastors are sworn at their ordinations never to reveal the sins confessed to them. As one Lutheran pastor put it, “The pastor’s ear is a tomb. What goes in, never comes out.”

Conclusion

Rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins, we pray that God gives us the strength to resist temptation, and to live lives that glorify Him, seeking to please Him by what we do, in accordance with His holy and perfect will. And as we do, we always are aware of our sin and so we flee for refuge to His boundless mercy, seeking and imploring His forgiveness for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank God for the gift of confession and absolution!

1. Words in italics are quotations from Luther’s *Small Catechism*.

2. C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, Chap. XVI.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Sacrament of the Altar

On the journey through our earthly life to heaven, our good and gracious God provides a holy and precious meal to sustain and strengthen us on our pilgrimage—the Lord’s Supper. What a privilege it is for us to receive this powerfully comforting gift! Thanks and praise forever be to God for the Sacrament of the Altar.

*Guide me ever, great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but you are mighty; Hold me with your powerful hand. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, Feed me now and evermore.*¹

Why do we need the Lord’s Supper?

As we examine our lives in the bright light of God’s holiness, we realize how much we have sinned and how much we need His forgiveness. Our sinfulness and the troubles, sorrows, difficulties and stresses of our life in this fallen world are all reasons we need the Lord’s Supper.

As great as is our need, even greater is the life-giving meal He has provided! It is a very personal way God works in our life to save us, to strengthen us and to keep us close to Him. Jesus promised to be with us always, to the very close of the age (Matt. 28:20). Through His precious Word and Sacraments, our Lord continues to fulfill His promise.

Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Altar with these words: “This is My body, given for you. This cup is My blood of the new testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). The Lord’s Supper “is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink” (*Small Catechism*).

*Soul, adorn yourself with gladness, leave the gloomy haunts of sadness, come into the daylight’s splendor, there with joy your praises render. Bless the One whose grace unbounded this amazing banquet founded. He, though heavenly, high, and holy; deigns to dwell with you most lowly.*²

What is Jesus giving us in the Lord’s Supper?

In the Sacrament of the Altar our Lord and Savior is continually distributing to us the body and blood of the sacrifice He made for us, the sacrifice by which He paid for the sins of the entire world. Thus, receiving His body and blood, we receive forgiveness, life and salvation. Flowing from these

tremendous treasures of God’s mercy are the love, peace and hope that He gives us in His Supper, and the ability and desire to do God’s will, living in love and harmony with others.

It is often observed how there is a foreshadowing of the Lord’s Supper in the Old Testament discussion of how the sacrifices were eaten by those for whom they were offered (1 Cor. 10:18). The Scriptures indicate that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7; Matt. 26:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 5:9; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 12:24; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 1:5; Rev. 7:14). And it is this very blood He gives in His Supper.

*Draw near and take the body of the Lord, and drink the holy blood for you outpoured; Offered was He for greatest and for least, Himself the victim and Himself the priest.*³

How is Jesus present in His Supper?

We do not try to explain how Jesus is present under the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, rather we believe, teach, confess and rejoice that He is present. We Lutherans let the words of Jesus stand without arguing about their possibility, or trying to explain how they are true. As Luther put it so clearly, “We maintain that the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ” (SA III.6). Everyone who communes receives into their mouths the body and blood of Jesus Christ, whether they believe it or not, be they worthy or unworthy.

Jesus’ Word is sure and certain. The Holy Spirit gives us faith to trust in and believe Jesus’ words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Faith in Christ’s promise is what makes us worthy to receive His Supper. Christ’s words of institution retain their validity and efficacious power and thus, by virtue of these words, the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed and received.

*Your body and your blood, once slain and shed for me, are taken at your table, Lord, in blest reality. Search not how this takes place, this wondrous mystery; God can accomplish vastly more than what we think could be.*⁴

Why do we receive the Lord’s Supper often?

We receive the Lord’s Supper often because of how much we need what the Lord gives in His Supper. We dare never make a law about how often an individual “should” or “must”

What About the Sacrament of the Altar?

receive the Lord's Supper. But this is a separate question from how frequently Holy Communion is offered in our congregations. Our Lutheran Confessions make it clear that the Lord's Supper is offered every Lord's Day and on other days when there are communicants present (AC XXIV.34 and Ap. XXIV.1).

In saying this, our Confessions are merely reflecting the truth of the Sacred Scriptures, which place the Lord's Supper at the center of worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20, 33), not as an appendage or an occasional extra. It is for this reason that our Synod has repeatedly encouraged our congregations to provide the opportunity for communicants who so desire to receive the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day.

*My Lord, You here have led me within Your holiest place. And here Yourself have fed me with treasures of Your grace; for You have freely given what earth could never buy, the bread of life from heaven, that now I shall not die.*⁵

What should we do if we do not feel a need to receive the Lord's Supper?

Because of our sinful human nature, we are tempted at times to think, "I don't need to take Communion. I just don't feel like it." But when we feel this way, we need to realize that in the Lord's Supper, the holy God of God, and Light of Light, very God of very God, is coming among us, under the bread and wine, to be with us, to join Himself to us, to forgive, renew and strengthen us.

In preparing to receive the Lord's Supper, it is good for us to review, "Christian Questions with Their Answers," on page 306 of our hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*. There Luther talks about those times when we just may not "feel" like receiving the Lord's Supper. Luther writes, "To such a person no better advice can be given than that, in the first place, he put his hand into his shirt and feel whether he still has flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say about it in Gal. 5 and Rom. 7.

"Secondly, that he look around to see whether he is still in the world, and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15-16 and in 1 John 2 and 5.

"Thirdly, he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Eph. 6; 2 Tim. 2."

*O Jesus, blessed Lord, my praise, my heartfelt thanks to You I raise. You have so lovingly bestowed on me Your body and Your blood. Break forth, my soul, in joy and say; what wealth has come me today, what health of body, mind, and soul! Christ dwells within me, makes me whole.*⁶

Conclusion

Here is how one Lutheran theologian beautifully describes the precious treasure of the Lord's Supper:

"The Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness as with bread from heaven (Ex. 16:15). In this Holy Supper we have the true manna which came down from heaven to give life to the world. Here is that bread of heaven, that angel's food, of which if any man eat he shall never be hungry (John 6:35, 51).

"The children of Israel had the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat, where they could hear the Lord speaking with them face to face (Ex. 25:21, 22). Here we have the true ark of the covenant, the most holy body of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). Here we have the true mercy seat in the precious blood of Christ (Rom. 3:25), through which God has made us accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6).

"Nor does Christ simply speak the word of comfort to our souls, He also takes up His abode in us. He feeds our souls not with heavenly manna, but, what is far better, with His own blessed self. Here is the true gate of heaven for our souls, and the ladder reaching from earth to heaven on which the angels of God ascend and descend (Gen. 28:12).

"Christ holds us dear because He has bought us at so dear a price. He holds us dear because He feeds our souls with so dear and precious a food. He holds us dear because we are members of His body, of His flesh (Eph. 5:30).

"The holy flesh of God, which the angelic hosts adore in the unity of the divine nature, before which archangels bow in lowly reverence, and before which the principalities and powers of heaven tremble and stand in awe, has become the nourishment for our souls. Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad (Ps. 96:11), but still more let the believing soul exult and sing for joy, to whom God gives such an unspeakable gift!"⁷

*O Lord, we praise you, bless you, and adore you, in thanksgiving bow before you. Here with your body and your blood you nourish our weak souls that they may flourish. O Lord, have mercy!*⁸

1 Hymn 220, LW.

2 Hymn 239, LW.

3 Hymn 240, LW.

4 Hymn 249, LW.

5 Hymn 244, LW.

6 Hymn 245, LW.

7 John Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, pg. 103ff.

8 Hymn 238, LW.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Being a Lutheran

What really is a Lutheran?

While there are a variety of ways one could answer this question, one very important answer is simply this, "A Lutheran is a person who believes, teaches and confesses the truths of God's Word as they are summarized and confessed in the Book of Concord." The Book of Concord contains the Lutheran confessions of faith.

Perhaps you have attended an ordination of a pastor and heard him promise that he will perform the duties of his office in accord with the Lutheran Confessions. When people are confirmed they are asked if they confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as they have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true.

These solemn promises indicate to us just how important the Lutheran Confessions are for our church. Let's take a look at the various items contained in the Book of Concord and then we will talk about why the Lutheran Confessions are so important for being a Lutheran.

What are the Ecumenical Creeds?

The three ecumenical creeds in the Book of Concord are the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. They are described as "ecumenical" [universal] because they are accepted by Christians worldwide as correct expressions of what God's Word teaches.

What is the Augsburg Confession and Apology of the Augsburg Confession?

In the year 1530, the Lutherans were required to present their confession of faith before the emperor in Augsburg, Germany. Philip Melancthon wrote the Augsburg Confession and it was read before the imperial court on June 30, 1530. One year later, the Lutherans presented their defense of the Augsburg Confession, which is what "apology" here means. It too was written by Philip Melancthon. The largest document in the Book of Concord, its longest chapter, is devoted to the most important truth of the Christian faith: the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

What are the Small and Large Catechisms?

Martin Luther realized early on how desperately ignorant the laity and clergy of his day were when it came to even the most basic truths of the Christian faith. Around 1530, he produced two small handbooks to help pastors and the heads of families teach the faith.

The Small Catechism and the Large Catechism are organized around six topics: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed,

the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar. So universally accepted were these magnificent doctrinal summaries by Luther, that they were included as part of the Book of Concord.

What are the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope?

In 1537, Martin Luther was asked to prepare a statement of Lutheran belief for use at a church council, if it was called. Luther's bold and vigorous confession of faith was later incorporated into the Book of Concord. It was presented to a group of Lutheran rulers meeting in the town of Smalcald. Philip Melancthon was asked to expand on the subject of the Roman pope and did so in his treatise, which also was included in the Book of Concord.

What is the Formula of Concord?

After Luther's death in 1546, significant controversies broke out in the Lutheran Church. After much debate and struggle, the Formula of Concord in 1577 put an end to these doctrinal controversies and the Lutheran Church was able to move ahead united in what it believed, taught and confessed. In 1580, all the confessional writings mentioned here were gathered into a single volume, the Book of Concord. Concord is a word that means, "harmony"

What is the connection between the Bible and the Confessions?

We confess that, "The Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine" (FC SD, Rule and Norm, 9). What the Bible asserts, God asserts. What the Bible commands, God commands. The authority of the Scriptures is complete, certain and final. The Scriptures are accepted by the Lutheran Confessions as the actual Word of God. The Lutheran Confessions urge us to believe the Scriptures for "they will not lie to you" (LC, V, 76) and cannot be "false and deceitful" (FC SD, VII, 96). The Bible is God's "pure, infallible, and unalterable Word" (Preface to the BOC).

The Lutheran Confessions are the "basis, rule, and norm indicating how all doctrines should be judged in conformity with the Word of God" (FC SD RN). Because the Confessions are in complete doctrinal agreement with the written Word of God, they serve as the standard in the Lutheran Church to determine what is faithful Biblical teaching, insofar as that teaching is addressed in the Confessions.

What is the main point of the Lutheran Confessions?

The Lutheran Reformation was not a "revolt," but rather began as a sincere expression of concern with the false and mis-

What About being a Lutheran?

leading teachings, which, unfortunately, even to this very day, obscure the glory and merit of Jesus Christ. What motivated Luther was a zealous concern about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here is how the Lutheran Confessions explain what the Gospel is all about:

“Human beings have not kept the law of God but have transgressed it. Their corrupted human nature, thoughts, words, and deeds battle against the law. For this reason they are subject to God’s wrath, to death and all temporal afflictions, and to the punishment of the fires of hell. As a result, the Gospel, in its strict sense, teaches what people should believe, namely, that they receive from God the forgiveness of sins; that is, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself the curse of the law and borne it, atoned and paid for all our sins; that through Him alone we are restored to God’s grace, obtain the forgiveness of sins through faith and are delivered from death and all the punishments of our sins and are saved eternally. . . . It is good news, joyous news, that God does not want to punish sin but to forgive it for Christ’s sake” (FC SD, V, 20).

What is a “confessional” Lutheran?

The word “confession” is used in a variety of ways, but when we speak of a “confessional” Lutheran we mean a Lutheran who declares to the world his faith and most deeply held belief and conviction, in harmony with the documents contained in the Book of Concord. You will catch the spirit of confessional Lutheranism in these, the last words written in the Book of Concord:

“Therefore, it is our intent to give witness before God and all Christendom, among those who are alive today and those who will come after us, that the explanation here set forth regarding all the controversial articles of faith which we have addressed and explained—and no other explanation—is our teaching, faith, and confession. In it we shall appear before the judgment throne of Jesus Christ, by God’s grace, with fearless hearts and thus give account of our faith, and we will neither secretly nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it. Instead, on the strength of God’s grace, we intend to abide by this confession” (FC SD, XII, 40).

What is an “unconditional subscription” to the Confessions?

Confessional Lutheran pastors are required to “subscribe” unconditionally to the Lutheran Confessions because they are a pure exposition of the Word of God. This is the way our pastors, and every layman who confesses his belief in the Small Catechism, is able with great joy and without reservation or qualification to say what it is that he believes to be the truth of God’s Word.

Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the Missouri Synod’s first president, explained the meaning of an unconditional confessional subscription in words as clear and poignant today as they were then:

“An unconditional subscription is the solemn declaration which the individual who wants to serve the church makes under

oath that he accepts the doctrinal content of our Lutheran Confessions, because he recognizes the fact that they are in full agreement with Scripture and do not militate against Scripture in any point, whether the point be of major or minor importance; and that he therefore heartily believes in this divine truth and is determined to preach this doctrine.”

So what is it to be a Lutheran?

Being a Lutheran is being a person who believes the truths of God’s Word, the Holy Bible, as they are correctly explained and taught in the Book of Concord. To do so is to confess the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Genuine Lutherans, confessional Lutherans, dare to insist that “All doctrines should conform to the standards [the Lutheran Confessions] set forth above. Whatever is contrary to them should be rejected and condemned as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith” (FC Ep. RN, 6).

Such a statement may strike some as boastful. But it is not; rather, it is an expression of the Spirit-led confidence that moves us to speak of our faith before the world.

To be a confessional Lutheran is to be one who honors the Word of God. That word makes it clear that it is God’s desire for His church to be in agreement about doctrine, and to be of one mind, living at peace with one another (1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11). It is for that reason that we so treasure the precious confession of Christian truth that we have in the Book of Concord. For confessional Lutherans, there is no other collection of documents, or statements or books that so clearly, accurately and comfortingly presents the teachings of God’s Word and reveals the Biblical Gospel as does our Book of Concord.

Hand-in-hand with our commitment to pure teaching and confession of the faith, is, and always must be, our equally strong commitment to reaching out boldly with the Gospel and speaking God’s truth to the world. That is what “confession” of the faith is all about, in the final analysis. Indeed, “It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak” (2 Cor. 4:13). This is what it means to be a Lutheran.

For Further Study:

Robert Preus, *Getting into the Theology of Concord: A Study of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977).

David Scaer, *Getting into the Story of Concord: A History of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1977).

To purchase a copy of the Book of Concord, call Concordia Publishing House at 800-325-3040.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Lutheran Worship

Why does our Lord gather us for worship?

The most precious gifts and treasures our Lord gives us are His forgiveness, life and salvation. Through His innocent life and bitter sufferings and death, Christ has purchased and won us from sin, death and the devil. Through Jesus Christ, all the sins of the world were paid for and the wrath of God was appeased. Christ has reconciled the whole world to God.

Jesus Christ serves us again and again as His Gospel is proclaimed, as His people are baptized and as His Word is read. He serves us as His forgiveness is pronounced and penitents absolved. He serves us as He gives us His body and blood under the bread and wine to eat and to drink. This is how our Lord gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation. What a blessing it is to be called and gathered for worship by our good and gracious God!

What is at the heart and center of Lutheran worship?

Lutheran worship puts the focus squarely on Jesus Christ, who is present for us and with us through His Word and Sacraments. Lutheran worship is, therefore, Christ-centered, not man-centered. When we are gathered for worship, we are not contemplating some far-off Christ or meditating on abstract concepts, or pondering various principles for living. Neither are we in church to be amused or entertained. Christ is living and active among us, right where He has promised to be in His Word and Sacraments. Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 18:20). When He gathers us around His Word and Sacraments, He fulfills this promise to us once again.

What is the basic pattern or "rhythm" of Lutheran worship?

Here is how our hymnal *Lutheran Worship* describes it: Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. . . . Saying back to Him what He has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. . . . The rhythm of our worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gives His gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

What does "Divine Service" mean?

Historically, the phrase used to describe Lutheran worship is Divine Service. This helps us understand the rhythm of worship—that it is first and foremost God serving us with His gifts, and then our service to Almighty God in thanksgiving and praise for all He has done. This rhythm of God giving His gifts and our giving Him thanks is conveyed aptly in the term, Divine Service.

The Divine Service is a "holy" time, meaning a time "set apart." It is a time to be set apart from the workaday world—a time to spend with our Lord. Indeed, in the Divine Service we are gathered together in the presence of the holy, almighty, ever-living God, and thus we are part of a time of "heaven on earth," as our Lord forgives our sins and gives us new life today, and eternal salvation with Him forever. This understanding of the Divine Service explains why many who experience Lutheran worship for the first time describe it as dignified, reverent and sacred.

What does Lutheran worship look and sound like?

Lutherans use orders of service common throughout the history of the Western church. The two main parts of the Divine Service are (1) the proclamation of the Word of God, and (2) the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Other orders of service used in the Lutheran church feature a more extended service of the Word as well as times of prayer, such as the services of Matins and Vespers, Morning and Evening Prayer, Compline, and the Litany.

In Lutheran services, pastors and congregations sing or speak the liturgy back and forth or together. Congregational singing of hymns has always been a hallmark of Lutheran worship. The best of musical traditions, both ancient and modern, are embraced by the Lutheran church in its worship, with an emphasis on congregational singing, reinforced by the choir.

Our pastors wear special clothing called vestments. These garments cover the individuality of the man and emphasize the sacred duties of the office he has been given to carry out. Throughout the course of the church year, an appointed order of readings and prayers helps the congregation focus on the major events in the life of Christ and how those events affect us today. Preaching, usually based on the appointed lessons, is a hallmark of Lutheran worship, distinguished by a clear presentation of God's Law and Gospel.

What About Lutheran Worship?

Lutherans may stand, bow or kneel at various points in the service to express reverence and devotion to the almighty Triune God. Pastors make the sign of the cross over the people, and the people may sign themselves with the cross at various times as well.

Lutheranism has continued to make use of beautiful ecclesiastical art such as statues of Jesus, the apostles, and other important figures in the Bible or church history. You will find in many Lutheran churches altars, candles, paintings, statues, crucifixes, symbols, stained-glass windows, processional crosses, banners, and other forms of art and decoration. All of these lend beauty, dignity and reverence to the service. They help us to focus our attention on Christ and His gifts. Some Lutheran churches are elaborately decorated and richly ornamented. Others are more plainly adorned. We make no fixed rules about such things. We rejoice in our Christian freedom to use all manner of reverent artwork and decoration to glorify and praise God.

How does Lutheran worship reflect Lutheran theology?

How a church conducts its worship is a reflection of what it believes, teaches and confesses. It is difficult, therefore, to retain the substance of Lutheran theology while at the same time embracing non-Lutheran styles of worship. It is important to remember that Martin Luther sought to reform—not to reinvent—the church and its worship. Luther knew that the Gospel was the heart and center of the Divine Service. He changed only what contradicted or diminished the Gospel. Luther never did away with faithful, Gospel-centered and historic worship practices and ceremonies of the church.

Why are common orders of service in our Synod such a blessing?

There are two extremes to be avoided in answering this question. The one extreme would be the view that every congregation can do whatever it wishes, however it wishes, without any regard for the other congregations of our confessional fellowship. The opposite extreme would be the view that everyone in the church must do precisely the same thing every Sunday, without any deviation, variety, change or difference. Neither of these extremes is appropriate or acceptable, and certainly not Lutheran.

Our Synod has always been concerned that—for the good of the church—uniformity in liturgical practices be maintained so that we confess our distinct, unique Lutheran faith boldly in a country where our church is surrounded by so many non-Lutheran churches. Uniformity in doctrine is reflected in uniformity in practice. Our Synod's first president, Dr. C. F. W. Walther, had this to say about the value of uniformity in worship practices:

We are not insisting that there be uniformity in perception or feeling or taste among all believing Christians—neither dare anyone demand that all be minded as he. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Lutheran liturgy distinguishes Lutheran worship from the worship of other churches to such an extent that the houses of worship of the latter look like lecture halls in which the hearers are merely addressed or instructed, while our churches are in truth houses of prayer in which Christians serve the great God publicly before the world. Someone may ask, “What would be the use of uniformity of ceremonies?” We answer, “What is the use of a flag on the battlefield? Even though a soldier cannot defeat the enemy with it, he nevertheless sees by the flag where he belongs.” We ought not to refuse to walk in the footsteps of our fathers.

But isn't Lutheran worship German?

Sometimes we hear people conclude that because the Lutheran Reformation began in Germany, Lutheran worship must, therefore, be German. This is a very common misunderstanding. The fact of the matter is that Lutheran worship throughout history has included hymns, canticles and orders of service that find their origins in the early Christian worship of the Near East and even further back to the worship of the Jewish synagogue as it developed from ancient Jewish temple worship. Thus, Lutheran worship is rooted in thousands of years of tradition and reflects the contributions of many ethnic groups: African, Asian, Middle-Eastern, Spanish, Greek, Italian, French, German, and American as well. It is definitely not the case that Lutheran worship is German.

Conclusion

As we find ourselves being gathered by our Lord for worship at the dawn of this new millennium, we realize that we join our song with angels, archangels and all the company of heaven from millennia past who are gathered before the Lamb upon His throne and worship Him both day and night. As our Lord gathers us for worship Sunday after Sunday, we join the entire company of heaven in praising our good and gracious God. The saints on earth and the saints in heaven praise Him who is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega, even our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reigns as one God, world without end.

“To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod

By God's blessing, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is committed to being strongly in the Word, Christ-centered and people-sensitive, reaching out boldly with the Gospel, faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and marked by peace and unity in the Lord. This pamphlet will help you better understand what The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is all about.

A peace that passes all human understanding

In the fullness of time, the Son of God descended to earth and became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In Jesus, God Himself was with us on earth. Jesus was not only with us, but for us. He came into this sinful and dying world to fight our enemies: sin, death and the devil. He came to set us free. He defeated these enemies by laying down His own life.

Through His perfect life and by His death on the cross, Jesus paid the full debt of sin for all people. He rose again and gives us a new life, a life that has meaning, purpose and direction—a life filled with hope and confidence, even during times of sorrow and trouble. Jesus Christ is with us. He loves us and cares for us, giving us the peace that truly passes human understanding.

A Family of Christian Believers

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a family of 2.6 million Christians, gathered in more than 6,000 congregations throughout the United States. Our church body was founded more than 150 years ago by a small band of immigrants in America who were dedicated to preaching and teaching the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Christ alone. Many of the founders of our Synod were from Missouri, hence the word "Missouri" in our church's name.

Our congregations are united in an association of Christian fellowship called a "Synod," which means "walking together." Every congregation is self governed and unique. We believe and teach the same Biblical truths, but our congregations also reflect the diversity of the people we serve. Some are located in rural areas, others in inner cities. Some are large, others are very small. Most use English, but some offer worship services in Vietnamese, Spanish, Laotian, and other languages. We are a family gathered from all nations, united in the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

Strongly in the Word

The voice of Jesus calls sinners to repentance, and comforts the brokenhearted through the preaching and teaching of His Word from our pulpits and in our classrooms. We are a church that honors the Bible as the written Word of God—the very voice of Jesus, our Good Shepherd. God the Holy Spirit, through this Word, creates and sustains trust in Jesus Christ. Through this living and powerful Word, Jesus Himself rebukes, comforts, forgives and guides His people through the perplexing, difficult and confusing questions and decisions we face in our lives.

We believe strongly that Jesus is with us and that He still rules His church today through His Word. Therefore, we are committed to reading, studying and growing in the Word of God, the Holy Bible. Our church's deeply spiritual and reverent liturgical worship is filled with the Word of God, through which Jesus blesses us with His presence and peace.

Christ-Centered and People-Sensitive

We treasure the special means by which Jesus Himself dwells among us with His forgiving grace. Therefore, our Synod is very much Christ-centered. Our focus is on Jesus Christ and His presence among us.

We believe that Jesus is present among us through the life-giving waters of Baptism, a Sacrament that unites us with Jesus' death and resurrection, washes away our sins, and brings us into the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. We rejoice in the gracious presence of Jesus in the Sacrament called the Lord's Supper. It is the true body and blood under bread and wine given to Christians to eat and to drink. In this sacred meal, Jesus feeds us and sustains us with the forgiveness of sins, strengthening us for a life of service to Him in this world, and preparing us for life forever with Him in heaven.

As the people of the Missouri Synod, we rejoice in Christ's presence, not only in our public worship assemblies, but also in our daily lives. Whether our place of service is small or great, humble or exalted in the eyes of the world, it is a holy calling in which we serve the Lord Jesus Christ with joyful hearts.

Together and individually, we strive to follow the example of Jesus who loved us and cared for us when we had no strength. Through our church's relief programs, our Synod is present with material and spiritual resources to care for those

What About The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod?

who suffer from natural disasters and tragedies in the world. We have built and help to maintain a large network of Lutheran hospitals, nursing homes, and human-care agencies to serve the sick, the elderly, the victims of abuse, those struggling with addictions, and many others coping with difficult situations and transitions in life.

The Missouri Synod has been a strong voice in America in defense of the sanctity and value of all human life from the unborn to the handicapped to the elderly. Because we are people-sensitive, we want to serve others as God has loved and served us in Jesus Christ.

Reaching Out Boldly with the Gospel

The Bible calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 19:29). Having paid our debt with His blood, Jesus rose from the dead and returned to the heavenly Father to reign over all things. He gave His disciples the command to go into all the world to baptize, teach and observe all that He commanded. He promised that He would continue to be with them through the ages.

Through congregations, and our regional and national offices, we strive to carry out our Lord’s command to make known His love and forgiveness to the whole world. The LCMS operates a worldwide mission program, sending more than 400 missionaries into nearly 70 countries around the world. These missionaries bring the good news of Jesus into places where His Name is not yet known and help to strengthen existing churches. Because each Christian is a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, it is our duty and privilege to tell the good news of Jesus to our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and all the people God puts in our lives.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is a respected leader in the field of Christian education. We place great emphasis on instruction in the Word. We recognize this as one of the most effective ways of reaching out boldly with the Gospel. Therefore, we administer the largest Protestant school system in the United States, operating more than 2,000 preschools, elementary schools, and high schools serving more than 250,000 students. We also value higher education, operating 10 colleges and universities. Our Synod’s schools are not merely private alternatives to public education, but Christ-centered, Word-saturated havens of God’s Spirit.

To maintain the high quality and spiritual direction of our schools, we educate a large number of Lutheran school teachers in our universities. These teachers are dedicated servants of the Lord who are able to lead students into the love of Christ. To fill our church pulpits with mature men of God who know the

Scriptures and are able to proclaim and apply the Word, we operate two seminaries.

Faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions

Martin Luther, the great Christian Reformer of the 16th century, boldly proclaimed the Bible’s most important message: that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and lived among us to defeat our enemies—sin, death and the devil. Luther believed and taught that Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross washed away the sins of the whole world, and that those who place their trust in Him are forgiven. They are declared righteous and are reconciled to God.

What Luther began in 1517 reached its culmination in 1580, when the official statements of Lutheran belief (the Lutheran Confessions) were gathered together in what is known as the Book of Concord. We place great value in retaining and advancing the cause of the Lutheran Reformation. We see in the Reformation movement the hand of God working to preserve the truth of His Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are committed to genuine, historical Lutheranism.

Marked by Peace and Unity in the Lord

Finally, we are united, not by our color, or our occupations, or our social and economic status, but by our union with the living Lord Jesus Christ and our common confession of the truths of His Word. We rejoice and live in the faith that God has given us. We are eager to share that faith with many others, so that all may come to know Jesus Christ, the one who brings us real peace, deep joy and life forever.

Welcome to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod!

To locate an LCMS congregation near you or to receive more information about us...

Call: 1-888-THE-LCMS (1-888-843-5267)

E-mail: INFOCENTER@LCMS.ORG

Fax: 1-888-LCMSEAX (1-888-526-7329)

Write: LCMS Information Center
1333 South Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, Missouri 63122-7295

Internet: www.lcms.org

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Telling the Good News about Jesus

What is our great privilege as Christians?

Through faith, we become disciples of Jesus Christ and, as such, it is our privilege to tell the good news about Jesus. We share with others the message of the salvation that is ours. And who are the people with whom we are to share the faith? Well, they are certainly our family members: husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, parents and so forth. But it does not stop there. That is only the beginning. It reaches out from there to our friends, to our fellow congregation members, to the people with whom we work, to our neighbors, and to the strangers we meet in our daily lives. Yes, this means actually talking to others about Jesus Christ and His great salvation.

Our privilege as Christians is to identify and recognize opportunities to tell others the good news about Jesus. And then, having recognized and identified those opportunities, ours is the privilege and responsibility of actually doing it—telling the good news about Jesus.

Where does telling the good news about Jesus begin?

It begins with our personal thankfulness for the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. Each of us daily sins much and because of that, if left to ourselves, we deserve nothing but God's wrath and eternal damnation. And so does everyone in the world who has not come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

But thanks be to God, something miraculous happened in your life! So great is the Father's love for all humanity, that He sent His precious Son into this world, to obey God perfectly, and to suffer and die for your sins and the sins of the whole world. Because of Jesus Christ, each and every one of your sins has been washed away. You are cleansed, pardoned and given the peace that passes all human understanding.

Of all the blessings that God will ever give you in your life, without a doubt the greatest one of all is the forgiveness that is yours in Jesus Christ, and with that forgiveness, the promise that when you die you will spend all eternity with the Lord in heaven. Thanks be to God for His mercy!

What do we do with the good news of Jesus?

God has not given us this great salvation merely for us to content ourselves with it, and to stick it away and treasure it privately. He has given us this great salvation and then called

each one of us to a life of being His witnesses. He gave us this great salvation to rejoice in, to live in and to share—yes, to share with others! He wants us to bring many others into His church, where they too will receive the blessings of God's Word and Sacraments, where they too will be made part of God's people—one of His own dear children. And what is more, God has promised that as we do, He will bless. For this fact too, we have every reason to thank and to praise the Lord.

The first president of our church, Dr. C.F.W. Walther made this extremely important point:

"Another major duty of a Synod that wants to be and remain an Evangelical Lutheran Synod is that it not seek its own glory, but only the glory of God, being intent not so much on its own growth, but rather on the growth of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of souls. You see, dear brethren, we are assembled here not for our own sake. We are in the faith, and by this faith we hope to be saved! But there are still many millions who have no faith! This is why we are here—so that we might bring salvation to as many people as we possibly can, so that the sad situation in Christendom and the corruption of the poor, blind heathen might be remedied. Only for this reason does our gracious God allow Christians to live on earth, that they might bring others to the saving faith. Otherwise God would immediately take a Christian to heaven as soon as he is converted."

Isn't evangelism just the pastor's job?

Evangelism is one of the pastor's important duties, but evangelism is not only the pastor's responsibility. Every Christian, through Baptism, is given the privilege of declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Whenever we speak the Gospel, it is an actual communication of the forgiveness of sins. Telling the good news about Jesus to another person is not merely a casual conversation, nor is it merely expressing pious wishes. When we share with others the good news of Jesus, we are actually conveying to them the forgiveness of sins, for that is what the Gospel is all about. When the Gospel is presented, God the Holy Spirit is present to work faith in the hearts of those who hear it.

What about Telling the Good News about Jesus?

Pastors and laypeople work together in the great task of making disciples of all nations, as together they tell the good news of Jesus. Together they work to make their congregations places where visitors feel welcome and places that have as a priority reaching out boldly with the Gospel. Hand in hand, pastors and congregations tell the good news about Jesus!

What is the starting place for telling the good news about Jesus?

It begins with our love for others. Love always takes an interest in the good of our neighbor, our friend, our family member, without trying to figure out what we will receive in return. God's love is poured out into our hearts and overflows into the lives of others. God doesn't need our good works, but our neighbors, our friends, and our family members certainly do.

Once we recognize how great is our own personal salvation and the enormous love of the Father's heart in saving us, we recognize that this love can remove barriers that stand in the way of our outreach to others. Barriers include apathy on our part and antagonism on the part of those with whom we speak. When we tell the good news of Jesus, following up that witness with love and kindness, there is something here that makes people pause and consider just what it is that makes Christians unique. It can lead people to ask, "What do you have? I need it."

How do we respond to our neighbor's question? We answer by telling the good news about Jesus. We explain that because of sin we are separated from God, but God loves us so much that He sent a Savior into this world to bring us back to Himself. The Bible says, "Always be ready to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have, but be gentle and respectful" (1 Peter 3:15). Telling the saving Gospel is the greatest service any Christian can perform for a neighbor, or family member, or even the most casual stranger.

Isn't it rude for me to impose my beliefs on another person?

Telling the good news about Jesus is certainly not rude, though the way we go about it might be. That we must avoid. The best way to tell the good news about Jesus is to do so gently and kindly. Telling the good news about Jesus is not "imposing our beliefs on another person." We need to shake ourselves free from the myth of our day that all beliefs are equally true, and one is no better than the other. We do respect the beliefs of others, but we can't give them "equal time" when it comes to the question of where that person is going to spend all eternity.

Telling the good news of Jesus is more than merely "shar-

ing my opinions." It is actually giving another person the Word of Life—the powerful, faith-creating Word of God by which God brings that person into His kingdom. So, telling the good news of Jesus is not rude, it is the most wonderful gift you could give to another human being.

What can be done to prepare ourselves to tell others about Jesus?

To witness about Jesus we need to be strongly in the Word and Sacraments. In so doing, we are kept by the Lord in constant contact with the power and strength for witnessing, our Lord Jesus Himself. Receiving forgiveness and peace, we then are able to share it with others.

Turning to the Lord in prayer is the next thing we do when we wish to tell the good news about Jesus. Just imagine how much better we will be able to recognize opportunities to tell the good news about Jesus when we ask our heavenly Father to show them to us and then pray for the courage to speak. When we ask for open doors to tell the good news, we will be amazed to notice how doors are open and just waiting for us to walk through, telling the good news about Jesus!

Suggested Resources

Excellent resources having to do with our church's emphasis on telling the good news about Jesus may be found on the Internet at: www.lcms.org/310.

1. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, (CPH: 1992) II:262.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Christian Families

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christian families face enormous pressures in our world today. It is important that they have a good understanding of what God intends for the family and how they best can respond to the many challenges that confront them.

What does God say about families in His Word, the Bible?

In the beginning, God created men and women to live together with one another as husbands and wives, and through their marriages to bring children into the world. We read in Gen. 2:22–24: “The Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Our Lord Jesus Christ affirmed the divine institution of marriage during his earthly ministry (Matt. 19:5).

Through the Apostle Paul, the Lord revealed that Christian husbands and wives are to love and serve one another, modeling before the world the love Christ has for His bride, the church. In Ephesians 5, St. Paul wrote: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior.

“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy. . . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of His body.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband” (Eph. 5:21–33).

In this powerful description of marriage, there is no room for husbands to “lord it over” their wives, nor for wives to disregard their husband’s role of “headship” in the home. The key is mutual submission to and love for one another, modeled after Christ’s love for the church, and the church’s submission to Christ her Lord.

Parents are to provide discipline to their children with love and compassion, doing what is best for their children. We read in Eph. 6:4: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” And children are to honor and obey their parents, as the Lord commands, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.’ ‘Honor your father and your mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Eph. 6:1–3).

What are some of the cultural trends impacting families?

As we review what the Bible has to say about families, we quickly realize how far many of our cultural trends are from God’s will for families.

Christian families are bombarded by signals which contradict God’s Word. Popular culture—through movies, music, magazines, books and especially television—inundates us with wrong messages. The signal is sent that a sexual relationship outside of marriage, or before marriage, is perfectly natural, or that even a homosexual lifestyle is merely an alternative to “traditional” marriage. Children are led to believe that being disobedient and disrespectful to parents is normal, even amusing, or that the elderly are to be viewed as a burden, or subjects for humor. So much of popular culture appeals to humanity’s most sinful inclinations, and encourages them in a barrage of images and words.

The pressure on our children—particularly our teenagers—to do whatever is necessary to be “popular” among their friends is sometimes difficult for parents to understand and appreciate. Our young people are often caught up in destructive lifestyles and behaviors, encouraged by popular music, which encourages rebelliousness and disdain for life and the dignity of their fellow human beings. As our teenagers grow older, they are given the impression that “living together” without marriage is perfectly acceptable. How tragic

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it is when their own families do nothing to resist this behavior!

Men in our culture are encouraged to indulge their lusts and selfish desires. So little respect or attention is given to the man who wishes to be a faithful husband or father. How many children today grow up without a loving and responsible father in the home? The horrendous consequences of this trend will only become greater as we move into the future.

Women too are pressured to take a dim view of what God has given them. They are pressured to view childbearing as less than fulfilling, something perhaps only to be tolerated, and not to be enjoyed as a gift from God. They too face temptations to disregard God's expectations for them when they are wives and mothers, or to view marriage as something to be abandoned when it becomes inconvenient for them.

Yes, we surely do recognize that popular cultural trends often convey messages totally contrary to our Lord's Word and His will for Christian families. This needs to be recognized and resisted.

What can a Christian family do to deal with the challenges of our day?

Openly facing the issues is the first step. Pretending that problems do not exist will certainly not help. Nor will it do for a family simply to hope that they will not be faced with problems. Ignoring reality will not make it go away.

It is crucial for Christian parents to spend both quality and quantity time with their children. Reading with their young children, discussing the questions they have and being there to support and encourage them is extremely important.

Husbands and wives need to take time out of busy and hectic schedules to simply talk to one another, discussing the needs they have and the problems they are experiencing, working together to grow in their love for one another, and for their children.

More importantly, Christians need to pray for the Lord's blessing on their marriages and families, asking God to forgive them for their sins and failures as parents and spouses, and then turning to the Lord's mercy through their Savior Jesus Christ.

Christian families need to make every-Sunday worship an absolute priority. As families are gathered by God around His Word and Sacraments, they receive forgiveness, life and salvation—the strength they need to cope with the challenges of daily life.

What role do daily devotions have in the life of the Christian family?

One of the most important things a family can do is spend

time together in the Word of God.

Key ingredients for the family's devotional time are the Scriptures, the hymnal and the Small Catechism. These are excellent resources for meaningful time together in the Word of God.

Parents should begin reading and reciting the chief parts of the Small Catechism with their children when they are very young, helping them learn the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed, and then working on the explanations, building as time goes on.

Parents need to discuss their faith with their children, pray with them and encourage their children in love to do what is right, not hesitating to say "no" when necessary. And always, parents will want to be for their children a model of the Heavenly Father's love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How can parents help their children resist temptations?

Parents often overlook the very important role they play simply by the way they themselves handle life. A parent can provide an important role model for his or her children.

If a man constantly displays a harsh and fierce temper at home, uses foul language and acts disrespectfully toward his wife, it is little wonder why his son would grow up with similar attitudes and behaviors. If a woman constantly gripes and points out every fault, again, there is little surprise when her children do the same when they grow up.

Christian parents need to model the faith, both to their children and others around them. St. Paul wrote that a Christian marriage is to be an image of Christ's love for the church. This is both an awesome responsibility and a joyous privilege.

May God bless our families richly with His loving mercy, strengthening them as they seek to love one another and serve their Lord and Savior.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Angels

It seems as though angels have captured the imagination of people everywhere. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation about angels, along with superstitions and unscriptural understandings. This pamphlet will provide a Biblical perspective on angels.

Do angels exist?

The Word of God—not popular television shows or magazine articles—is our only reliable source for knowing what angels are, and what they do. The Bible teaches us that angels were made by God during the six days of creation. Before creation there was only God (John 1:1-3), and after creation, we are told that on the seventh day God “rested from all the work of creating he had done” (Gen. 2:3b). The Bible does not indicate on which day of creation God made angels. But angels are very real.

What does the word “angel” mean?

The word “angel” comes from a Greek word that means “messenger.” Angels are God’s messengers. Elsewhere in the Bible, angels are described as spirits (cf. Acts 23:9; Heb. 1:14). The word “angel” is actually a description of what they do.

What are angels?

Angels are spirits. They are beings who do not have a physical body. Jesus Himself said, “a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39). Evil angels too are described as not having “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12). In the Scriptures, when angels do appear in human form, this is only a momentary appearance for those who need to see them. Angels are not gods. They are God’s creation and serve His holy and perfect will. The good angels are said to be “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14), sent by God to serve us, His people.

Are angels human?

Human beings are the crown of God’s creation. Only of human beings, and no other creature, did God say, “Let us make man in our own image” (Gen. 1:26). Furthermore, the Scriptures reveal that only into human beings did God breathe the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). Also, God did not give angels rule over His creation. This privilege He gave only to mankind (Gen. 1:26-28). Angels are not human beings. They exist as spirits who serve God and His people.

Do human beings become angels when they die?

No, human beings do not become angels when they die. The Scriptures are clear on this point. Until the last day, the

souls of the dead are before the Lord, enjoying peace and rest in His presence, awaiting the final day when they will receive glorified bodies for all eternity (see 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 5:17; Rev. 7).

Are angels intelligent beings?

The Bible describes angels as having both intelligence and a will. The good angels know and follow the wisdom of God, which He has revealed through Christ to His church (Eph. 3:10). They gladly serve us, who are the heirs of the salvation Christ has won for us (Heb. 1:14). However, angels do not know all things. For instance, they do not know the thoughts of our hearts (1 Kings 8:39).

How powerful are angels?

Angels are extremely powerful beings. They are described as “mighty ones” (Ps. 103:20; 2 Thess. 1:7). The good angels guard and protect God’s children (Ps. 91:11-13). The power of the angels is never unlimited, but is always subject to the will and authority of God.

Evil angels too are powerful beings. The Bible tell us that they hold captive all unbelievers (Luke 11:21-22; Eph. 2:2). Believers in Christ are able to withstand the temptation of evil angels through the power of God (Eph. 6:10-17).

Where are angels?

Angels, like God, do not inhabit the same physical dimension that human beings inhabit. From time to time, they are ordered by God to appear in our physical dimension. Thus, while there are times when angels will make an appearance at a distinct place (cf. Acts 12:7), they remain beings that inhabit no physical space.

How many angels are there?

The Bible does not give us an exact number, but does clearly teach that there are incredibly large numbers of angels who serve God. Scripture speaks of “ten thousand times ten thousand angels” (Dan. 7:10). Elsewhere Scripture speaks of “a great company of the heavenly host” (Luke 2:13).

From every indication in the Bible, there are an unimaginably large number of angels, of whom we are totally unaware most of the time. There is a fixed and limited number of angels, never increasing or decreasing. Unlike human beings, angels do not marry and have children (Mark 12:25). They are immortal.

Are all angels the same?

Within the large numbers of angels there are apparently cer-

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tain orders or classes of angels. Scripture speaks of “cherubim” (Gen. 3:24; Ps. 80:1), “seraphim” (Is. 6:2), “thrones or powers or rulers or authorities” (Col. 1:16), “archangel” (1 Thess. 4:16).

Also among the evil angels there are ranks and classes of angels (Matt. 25:41). Satan is described as the “prince of the devils” (Luke 11:15). It is pointless, however, to try to invent complicated divisions and ranks of angels, since Scripture itself does not provide us with this information.

What are evil angels, and what do they do?

Originally, all angels God created were good and did His will perfectly. At some point after God created them, some angels chose to rebel against Him. They fell away from God and into great sin and evil. At that point, they were confirmed in their evil condition. There is no hope for them. In Matt. 8:29, they recognize that there will be a time when they must suffer eternal torment and punishment for their rebellion against God.

Satan is the chief evil angel, the “prince of demons” (Luke 11:15). Here is how our Lord Jesus Christ describes Satan: “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

When precisely the evil angels rebelled and fell away from God we cannot say for sure, but we do know it was some time at the very beginning of the world. Most Christian church fathers believe that the evil angels’ original sin was pride, based on the fact that Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve was an appeal to their pride. Also, 1 Tim. 3:6 indicates that pride was the cause of the devil’s condemnation.

The devil is our great enemy, who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The Bible tell us that the devil is the cause of unbelief in the world (Eph. 2:1-2). Every person who does not believe the good news of Christ Jesus is thinking and doing what the devil wants. Unbelievers are described in the Bible as being in the devil’s kingdom and under his power (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). The very fact that people do not realize this, and even deny it, is the devil’s greatest deception. The devil is so deceptive, at times he will even disguise himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). In fact, the Old Testament once refers to Satan as “Lucifer,” which means, “light bearer” (Isa. 14:12; KJV).

We need to keep in mind that all the Bible says about evil angels, and their eternal punishment, is for the purpose of making us recognize the need to repent and to believe in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, who has ransomed mankind by His death, and saved us for eternal life, not in hell, but in heaven.

What do good angels do?

Good angels enjoy the blessing of being able to see God. They are in the immediate presence of God, always beholding

His great glory, majesty and power (Matt. 18:10). This is called the “beatific vision,” which all Christians will enjoy one day when they are in heaven.

God’s Word reveals the following things about the activity of good angels: They praise God (Is. 6:3; Luke 2:13), and they are the Lord’s servants in the world and in the Church (Ps. 103:20-21; Heb. 1:14).

God sends angels to serve and to protect Christian believers in their work and their callings in life (Ps. 91:11-12). They attend to the dying (Luke 16:22). They care for children (Matt. 18:10). Angels are deeply interested in all that occurs in the Church. They adore and take great joy in the work of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world (Luke 2:13; Eph. 3:10). They rejoice over every sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).

Scripture mentions the presence of angels at every great event in the Kingdom of God. Angels were present when God gave His law on Mount Sinai (Deut. 33:2; Gal. 3:19). Angels were present at the conception, birth, resurrection and ascension of our Lord (Luke 1:26; 2:11; Mark 1:13; 24:5ff; Acts 1:10ff). Angels will come with Jesus when He returns on the last day (Matt. 13:41ff.; 24:31).

The Bible tell us that angels are present in the public worship of Christians (1 Cor. 11:10). God also uses angels to help the family and to preserve law and order (Gen. 24:7; Matt. 18:10; Dan. 10:13).

How are we to treat angels?

We need to praise and thank God for good angels. We are told that we are to take care not to offend them through sin and unbelief (1 Cor. 11:10; 1 Tim. 5:21). But the Scriptures are also clear that we must not pray to angels, nor offer them our worship. The angels themselves protest any worship given to them (Rev. 22:8-9).

As believers, we have the privilege of having angels surrounding us and protecting us and working to do God’s good and perfect will in our lives. Our hope and trust is always in God, whom we know sends His angels to watch over us and to see us through whatever difficulty in life may come our way.

Because of our Lord Jesus Christ’s perfect life and sacrificial death for the sins of the world, we have the assurance of the complete and total forgiveness of all our sins. We know that God loves and cares for us as His own dear children. Furthermore, we know that the Lord sends His angels to care for us in order that some day we may join them, and all the company of heaven, in seeing God and singing His praises for all eternity.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Death and Dying

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Christians we have a unique perspective on death, a perspective that is radically different from the world around us. This pamphlet is intended to help you, or someone you know, face death and understand what death is, and how Christians face death and deal with grief.

What is death?

The Bible teaches that death is not an annihilation in which we cease to exist. The Scriptures teach that death is the separation of our eternal soul from our mortal bodies. Our bodies rest in the grave, awaiting the final day when soul and body shall be reunited. At the moment of death, our souls, and the souls of all those who die in faith, immediately are in the presence of Christ, and will enjoy His presence, peace and joy until the great day of the resurrection of all flesh.

Is Death Natural?

It is popular to think of death as something that is “natural.” Some people even are heard to say, “Death is a friend.” Nothing could be further from the truth! Death is a horrible reality. It is the enemy we each face at the end of our lives. Death is the awful curse that fell on creation through the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Through that sin, death came into the world and so death spread to all of humanity because all people sin.

God did not create human beings to die, but to live—to live forever and enjoy Him forever. Death was not part of our created nature, but only something that came about as a result of the sinful disobedience of our first parents—a sinful disobedience that has been passed down to every human being since that time.

Why must Christians die?

Scripture clearly indicates that Christians too must pass through death to life. We learn that our bodies are actually dead right now because of sin (“The body is dead because of sin” Rom. 8:10). And so Christians too must die.

The sting of death and sense of God’s judgment are horrible punishments on those who have no faith in Christ as their Savior. They face, at the end of their life, only the prospect of an unknown future, or a terrifying vision of eternal damnation.

However, the death of a Christian is not death in as full a sense as it is for the non-Christian. For the Christian, eternal life and joy follows death, for our Lord Jesus Christ is the One who walks with them through the “valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23).

What is the Christian’s response to death and dying?

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” These familiar words of Psalm 23 chart the direction for a Christian individual or family facing the reality of death. Here God identifies our greatest enemy in such times—fear. Since none of us among the living has ever tasted death, we respond to the prospect of death (whether our own or that of someone we love) with fear. Fear is natural.

Now, if fear is the enemy, who is our ally? The Psalmist continues: “For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” Jesus, our Good Shepherd, the One who laid down His life for the sheep, is our companion on the dark, winding road that leads through the valley of the shadow of death. The journey is not optional. Sooner or later each of us, no matter how old or young, will walk that path. This will happen until that day when Jesus comes again—when, at the last trumpet, the faithful will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

But here is the important part: I walk through the valley. The One who is with us in that journey, who leads us on, bears the scars of death in His living body. He was dead, but now He lives forevermore. All who believe and are baptized will be saved; they have a share in His victory over death. Christians, therefore, are able to see death not merely as an unfortunate reality to be endured, but as a defeated enemy. The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting are the sure and certain realities promised to all who remain faithful unto death.

What happens after we die?

For unbelievers, there is the “second death” (Rev. 20:14) in which their souls are immediately in the presence of Satan and immediately begin to suffer the torment of eternal punishment in hell, from which there is no possibility of escape. On the day of judgment, their bodies join their souls in hell.

Those who trust in the redemption won by Christ our Lord pass from death to life. This is why the Bible uses so many

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comforting images to describe the death of the child of God. Here are some of the phrases the Holy Spirit uses to describe a Christian's death: being gathered to one's people; departure in peace; departure and being with Christ; a turning away from the evil to come; sleep; rest; passing from death to life; deliverance from all evil; and, finally, "gain."

Gain? How can death be gain? When a baptized child of God passes through death—a son or daughter of God who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God—then death is gain. Through death the children of God pass into an eternity of joy and peace with their heavenly Father.

Each Christian, therefore, may rejoice in the life that Christ has won and gives to him or her through the Word and Sacraments. When we die, our souls await the final consummation of all things on the day Christ returns. We shall receive glorified bodies that are free from tears, pain, sickness and age—perfectly renewed and glorified resurrection bodies.

In these new and glorified bodies, we shall spend all eternity in heaven, enjoying the presence of God and all His saints, forever and ever. The overwhelming joy of this truth is almost too much for us to even begin to comprehend, but it is true!

How do Christians face death?

Christians face death as they face life—with their eyes fixed firmly on Jesus. We cling to the promises of His Word, which, when facing death, seem even more wonderful and powerful. One of the most beautiful promises our Lord gave to us is found in John 14:2–3 where He says, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

We realize that no matter how our lives may end, there is one thing of which we can be absolutely certain. We shall pass from death to life, from this life to the life beyond, with our Lord. And there we shall rejoin all of our loved ones and others who have gone before us trusting in Christ their Savior.

How does a Christian deal with grief?

Christians should not hesitate to cry. Our Lord wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. We too find ourselves in tears at the pain of our loss. But we do not sorrow in the same way as those who have no hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess. 4:14). We look forward to a grand reunion with loved ones who have died in faith. Still, we miss them. The separation can seem overwhelming at times. This pain is part and parcel of grieving; it is to be under-

stood, not resisted.

Grieving for most people is a journey. It is a journey from the initial pain of parting, toward healing and reconciliation with our loss. The pain gradually subsides, but the loss remains. Grief has many dimensions and may seem unpredictable in its ebb and flow; yet in Christ we find strength along the way. For in this journey we are not alone.

Christians find that family and friends are God's gifts to help them bear the pain of loss, which at times seems unbearable. Such company is important in dealing constructively with grief. It must be consciously sought out by those who mourn. Most who mourn find it very helpful to tell the story of the death of those they love to family and to trusted friends. The repeated narrating of that story brings release and insight into the joy and sorrow of the parting. Friends and family will want to lend a listening ear and heart for such telling and retelling; it is a rare privilege to be entrusted with such treasures. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Above all, Christian mourners will turn to the worship fellowship of the church and the rich comfort of God's holy Word and Sacrament for healing along the path of grief. For Jesus Christ abides within His church through His sacred means of grace. Through these channels He bestows the riches of His forgiveness, life and salvation now, and to all eternity. One day we too shall stand with that great multitude of heaven who hear these blessed words:

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:3–4).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Pastors

Why does God give us pastors?

When we look at our lives and measure them according to the holiness and righteousness of the Lord God Almighty we are moved to say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." We receive forgiveness of sins, and become righteous before God, by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ lived, suffered, died and rose again for us, and that for His sake our sins are forgiven, and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.

But how do we receive this faith? In order to obtain such faith, God instituted the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. It is through the Word and Sacraments that the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases Him, in those who hear the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins.

Pastors accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage. They serve us with Christ's Word and Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit gives us forgiveness, life and salvation. Therefore, we believe, teach and confess that "when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command . . . this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself" (Small Catechism).

How does God give us pastors?

The pastoral office is a gift that God has given to the church, as Paul says, "When he ascended on high he gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8, 11-12). Paul enumerates pastors and teachers among the gifts belonging to the church, and he adds that they are given for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. Therefore, the right of electing and ordaining ministers is a duty and responsibility of the church.

Through a congregation's call, God places a man to be the shepherd of that congregation. "Our churches teach that nobody shall publicly preach or teach or administer the sacraments without a regular call" (Augsburg Confession, Article XIV). Only those who are called and ordained to the pastoral office may exercise it publicly. Although the Holy Scriptures make it clear that all the baptized are priests, called to offer God sacrifices of thanks and praise (1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10), it also teaches that in the church there is an office to teach, feed, guide and rule, which Christians, by virtue of their general calling as Christians, do not possess (1 Cor. 12:29;

Rom. 10:15; 1 Tim. 5:17; James 3:1). While all Christians through Baptism are made part of God's royal priesthood, not all Christians are ministers.

When a man receives and accepts his first call to serve as a pastor, he is then ordained. Ordination is a confirmation of a man's call into the ministry of the church and is the historic and apostolic rite by which, through Word and prayer, a man is set apart for service to Christ and His church as a pastor. During his ordination, he is also installed into the pastoral office of the congregation that calls him. In the future, if he accepts other calls to serve, he will be installed, but not ordained again.

How are pastors described?

The word "pastor" comes from the Latin word for "shepherd." Shepherding is a predominant picture in the Bible for both the work of Christ and the work of our pastors (cf. Ps. 23; Ezek. 34; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2-3). The Scriptures indicate that the Holy Spirit appoints men to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28).

Pastors are also referred to frequently in the Bible as "ministers," a word that literally means "slave" (Acts 26:16; Rom. 15:16; Eph. 3:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). In 2 Cor. 4:5 Paul describes pastors this way: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your slaves, for Jesus' sake." Pastors model their ministry on the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve. The pastoral office is an office of loving, caring service to the people of God, in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Oversight" is another less frequently used term that describes the pastor's work. Pastoral oversight is the spiritual duty of rebuking and warning Christ's people when they fall into sin, feeding and caring for them with the Gospel, and guarding and defending them from false teachers and their false teachings. Pastoral oversight is not to be confused with institutional management or leadership, like a CEO type of position.

Our Lutheran Confessions refer to the pastoral office as the "Preaching Office," to which men are called and ordained. We also speak of the office of the holy ministry. The ministry is holy not because of the men who are in it, but because of the One who established it. It is holy because of what the Lord is doing for His people through the work of His pastors.

What about Pastors?

What does God expect of pastors?

Pastors do not “represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the Church’s call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16) ‘He who hears you, hears me.’ When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ’s place and stead” (Apology VII/VIII.28).

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Tim. 3:2-4 that a pastor is to be “above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.” In 1 Tim. 3:6 we read that a pastor is not to be “a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” In Titus 1:9 is it is said that pastors “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine, and refute it.”

Although some Protestant churches ordain women to the pastoral office, this is a 20th-century innovation. For more than 1,900 years, there has been nearly unanimous faithfulness to the Word of God, given through the Apostle Paul, that women are not to serve as pastors (see 1 Cor. 14:33-35, 37; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1-2 and Titus 1:5-6).

Because it is God who places men into the pastoral office, through the congregation, only God, through the congregation, can properly remove a man from the pastoral office. Pastors are forgiven sinners, as are all baptized children of God. Thus, we do not expect perfection of our pastors, any more than pastors would expect congregations to be perfect. The awesome forgiveness of Jesus Christ sustains us all. A “hire and fire” attitude toward our pastors must not enter into our thinking. Removing a man from the pastoral office must be based only on clear, Biblical, criteria; namely, persistent adherence to false doctrine, a scandalous life, or willful neglect of duty.

What are the duties and commitments of pastors?

Our pastors preach, catechize, administer the Sacraments, hear confession from penitent sinners, and comfort the sick. The church knows that even the most faithful pastor can never do enough of these things, but the church also knows these are the precious duties our pastors are given to do. We must never allow other things to take priority over these key pastoral duties and activities.

With the help of God, our pastors have the responsibility to speak the truth in love, but this duty must be understood correctly.

Our pastors are not “people pleasers,” watering down the truths of God’s Word. Pastors pledge themselves uncondition-

ally, and without qualification, to the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, as a true and faithful exposition of the Word of God.

This strong doctrinal commitment safeguards the teaching of the truth of the Word of God in the congregation. Also, it protects the pastor from unjust criticism when he stands up for the truths of God’s Word. By means of this strong doctrinal foundation, both pastor and people are able to evaluate their relationship to one another and the work of the congregation.

How do we support our pastors?

The most important way we support our pastors is through our prayers, asking the Lord of the Church to give our pastors wisdom, strength, courage and peace, asking Him to bless our pastors’ ministry among us and to work powerfully through their proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Our children should be taught each night to remember their pastor in their prayers.

The members of our congregations assist their pastor as they encourage and support him in the ministry entrusted to him. They volunteer their time, by serving in a variety of ways in the parish, and give of their treasures. The pastor is not a “hired hand,” who is to do all the work of the congregation. Telling the good news of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, in many different situations and opportunities in life, is a task and duty given to all Christians, not only pastors (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Peter 3:15).

God’s Word also has these things to say about how we are to support our pastors. 1 Cor. 9:14: “The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” Gal. 6:6-7: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” 1 Thess. 5:12-13: “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” Heb. 13:17: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

What a blessing pastors have been to God’s people down through the ages! May God continue to bless the church mightily through His gift of pastors.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The New Millennium

As we approached the year 2001, the beginning of a new millennium, we heard more and more predictions about the end of the world. There is a great deal of confusion about the end of the world and what the new millennium might bring. What a blessing it is to have the Word of God to help us sort through the many speculations we hear about these things!

Will the world come to an end in the third millennium?

It is simply impossible to answer this question with either a definite “yes” or a definite “no.” During his earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ was asked when the end of the world would be. His answer was very clear. He said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt. 24:36). The Bible repeatedly warns us about trying to set a date for the return of Christ (Mark 13:32-33; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 3:10). We are not to speculate when Jesus will return. Rather, we are to be ready at all times for His return (Matt. 24:33, 42-44; Luke 21:28; 1 Thess. 5:6).

What are the signs of the end times?

Every generation should expect Christ’s return as they see the signs of the end times. The most important sign of the end is the preaching of the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10). The time between Christ’s birth and His return is the great missionary age—the time that God is calling all people to be saved. It is the time that was predicted by the Old Testament prophets (see Isa. 2:1-4; 42:6-7; 49:6; 52:10; Amos 9:11-12).

Other signs that the world will come to an end include wars, earthquakes, famines and widespread diseases. These are all indications of God’s divine judgment. The Bible describes these signs in many places (see, for instance, Isa. 19:2; 2 Chron. 15:6; Matt. 24:6-8; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-11, 25-26; Joel 2:30-31). We are not to see every incident of natural disasters as a direct punishment from God (cf. Luke 13:1-5). The upheaval and troubles in the world of nature should always remind us that our present fallen world is under the curse of God on account of sin (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:19-22). These signs show us God’s wrath and are signals to us that all sinners need to repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9).

Christians especially are urged by God in His Word to regard these signs as “birth pangs” of a new and better world to come (Rom. 8:22; Matt. 24:8; Rev. 21:1-4). Believers in Christ can take comfort in God’s promise to protect and preserve us even in the midst of suffering (Rev. 3:10; 7:3-4).

Jesus warned us that trouble would lie ahead for His people (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-20; 16:33). Because the world will continue to oppose the Kingdom of God, Christians can expect to suffer persecution in a variety of forms throughout the time between Christ’s birth and His second coming. It is for this reason that God calls on us to endure to the end, and gives us the strength to do so (Matt. 24:9; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19).

What will happen when Christ returns?

The Bible teaches that the following events will take place when Jesus returns:

1. Christ will come visibly and all people will see Him (Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:27, 30; Luke 17:22-24; 21:27, 35; Mark 13:24-26; 14:62; Rev. 1:7).
2. Christ will come in glory surrounded by His angels (Matt. 13:39-43, 49; 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 19:11-14; Titus 2:13; Jude 14, 21; 1 Pet. 4:13; Zech. 14:3).
3. When Christ returns, a bodily resurrection of all the dead will take place. Believers will be raised to salvation and unbelievers to damnation (John 5:27-29; 6:39-40, 44, 54; Rev. 20:11-15; 1 Cor. 15:12-57; Dan. 12:1-2). All believers, both the dead and the living, will be “caught up” to “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Death will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-57; Rev. 20:14).
4. When Christ returns, He will judge all people, both the living and the dead (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:27; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Jude 14-15; Rev. 20:11-15). Believers will receive eternal salvation and unbelievers eternal damnation (Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Pet. 1:4-5, 7; 5:4; 1 John 3:2; Heb. 9:28; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:6-10). Satan and Antichrist will be destroyed (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 12:10-11).
5. When Christ returns, a “new heavens and a new earth” will be created (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Nowhere, however, do the Scriptures teach that at His return Christ will establish a this-worldly, political kingdom or “millennium.”

What about the New Millennium?

What is Millennialism?

Millennialism describes a variety of erroneous speculations about a supposed 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ, here on earth, during which there will be perfect peace and the complete victory of the church on earth. These views err in that they place too much emphasis on highly figurative language in certain portions of the Bible.

Dispensational Premillennialism divides God's dealings with our world into seven distinct "dispensations." From the age of innocence before the Fall, to the Millennial Kingdom, this theory holds that God is working through periods of history, culminating in a series of dramatic battles on earth, after which Christ will return in glory, destroy all His enemies, and establish a 1,000-year reign on earth of prosperity and peace, with worship centered around a rebuilt new temple in Jerusalem.

Historic *Premillennialism* is the view that the return of Christ will be a one-time event following a period of intense suffering and tribulation. Christians will be resurrected from the dead and those still living will join Christ, who will destroy the Antichrist and Satan, and will begin a 1,000-year reign on earth. During this 1,000 years, there will be perfect tranquillity and peace. After the 1,000 years is over, Satan will be let loose for a little while and then the end will come in one last great battle. After that, the judgment will begin, sending people either to heaven or hell for all eternity.

Postmillennialism is the theory that after a 1,000-year period of peace and tranquillity, Christ will return, and the resurrection of all the dead will take place. Postmillennialists do not believe that the 1,000 years will be a literal 1,000 years, but it does claim that there will be a distinct period of peace and prosperity for the church before the return of Christ.

Amillennialism, however, is the teaching that there will be no millennium of perfect peace on earth before or after Christ's second coming. The Lutheran church, on the basis of the Bible, holds to this point of view. The Bible does not teach that there will be a definite 1,000-year period of time during which Christ will reign on earth visibly. Christ Himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36); furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that we Christians are looking for "a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:13)—not an era of prosperity on the present earth.

What are Christians to be doing as the new millennium approaches?

God wants all people to come to believe and trust in His Son for their salvation and to lead holy lives in service to Him, eagerly awaiting with patience and perseverance His return on

the last day (Rom. 13:12-14; Titus 2:1-13; 1 Pet. 1:13-15; 2 Pet. 3:11-12; 1 John 3:2-3; 1 Tim. 6:14; Matt. 25:14-30).

Our Lord says to us: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt. 24:42). This is a constant theme in Scripture. St. Paul writes, "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled" (1 Thess. 5:6).

The Apostle Peter describes what Christians are to be doing: "In keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Pet. 3:13-14).

As the end of the world draws closer, each day the Lord gives us is one more day to serve Him and to be a part of the great effort to proclaim the Gospel. This is the great mission Christ has given His church: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Our Lord promises to be with us until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20), as we continue to tell the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35).

Finally, our Lord wants us to be watchful for His coming. We have the assurance that because of His death and resurrection for us, we have the full and free forgiveness of our sins. We may not know all the details about the end of the world, but we do not need to be anxious about them. Nor should we get all caught up in speculation about the end times. We live in the great period of the "now" and the "not yet." We have salvation in Christ right now. But we do not yet have the final blessing of our salvation: life forever with the Lord in heaven.

Though we do not know when our Lord will return, we are able to look forward to His return with confident hope and joy (Rev. 22:20): " 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

For further study

Much of the information contained in this pamphlet is based on the excellent study from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled, "*The End Times: A Study on Eschatology and Millennialism*" [September 1989]. You may purchase a copy from Concordia Publishing House.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Christian Stewardship

I have a suspicion Christian stewardship is one of those areas to which we really do not give adequate attention. Unfortunately, at times when stewardship is discussed it is done from the perspective of the Law, not the Gospel. In fact, it may well be that a number of people think that stewardship is only about raising funds for the church's budget. That is genuinely unfortunate, for, as we shall see, Christian stewardship is much more than this.

To fully appreciate the privilege we have of being Christian stewards, we need to return to those bedrock truths of the Christian faith so that we will continually live in appreciation of the glorious truths of God's Word, truths that set us free for lives of Christian stewardship.

Why are we here?

The age-old question is this, "Why am I here?" We need to admit that sometimes our answer goes something like this, "I am here in order to accumulate as many things as I possibly can in order to have a successful life. I work to earn money to buy more things."

But the real answer to that question is found in the first book of the Bible, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27). We are here because we are God's creation.

There was perfect and complete harmony between human beings and God. He created mankind to be in perfect fellowship with Him, reflecting His glory. He wanted this perfect relationship to continue forever.

What went wrong?

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the beautiful relationship God intended them to have with Him was destroyed through their sinful rebellion against Him. "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). To this very day and hour this fall impacts all areas of life.

From the moment of our conception we are sinful (Ps. 51:5). By nature, every thought and imagination of human beings from their childhood is evil continually (Gen. 8:21). Human beings, as they come into this world, are at war with God (Rom. 8:7), and "alienated from the life of God" through the ignorant blindness of their sinful condition (Eph. 4:18).

That is the most fundamental challenge and problem we face in regard to Christian stewardship. Ever since the fall into sin, human beings are always turned in upon themselves, with lives that revolve around what they want, what they need, and what they are concerned about.

Believers are constantly fighting against the old sinful flesh that wants to pull them back into these old patterns of thought and action.

How did God deal with our greatest need?

God promised to send a Savior when Adam and Eve fell (Gen. 3:15). When the time had come, God sent His Son into our world, to live perfectly under His Law, and to be the perfect atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (Gal. 4:4, 5). By His innocent suffering and bitter death, our Lord Jesus Christ opened to us the gates of paradise.

By the shedding of His holy, precious blood, Jesus has cleansed you from all of your sin—all of it, not just some of it—all of it. You are forgiven. Your debt is paid. In Christ, you have become a new creation. He has opened all the doors that sin had closed (Is. 59:2).

He has pulled us out of destruction and made us new creatures to live under Him in His kingdom, serving Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. We are saved from eternal damnation and saved for an eternity of life with God that begins right here and now.

The source and strength of Christian stewardship is the blood-bought salvation that is so richly and daily given us in Christ. We are given a new purpose in life and a new hope. We are given new hearts and renewed minds. We are set on a new path of life. We are freed from our former slavery to sinful patterns of thought and action.

Having been saved redeemed and forgiven by our good and gracious God, we now live in the reality of that salvation. We realize that life is not just about us, but about God's will for us. We live now in the awareness that all things belong to God. We are called to be stewards of those things God has entrusted to us.

What is the steward's highest priority?

Luke 19:11-27 is the parable of the talents. I would encourage you to take a few moments to read this parable.

What About Christian Stewardship?

Here our Lord clearly indicates how He wishes us to be stewards of His precious Gospel, the good news of salvation that is ours in Christ. Jesus told this parable as He was on His way to Jerusalem for the final time in His earthly life. He knew that soon He would no longer be present visibly with His disciples.

God has given us the soul-saving and life-changing Gospel through Word and Sacraments. These Gospel-treasures are to be guarded, defended and preserved, as Jude 3 makes clear. We are not, however, simply to bury these treasures, instead we are to make good use of them!

Christian stewards use the treasure of the Gospel in their own lives by faithfully gathering every Sunday around the Word and Sacraments. There they receive the life and strength and hope and power that makes Christian stewardship possible. We gather regularly with other Christians to study the Bible so we can grow in our understanding and knowledge about God's Holy Word. And having so gathered around Word and Sacraments, we then are ready to "invest" these treasures.

Stewards don't just bury this treasure, they put it to work! This is our sacred trust and responsibility. Christ wants us to share the saving Gospel He has committed to our trust, so that with it and through it, others may be won for Him for all eternity (Mark 5:19–20). He died for all (2 Cor. 5:15) and it is His will that none should perish, but that all should be brought to repentance and faith (2 Peter 3:9).

As Christian stewards joyfully use the greatest gift of all—the Gospel given through Word and Sacrament—they will find that priorities in their life change and take on a new perspective. No longer do they find themselves living only for themselves. Rather, they recognize they are part of the most dramatic, exciting and wonderful life possible—life with God and life in service to Him for the sake of others.

St. Paul puts it so beautifully when he writes in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

How do Christian stewards use their material blessings?

The money that we have and all the things that we own—all of them are God's possessions. Everything in this life that we have is a sacred trust from our heavenly Father (Hag. 2:8; Lev. 25:23; Ps. 50:10ff). Everything belongs to God. He allows us to use His creation and intends it for our good.

The Apostle Paul puts matters quite clearly when he writes, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). Because this is

true, we need to realize that those things we have are not ours to use in any way we choose.

When we talk about Christian stewardship then, we are talking about a "big picture" view of how we manage and use all that our good and gracious God has given to us, and that certainly includes money. Some have more, some have less, but all have the privilege, duty and responsibility to give sacrificially for the work of the Kingdom. Clearly then, it is our joyful privilege and sacred duty to support the work of the church through our financial offerings. We give too of our time and our talents in the work of the church, giving as we have received and sharing as we have been blessed.

We do this in order that the message of Christ and the truth of His Word is spread abroad, through our own personal efforts, and through the efforts of our congregation and our district, and our Synod, as together we join hands to reach out boldly with the Gospel—telling the good news of Jesus.

Conclusion

When we catch the vision of Christian stewardship that flows from a Christ-centered and Gospel-centered understanding of God's Word, we are able to put issues of our wealth and possessions in proper perspective. They are not "ends" but "means." They are the means by which our Lord provides for our needs and the means by which He permits us to join hands with fellow believers in supporting generously the work of the church in reaching out with the message of forgiveness, life and salvation in Christ.

How much can we give? How much are we to give? We do not live under law, but under grace. Each of us needs prayerfully to determine what is most appropriate for their own situation. Many Christians have found giving a fixed percent of their income to be the best way to be regular in their giving.

Because of what Christ has done, we are called to lives of Christian stewardship—lives that reflect the glory of God. Christian stewards are privileged by God to live their lives in grateful praise and thanksgiving to God, reflecting this marvelous truth from God's almighty Spirit-filled Word:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Fellowship in the Lord's Supper

Fellowship in the Lord's Supper is the basis for the practice of "close" or "closed communion." (The phrases "close communion" and "closed communion" refer to one and the same practice). This pamphlet will help you appreciate, understand and explain to others the practice of close communion.

What does God teach in His Word?

"Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (cf. Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Cor. 11:17–29).

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

"Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:26–29).

What does the Lutheran church believe about the Lord's Supper?

The Lutheran church believes, teaches and confesses that the Lord's Supper is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink. We hold that the bread and the wine in the Supper are the true body and blood of Christ and that these are given and received into the mouths of all who commune. Those who believe the promise: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. This promise, along with the bodily eating and drinking, is the main thing in the Sacrament.

The Lutheran church rejects and condemns incorrect understandings of the Lord's Supper, such as the view that the sacrifice of the Mass delivers man from his sins, or that the substance of the consecrated bread and wine is actually

changed into the body and blood of Christ. We also reject and condemn the view that in the Lord's Supper the true body and blood of Christ is not received by the mouth of the communicants, under the bread and wine, but is received only spiritually in the heart by faith, or that the bread and wine are only symbols of the far-distant body and blood of our Lord.

How is the Lord's Supper an expression of church fellowship?

While the Lord's Supper is always a personal matter, it is never a private matter. That is an important truth that is often overlooked. Those who commune at the same altar are thereby declaring publically that they are united in the doctrine of the Apostles (Acts 2:42). Therefore, fellowship in the Supper is church fellowship. This is what is taught by Holy Scripture in 1 Cor. 10 and 11. Here is how one of our church's teachers explained this truth.

"As there is but one bread, one loaf, from which we eat, so we who are eating of this loaf are one body. The eating of one and the same loaf of bread unifies us to one body. Our participation in the Lord's Supper is a public profession on our part that we are not only in fellowship with Christ, but that we also are in fellowship with those with whom we commune at the Lord's Table. We all eat the same bread, the body of Christ. Through that act we indicate that we belong together. All of us Christians who in the Lord's Supper eat the body of Christ and drink His blood present ourselves as one spiritual family. What we eat and drink together, Christ's body and blood, ties us together more closely than the bonds of blood. We declare ourselves to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Upon this Bible passage do we base the saying, 'Altar Fellowship is Church Fellowship.'"

"This passage in Corinthians strikes a crushing blow at unionism. To admit those who believe differently to our Communion, and so to our church fellowship, is a contradiction in itself. For those who approach the same altar together profess to be one—one in all points of Christian doctrine and practice—while in reality they disagree. It would be shameful hypocrisy on our part if we would have those who actually profess a different faith than we do join us at the Lord's Altar" (Stoekhardt, *1 Corinthians*, p. 60–61).

What About Fellowship in the Lord's Supper?

Another teacher of our church had this to say about why the Lord's Supper is an expression of church fellowship:

"The Holy Supper is one of the marks, one of the banners of the church, one of the seals of the church's doctrine and faith (Rom. 4:11; see 1 Cor. 10:21; Ex. 12:48). In whichever church one receives the Holy Supper, one is confessing that church and its doctrine. There cannot be a more inward, brotherly fellowship than that into which one enters with those in whose fellowship he receives the holy Supper. . . . Even one who confesses the Real Presence cannot ordinarily, except in the case of death, be admitted if he is and wants to remain, not a member of our orthodox church, but rather a Roman Catholic, Reformed, so-called Evangelical or Unionist, Methodist, Baptist, in short, a member of an erring fellowship. For the Sacrament, as it is a seal of faith, is also the banner of the fellowship in which it is administered" (Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, p. 110–111, 149).

What is the Lutheran church's motive for practicing close communion?

Our Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations offers the following helpful explanation of why we practice close communion:

"Close communion seeks to prevent a profession of confessional unity in faith where there is, in fact, disunity and disagreement. It would be neither faithful to the Scriptural requirements for admission to Holy Communion (1 Cor. 11:27ff; cf. 10:16–17) nor helpful to fallen humanity if the Christian Church welcomes to its altars those who deny or question clear Scriptural teachings.

"The reasons for the practice of close Communion are often misunderstood by Christians who have been accustomed to an 'open Communion' policy. In a tract titled, *Why Close Communion?* the rationale for the practice of close communion is explained in this way:

'So it is not that a Lutheran congregation wants to bar fellow-saints from the blessings of the Eucharist when they practice Close Communion. It is not that they want to be separatistic, or set themselves up as judges of other men. The practice of Close Communion is prompted by love and is born of the heartfelt conviction, on the basis of Scripture alone, that we must follow Christ's command. This means refusing the Lord's Supper to those whose belief is not known to us. It is not showing love to allow a person to do something harmful, even though he may think it is for his own good. It also means if they are members of a Christian body which departs from the full truth of the Scripture in some of its doctrines, that we

must not minimize the evil of this false teaching by opening our fellowship to any and all Christians who err in the faith' [Deffner, *Why Close Communion?*, p. 14].

"In keeping with the principle that the celebration and reception of the Lord's Supper is a confession of the unity of faith, while at the same time recognizing that there will be instances when sensitive pastoral care needs to be exercised, the Synod has established an official practice requiring, 'that pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, except in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care, commune individuals of only those synods that are now in fellowship with us. By following this practice whereby only those individuals who are members of the Synod or of a church body with which the Synod is in altar and pulpit fellowship are ordinarily communed, pastors and congregations preserve the integrity of their witness to the Gospel of Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures and confessed in the Lutheran confessional writings.'"

"The Office of the Keys is less than faithfully exercised when admission to the Sacrament is granted to all who come to the altar regardless of their faith and congregational and/or denominational affiliation. The practice of open Communion renders it difficult, if not impossible, for church discipline to be exercised in a way that honors the ministrations being carried out by those to whom the responsibility of spiritual care for a member of God's flock has been entrusted" (Heb. 13:17; cf. John 20:22–23; Acts 20:27–28; 1 Cor. 4:1–2. *Theology and Practice of the Lord's Supper*, pp. 21–23).

Conclusion

On the basis of God's Holy Word, our Lutheran church continues to practice the ancient, Biblical and confessional practice of close communion as an opportunity to give joyful witness to our unity in the true faith. We practice close communion with the belief that this is what the Lord would have us do as we faithfully administer His body and blood in His holy Sacrament.

Close communion is not a practice unique to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It is also practiced by the majority of Christians in the world who are members of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions.

Hopefully, this brief explanation will help you, or someone else, understand that our love for our Lord and His Sacrament, and our love for the individual, is the reason why we practice close communion.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Difference Between the ELCA and the LCMS

August 1997 will be long remembered as an important time in the history of the Lutheran church here in America. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] made a number of very significant decisions during that month. It declared full communion with three Reformed churches: the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church of America, and the Presbyterian Church—USA. It based this decision on its opinion that there is no longer essential disagreement between the ELCA and these Reformed churches. Furthermore, the ELCA decided that the long-standing differences between Lutheranism and the Roman Catholic Church over the question of how we are saved have been resolved.

These decisions have caused considerable confusion within the ELCA as well as within our own church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod [LCMS]. It has caused many people to wonder what the differences are between the ELCA and the LCMS, even though our two churches both use the name “Lutheran.”

The LCMS has a tremendous opportunity to make it very clear, both to our own members, as well as to the world at large, what it means to remain committed to the full truth of the Holy Scriptures and the historic confessions of the Lutheran church. This pamphlet is intended to offer a brief overview of the key differences between the ELCA and the LCMS. Hopefully, it will help you understand these differences so that you will be able to discuss them with others.

Our Difference Over the Bible

The LCMS and the ELCA disagree about the nature and authority of the Bible. While both of our churches profess allegiance to the Reformation principle that Scripture alone is the supreme authority for the church’s doctrine and life, our two church bodies have significant differences when it comes to putting this principle into practice.

The LCMS believes that the Bible is actually the Word of God, and therefore, is totally truthful, reliable and free from any error. We believe that the Scriptures are the final standard by which we must judge everything that we believe, teach and confess.

The ELCA, on the other hand, avoids making statements that confess the full truthfulness of the Bible. It holds that Scripture is not necessarily always accurate or trustworthy in

all its details and parts. The ELCA tolerates and encourages methods of interpreting the Scripture that presuppose that the Bible contains error and is unclear about various doctrinal matters.

Our difference over the Bible explains other more visible differences. For example, our churches disagree about the ordination of women to the pastoral office, the issue of homosexuality and the question of abortion. The LCMS does not ordain women to the pastoral office, while the ELCA does, in spite of the fact that Holy Scripture clearly teaches otherwise.

The LCMS unequivocally teaches that homosexual behavior is intrinsically sinful because it is contrary to God’s Word. In love, we want to help the person caught up in the homosexual life to repent of his sin and receive God’s forgiveness. The ELCA has been unable to take a clear Biblical stand against homosexual behavior. It also tolerates groups within its midst that openly advocate the homosexual lifestyle both for clergy and laity.

The LCMS has repeatedly condemned willful abortion as contrary to God’s clear commandment not to murder. The ELCA has not been able to speak out clearly against abortion, and, sadly, even pays for willful abortion procedures for members in its health insurance plan.

While there are other examples, these three serve to make the point that our differences over the authority and reliability of God’s Word lie at the heart of the other differences between the ELCA and the LCMS.

Our differences over the authority of the Lutheran Confessions

Our two churches also disagree about the authority of the historic Lutheran confessional statements contained in the Book of Concord. The LCMS binds itself to the entire doctrinal content of the 16th-century Lutheran confessional writings. We agree with the confessions of our church not merely *insofar* as they agree with the Bible (a position which would allow individual members to reject certain doctrines), but *because* these confessional statements are in complete harmony with God’s inspired and inerrant Word. We therefore accept without reservation all the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, normative also for the church today.

What about The Difference Between the ELCA and the LCMS?

The ELCA, on the other hand, does not require that its church workers and congregations pledge unqualified acceptance of the full doctrinal content of the Book of Concord. The ELCA views the Lutheran Confessions as historical expressions of the faith held to be true at the time that they were written, but not necessarily as normative standards for teaching and practice today.

Our differences over what is necessary for church fellowship

Given its approach to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, it comes as no surprise that the ELCA would consider it possible to enter into fellowship with churches that teach things that are clearly contrary to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. These sorts of fellowship arrangements are a reflection of the attitude that absolute truth is unable to be known, confessed and asserted. This attitude is contrary to the confessional principle of the Lutheran church that is characterized in the Book of Concord with two very important phrases: “We believe, teach, and confess” and “We reject and condemn.” These phrases reflect the Lutheran church’s firm belief that God’s Word is clear, that it does assert truth that is binding for all times and all peoples, and that we are able with joy to confess and proclaim this truth.

The LCMS believes that the Bible requires full agreement in doctrine before it is possible to join in altar and pulpit fellowship with other churches (Rom. 16:17). On the other hand, the ELCA believes that disagreement in important doctrinal truths does not prohibit altar and pulpit fellowship with other churches.

A good example of this attitude is found in the documents the ELCA used to establish church fellowship with the three Reformed churches. In these documents, it is admitted that “important theological differences ... remain between our two churches in such questions as the understanding of the Lord’s Supper and Christology.” These differences are viewed “not as disagreements that need to be overcome, but as diverse witnesses to the one Gospel that we confess in common.”

What this means is that the ELCA is willing to tolerate the Reformed church’s denial that Jesus Christ is really present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. The Reformed believe Jesus is present only “spiritually” but not really present in a miraculous manner in the bread and wine. Lutheranism has never accepted the Reformed Church’s denial of our Lord’s real presence in Holy Communion. The ELCA now claims that the errors of the Reformed church regarding the Lord’s Supper and the doctrine of the person and work of Christ are acceptable options. This has never before been the

position of the Lutheran church, and reveals a decided movement away from historic Lutheranism on the part of the ELCA.

The ELCA’s attitude toward doctrine obscures the vital relationship that exists between the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and all other teachings of Scripture that are centered and rooted in that Gospel—teachings our Lord Himself has given to us to believe and to share with others (Matt. 28:20). The ELCA position regarding church fellowship compromises Scripture’s clear mandate to confess and proclaim “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27)—in all its Gospel-centered truth and purity.

Synod’s opportunity for faithful clarity

All Lutherans have a wonderful opportunity to wrestle with the question of what it means to be a confessional Lutheran church in this day and age. What does it mean to say that we embrace the Holy Scripture as the inerrant and inspired Word of God? What teachings will therefore be rejected? What truths will be raised high as positions that can never be compromised or bargained away for the sake of external church unity? What does it mean to say we agree unconditionally with the Lutheran Confessions as pure expositions of the Word of God? Given this unqualified subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, what issues are non-negotiable and can never be surrendered or given up by Lutherans who wish to remain genuinely confessional Lutherans? What makes for true church union? Is “agreeing-to-disagree” an appropriate attitude for Lutherans when it comes to establishing church fellowship?

The differences between our two churches are a source of great sadness for the LCMS. We take no pleasure in talking about these differences. We wish that our two churches could share a common confession of what it means to be Lutheran. It is important that the members of LCMS congregations have a clear picture of why our two churches are not in fellowship. Knowing the basic differences between our two churches will help us talk with our ELCA friends and family members in a loving and kindly manner.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many denominations ordain women to the pastoral office, even some Lutheran churches. It is important that Missouri Synod Lutherans be able to give a kindly response and explanation to those who may question our position on this issue. We have an opportunity to speak the truth in love.

What does God say about women serving in the pastoral office?

The Lord teaches us through His Word that women are not given the responsibility of serving the church as pastors. We read the following statements:

“As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says . . . what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:33–34, 37).

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent” (1 Tim. 2:11–12).

“The saying is sure: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Now an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife. . .” (1 Tim. 3:1–2).

“This is why I left you in Crete . . . that you might appoint elders in every town as I directed you, if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife. . .” (Titus 1:5–6).

God has given His church many gifts. Among them is the gift of the office of the public, pastoral ministry. We receive what God gives, in the way He has given it, and in the form He has given it. We do not tell God that His gift is not good enough for us, or that we don't like the form in which He has given the gift. We receive God's gifts as He gives them, with thanks and praise. We rejoice in the opportunities God has given us, as His redeemed people, to serve Him in the church, and in our daily lives.

The church which wishes to remain faithful to the Word of God cannot permit the ordination of women to the pastoral office.

The Bible says that we are all one in Christ. Don't these words imply that women may serve as pastors?

There are those churches which believe that St. Paul's words in Gal. 3:28 mandate the service of women as pastors: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

But this verse does not teach that there is no distinction between these various groups; rather, it teaches the equality of salvation that all Christians have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul wants us to know that all individuals are equally sinful and equally saved by the work of God through Jesus Christ.

Gal. 3:28 does not contradict or overturn St. Paul's comments elsewhere. This passage does not speak to the issue of the ordination of women; instead it is speaking of the equality of our salvation in Christ, for which we praise the Triune God, but it certainly does not mean that all may serve as pastors.

If men and women have equal rights, why can't women be pastors?

The issue of the ordination of women is not a matter of “human rights” or “church traditions” or various human opinions and customs. Nor is it a matter of “discrimination against women.”

Various social reformers in our culture would have us believe that men and women are totally interchangeable and that their God-given differences simply have no bearing on life in this world. Not only does this run contrary to the clear testimony of nature, it also contradicts the Bible. The Bible teaches us a different view of God's creation.

The Scriptures teach us that both men and women were created in the image of God, but are two distinct and special creations of God. We praise God for His wisdom in creating human beings as both man and woman.

We believe that God has gifted men and women with different responsibilities and duties. For example, men are gifted by God to be husbands and fathers; women are gifted by God to be wives and mothers. So also in the church, God has gifted men and women with different, though complementary, opportunities and responsibilities for service.

What are the roles of men and women in the church?

Together, men and women serve their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Men have the divine obligation to be the spiritual

What about the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Office?

leaders of the church. Women are called to be of assistance to men in this capacity. An attitude of service guides what we do in the church, not a demand for “rights” or an attitude of “lording it over” one another. We have one Lord and one Master, Jesus Christ. We serve Him in the ways He desires.

God has given the responsibility to serve as pastors only to certain qualified men. The church calls these men to serve as representatives of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the pastoral office. Women are not called to serve in this way because God has not given this responsibility to women.

Why didn't Jesus call a woman to serve as an apostle? Why, through the Apostle Paul, does He prohibit women from serving as pastors in the church? We must leave the answers to these questions to God. We remain with what has been given to us by God in His Word. God has not given the church the option of calling and ordaining women to the pastoral office. We honor and respect God's will in these matters and praise Him for the many gifts He has given us all, including the marvelous opportunities He provides to both men and women to serve Him.

Why then do some churches ordain women as pastors?

Here again, as with so many issues, the reason for differences we have with other church bodies is based on their differing attitude toward the Scriptures.

Our Synod affirms the truth that the Holy Scriptures are God's perfect and errorless revelation to us. We receive what God has given to us in His Word. We are not free to overlook that Word, ignore it, explain it away, or otherwise disregard what the Lord has revealed through the Apostle Paul.

Churches that ordain women have chosen to regard St. Paul's writings as his own personal opinions. This is a difficult position to maintain in light of the fact that St. Paul goes out of his way, on more than one occasion, to repeat his position on this matter, and explicitly declares that this is not merely his personal opinion, but a command of the Lord.

How can faithful Lutherans respond to the ordination of women?

First, we never should become defensive or antagonistic about this issue. Instead, we need simply to speak the truth in love, witnessing to our beliefs and recognizing this as yet another opportunity to say, “This we believe, teach, confess and practice.”

Second, we need to be loving and gentle with people who belong to church bodies that ordain women. In many instances, they are simply unaware of why this has been done. They have been given incorrect information and have no clear

foundation in Scripture to understand why the ordination of women is contrary to the Word of God. We need to explain these issues in love, with gentleness and compassion.

Third, it is important for us to explain how women may serve their Lord in the church in a fulfilling manner. There are many ways for women to serve as full-time church workers in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, including service as teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, deaconesses and parish nurses. Laywomen have many opportunities for service through various church societies, guilds and leagues, along with the service they provide as volunteer teachers. They have additional opportunities to serve in their local congregations as members of various boards and committees. We thank God for the many blessings and gifts that come to the church through the service of women.

We need to emphasize the opportunities that God has provided to all of us, both men and women, to serve Him in His kingdom. How unfortunate it would be if we permitted ourselves to become ensnared in self-centered demands for “rights,” and thus take our eyes off of our Lord's call to service. Demanding from God what He has not given is contrary to what it means to be a child of God. When our focus is on love and service to one another, we realize that there is more than enough for all of us to do.

We serve each other in love, conforming our service to the Word of God. Nobody in the church is called to be the “master” over anyone else. Pastors are Christ's servants who care for the people of God with Christ's Word and Sacraments. Thus, through these gifts, our Lord graciously gives Himself to us for our salvation, in humble sacrificial service, according to His Father's will. We are privileged to be able to follow Christ's example with thankfulness in our hearts for His many gifts, most importantly the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. May God bless our service to Him, for the sake of the Gospel of Christ our Lord.

— Dr. A. L. Barry

President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Homosexuality

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This pamphlet is intended to help Christians answer some questions about homosexuality. The church recognizes this as both a significant challenge and, more importantly, as an opportunity to speak the truth in love, reaching out with the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What does God say about homosexuality in His Word, the Bible?

The Lord teaches us through His Word that homosexuality is a sinful distortion of His desire that one man and one woman live together in marriage as husband and wife. God categorically prohibits homosexuality. Our church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has declared that homosexual behavior is “intrinsically sinful.” Why does our church take this position?

We read in God’s Word the following statements about homosexuality:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. . . . Do not defile yourselves by any of these things” (Lev. 18:22, 24).

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. . . .” (Lev. 20:13).

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:26–27).

“Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

“. . . The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, . . . immoral persons, sodomites . . . and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:9–10).

Through His Word, God teaches us very clearly that homosexuality is a sin. A person who persists in homosexual behavior stands under the condemnation of God’s Word. This is true for anyone who persists in sin without repentance. While this may be an unpopular message, it is the truth taught to us by God in His Word.

What is the church’s message to persons who are homosexual?

The church’s message to homosexual persons is the same message it proclaims to all people: Repent and believe the Gospel! All human beings are born with a sinful nature that results in sinful thoughts, words and actions. Homosexuality is but one of many sinful situations human beings encounter in this life. From the moment we are born, all human beings stand under God’s perfect judgement. All of us, by nature, are lost and condemned sinners. We all need God’s mercy in Christ for our salvation.

The church’s most important message to homosexuals is the promise of forgiveness and eternal life through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. God sent His Son into this world to live a perfect life on our behalf, and to die a perfect death as the payment for all of our sins.

A statement regarding homosexuality from the Lutheran Church in Australia summarizes the church’s response to homosexuality in a very helpful way: “The Church, while rejecting on the one hand the movement which claims tolerance of homosexual behavior in the name of freedom of the individual and of moral progress, must also resist the popular reaction of persecution and ostracism.

“The Church must exhibit understanding and sympathy for the homosexual, show love and pastoral concern, being ready to give help and encouragement in whatever way possible. It must proclaim to homosexuals, as it does to all men, the judgment of God against sin, above all the forgiveness of sin for Christ’s sake, and the possibility of new life through the power of the Holy Spirit. . . .”

Another Lutheran pastor has written about homosexuality: “God is presenting to the Church a great challenge and opportunity. We can proclaim the Word of God in a clear and fresh manner. We can offer new hope to sinners whom God loves. We can apply the Means of Grace to another area of human need, so that sins can be forgiven and the Spirit’s power employed to create new life in Christ.”

What can Christians do for the families of homosexuals?

It is tempting to ignore the problems and challenges associated with homosexuality. As God’s people, we are able to take actions that demonstrate love and concern for homosexuals

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and for their families.

While clearly affirming the sinfulness of homosexuality, we will also want clearly to affirm God's promise of forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Often families of homosexuals are embarrassed and ashamed. If Christian friends and relatives treat them in ways that increase this shame, it is little wonder that they will attempt to rationalize or otherwise explain away a son's or daughter's sinful lifestyle.

Christians should reach out in compassion to these families, expressing their love and concern, offering the encouragement that is ours in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the person caught up in the homosexual life, Christian friends and family members should continue lovingly to share their convictions with this person, reaching out with the forgiving love of Christ and the hope that is found only in Him. Various organizations work with homosexuals who desire to turn away from the homosexual lifestyle. A Lutheran group working in this area is "Keys Ministry." Their address and telephone number are at the end of this pamphlet.

How should Christians respond to the "gay rights" movement?

There has been a growing increase in the influence of the "gay rights" movement, even within some Protestant churches. The "gay rights" movement wants our culture to accept homosexuality as an alternative natural lifestyle in which human beings may express their sexuality. We have reached the point where even the idea of "gay marriages" is considered an acceptable possibility. The church must resist these attitudes with the truth of God's Word.

Our church encourages our members to exercise their duty as Christian citizens to be aware and informed about these issues. The Christian citizen must be knowledgeable about the positions taken by politicians in regard to homosexuality, and other issues, so that responsible participation in the political process can take place.

The church is committed not to the political process, but to the preaching of the Gospel. This is the church's mission. The church does encourage its members to be responsible and active citizens in our country. Thus Christian citizens will work to enact laws that reflect Biblical truth in regard to homosexuality.

Why have some churches changed their position on homosexuality?

We have noticed changes particularly in many Protestant churches in our country when it comes to the issue of homosexuality. Even the national media has noticed these changes,

printing long stories on national church studies on the topics of homosexuality. Because the news media does not always distinguish carefully between Lutheran churches in the country, even our own members have sometimes wondered about the position of our Synod on these matters.

What accounts for these changes in some churches? First, homosexual groups within these churches often engage in "lobbying" efforts and gain considerable influence. Second and more important, attitudes toward homosexuality have changed as a result of changing attitudes toward the authority and reliability of the Holy Scriptures.

An academic philosophy about the Bible, called "higher criticism," puts man in the position of determining what is true and what is not in the Bible. With this attitude, we can understand why some churches have attempted to explain away the Bible's teaching about homosexuality.

How can Christians respond to attempts to make homosexuality appear as merely an alternative lifestyle?

All one has to do is turn on the television set and watch a few popular situation comedies to realize that there is an enormous effort underway to create an image of homosexuality as merely an alternative lifestyle. Homosexuality is portrayed as a perfectly normal and natural expression of human sexuality. Persons who view homosexuality as abnormal are portrayed in popular culture today as being "homophobic" or otherwise on the fringe of our society. It is therefore all the more important that Christians not hesitate to speak lovingly, yet clearly, about this issue. Parents need to take the time to discuss this issue with their children when they reach an age where they can understand these things.

What Lutheran resources are available to help minister to homosexuals and their families?

Keys Ministry is a Lutheran group dedicated to helping individuals and their families who are struggling with homosexuality. You may call Keys Ministry at (507) 352-4110. You may write to Keys at Box 97, Wykoff, MN 55990.

A study called "A Christian Perspective on Homosexuality" may be purchased by calling Concordia Publishing House at 800-325-3040 and requesting stock number 20-2586.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Abortion

What About Abortion?

Abortion is one of the most significant moral issues of our day. Emotions run very deep when it comes to this issue. It is tempting to consider this issue from the perspective of our culture's standards. Christians want to be informed about abortion based on the Word of God.

What does God's Word say about abortion?

God's Fifth Commandment is clear, "You shall not murder." This means, in the words of the Small Catechism, that "we should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need." God forbids us to take the life of another person, and this most certainly includes abortion.

God's Word also says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jer. 1:5). Psalm 139:16 says, "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

Our church's explanation of the Small Catechism puts the matter well when it says, "The living but unborn are persons in the sight of God from the time of conception. Since abortion takes a human life, it is not a moral option except to prevent the death of another person, the mother." The sin of willfully aborting a child, except in those very rare situations where it may be necessary to save the life of the mother, is a sinful act, totally contrary to the will of God.

If abortion is legal in the United States, how can the church oppose it?

Just because something happens to be legal does not make it moral, ethical or right. Abortion is perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of a situation where something is legal, but is very much a sin against God. Since 1973, abortions have been legal in the United States. Abortion remains a sin against God, whether or not it is legal in our society; therefore, we must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The church needs to inform its members that abortion is sinful and then encourage them, as Christian citizens, to use available legal means to change the law. Christians do not resort to illegal activities to change our nation's laws.

Why is the church involving itself in a personal decision?

A personal decision is not necessarily a private decision. The church, and the church's ministers, have God-given responsibilities to warn, exhort and rebuke from the Word of God with all authority (2 Tim. 4:2). The church is very concerned when Christians make decisions that are contrary to the Word of God and thus place themselves outside the will of God. Living in a state of unrepentant sin is a very serious situation. Thus, the church must warn its members against the temptation of abortion. The church also must minister to those who have had abortions. Furthermore, the church needs to speak out against the sin of abortion, since it is widely presented in our culture as perfectly acceptable.

Has the Christian church always been opposed to abortion?

Abortion was a common practice in the ancient Roman empire. The very fact that the Son of God was conceived in the womb of Mary was a powerful reason for Christians to hold a high view of all human life. The unborn Christ was not merely a blob of cells, but was in fact the very Son of God, who had assumed a human nature in order to save and redeem human beings from their sin. Early Christian writers make it clear that abortion was abhorrent to the first Christians. The early Christians understood their views on marriage, women and family to be unique. One church father said it quite plainly, "The hair-splitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us. Whoever deliberately commits abortion is subject to the penalty for homicide." From its earliest days, the Christian church has been opposed to abortion, regarding it as infanticide and homicide.

Why do some churches take a weak position on abortion?

Abortion is an emotional issue and one that is very upsetting to many people. It is easier for a church to take a weak position and not speak out clearly against abortion. However, a church body that wishes to be and remain faithful to the Holy Scriptures cannot remain silent but must clearly indicate that willful abortions are sinful. Many mainline, liberal denominations, which tolerate doubt and indifference in their churches about many teachings of the Bible, also tolerate and even defend abortion. It is often confusing to Missouri Synod

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Lutherans when they hear that some other Lutheran churches have not taken a strong stand against abortion. It is important for us to make clear that our church does not share the position of those church bodies that do not speak clearly against the sin of abortion.

Isn't abortion acceptable in the case of rape or incest?

While the emotional arguments for abortion in these situations might seem compelling, the fact of the matter is that it is wrong to take the life of one innocent victim (the unborn child), and further burden the life of the other victim of these horrible situations, the mother. It is indeed a strange logic that would have us kill an innocent unborn baby for the crime of his father.

What can we do for people considering abortion?

It is a sin for parents to counsel their children to have abortions. This is not an option for Christian parents. An unplanned pregnancy comes as a shock to all involved and abortion may be seen as a "quick and quiet" way to move past the problem, but it is not. It merely compounds an already sinful situation with another sinful choice.

A woman who is considering an abortion has the option to keep her child or to give it up for adoption. Adoption is a noble choice, for it allows a child who otherwise may not be well cared for to receive the love and attention he needs in a family that is able to care for him. Our pastors are aware of the various agencies that deal with adoptions.

How can the church minister to those who have had an abortion?

A woman who has had an abortion may feel at first that she is free of her "problem." Her partner, either a boyfriend or a husband, may also feel that he is "off the hook." It may be soon after, or perhaps not until years later, that they realize what they have actually done: destroyed the life of their unborn child. Perhaps this realization comes as they hear God's Word correctly explained on this point. The Law of God reveals their sin to them and they feel guilt and great sorrow, and they begin to wonder what can be done about it or if there is any hope at all.

The woman who has had an abortion needs to hear that for this sin too the blood of Jesus Christ was shed, and that there is in Him now full and free forgiveness. This assurance needs to be given over and over; namely, that in Christ Jesus, there is forgiveness—complete and total forgiveness. This is how the church best ministers to those who continue to feel the burden of the sin of abortion, by again and again pointing them to the cross of their Lord Jesus Christ and assuring them

of the full and free forgiveness He won for them there, for all sins, for each and every one.

It is important then that people who have repented of their sin continue to remain close to their Lord through regular and faithful church attendance where they will continue to hear the Gospel proclaimed and where they will receive the Lord's Supper regularly. Private confession and absolution with their pastor is another powerful means by which God gives His grace, pardon and peace to a person feeling guilty over the sin of abortion. The grace and love of God is stronger than any human weakness and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). This is truly good news and the good news that can and must be shared with those feeling guilty.

What resources are available?

There are many worthwhile resources available. Our church has a commission on the sanctity of life that has produced a number of helpful materials.

That They May Have Life is a useful summary of how Christians reflect and think about life issues. *Real and Abundant Life* is a broad theological overview of God's gift of life and the eternal life He offers to us in Christ our Lord. Both of these documents are available from Concordia Publishing House by calling 800-325-3040.

There is a video aimed directly at young people that helps them think about life issues. It is a movie titled, *Life: It's A Class Project*. You may obtain a copy of this video by calling Lutheran Visuals at 800-527-3211.

Lutherans For Life is an organization that also provides numerous resources to help Christians understand better a wide range of life issues. They may be contacted at their Web site: <http://www.lutheransforlife.org>.

You may write them at LUTHERANS FOR LIFE, 1229 South "G" Avenue, Building B / Suite 100, Nevada, IA 50201-2778 or call, toll-free, 888-364-LIFE.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Living Together Without Marriage

Increasingly, men and women choose to live as husband and wife without being married. This pamphlet will answer some questions asked about living together.

What is marriage?

We learn from the Word of God that marriage is the life-long, exclusive union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife. Marriage is a part of God's creation. Thus, we read in God's Word, the Bible: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; cf. Matt. 19:5-6; Eph. 5:31).

Elsewhere we read, "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). And, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4). Marriage is such a precious blessing that God inspired the Apostle Paul to describe marriage as a picture of Christ's relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33).

Why is it wrong for a couple to live together without marriage?

Simply stated, a couple that lives together as man and wife without being married is sinning. God's Word is clear: "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ... Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Eph. 4:17-19). Our Lord Jesus Christ once helped a woman living with a man who was not her husband to recognize that what she was doing was wrong (John 4:16-18).

Lutheran Christians believe that the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," means, "We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do; and husband and wife love and honor each other" (*Luther's Small Catechism* [CPH: 1986], p. 10).

All of this is another way of stating the obvious: Men and women are not to live together as husband and wife, unless they actually are husband and wife. This is as true for 80-year-olds as it is for 18-year-olds.

Why does the church care about what two consenting adults do?

The church cares because God cares. The Lord's Word is very clear in its condemnation of sexual activity outside of marriage. Consider these passages:

"Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers. . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

"Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Eph. 5:3).

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery. . . I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Why is living together such a serious problem?

Because God's Word clearly shows that it is sinful for couples to live together without marriage, people who persist in behavior that God rejects and condemns as sin are choosing a course that may lead to eternal punishment. God's Word is clear: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left" (Heb. 10:26).

And again, we read: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God. . . The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thess. 4:3-7).

Isn't the church being judgmental?

The church is declaring the truth of God's Word. On behalf of Christ and His people, pastors have the responsibility to speak clearly to couples living together and to proclaim the Word of God to them, both Law and Gospel. It is never easy for a pastor, or a congregation, to deal with couples who are living together without marriage. It is important for both pastors and congregations to deal with these situations pastorally and faithfully, in a caring manner. Couples, and their parents, are tempted to say, "So what? Everyone else is doing it; and besides, we live in changing times." In proclaiming the truth of God's

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Word about these situations, the church is being faithful, not judgmental.

Shouldn't a couple find out if they are compatible?

Secular research has demonstrated that living together without marriage results in a relationship that is less stable and less fulfilling than marriage. Furthermore, couples who live together have a much higher risk of divorce when they finally do marry. Living together is a bad idea, even from a purely human perspective.

One study notes, "Those who cohabit before marriage have substantially higher divorce rates than those who do not; the recorded differentials range from 50 percent to 100 percent higher" ("The Relationship Between Cohabitation and Divorce" [1992], *Demography*, 29:357–374). Studies conducted at Yale and Columbia Universities found that "the dissolution rate for women who cohabit premaritally with their future spouse is, on average, nearly 80 percent higher than the rates of those who do not" ("Commitment and the Modern Union," *American Sociological Review*, [1988], 53:127–138).

How does the church deal with these situations?

The church, and the church's pastors, will inform couples living together without marriage that what they are doing is sinful. These conversations will take place in a loving manner; but in faithfulness to the Word of God, such conversations need to take place. These situations cannot be ignored or overlooked. It may be necessary to place unmarried couples living together under church discipline in order to help them realize the seriousness of the situation.

This response may offend people. They may become angry at the church, or the church's pastor. Sometimes an entire family is upset when a situation they have ignored is finally dealt with. The Word of God has a way of cutting through all issues and exposing our sinfulness. That is the work of the Law of God, which shows us our sin.

Offending people is certainly not the church's goal, nor is it the church's desire only to have people recognize their sin. The church wants people to see their sin, so that they may see their Savior. The proclamation of the Gospel is the church's highest priority. The church proclaims the Law of God so that people are able to hear and believe the good news that "The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The church wants people to hear and believe the Gospel, for only the Gospel has the power to change lives and behavior for the better.

How can a couple living together resolve the situation?

A couple living together without marriage needs to take concrete steps to end the situation. They may choose to separate, with no plans for marriage. They may choose to separate until they are married—hopefully soon.

It is important that they make a commitment to marriage counseling before their wedding, and perhaps also after their wedding. Some couples may choose to be married by an officer of the court. This is a completely valid marriage in the view of the church. Couples choosing this option are encouraged to have their marriage publicly recognized by the church as well. No matter what the decision, they will want to seek their pastor's counsel.

What is the ultimate solution to this problem?

There are many solutions we can identify. Christian families need to understand what is right and wrong. Early on, parents need to speak with their children about God's expectations in regard to marriage.

Pastors and congregations will want to work patiently and lovingly with couples caught up in this sin. Concerned Christian congregations need to pray that the Holy Spirit will work in the hearts and lives of those involved in this lifestyle in order to break down their resistance to God's Word. Christian congregations must not ignore the problem, but must deal with it faithfully. Congregations need to speak about this matter.

Couples that recognize their sin need to hear God's comforting word of promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If they choose to be married, they should do so with joyful confidence in God's forgiveness and His blessing on their marriage.

Scripture taken from the *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. © 1973, 1978, 1984, by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Creation and Evolution

Evolution: fact or theory? Many people assume it is simply a fact. Christians who by faith accept the truth of God's Word about Creation, as it is recorded for us in Genesis and elsewhere in the Scriptures, sometimes wonder how they can help others consider the possibility that there is a Creator. The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide a starting point from which to evaluate the claims made by advocates of Evolution.

What is the point of Evolution?

In 1859, Charles Darwin, in his book, *On The Origin of Species*, proposed a theory that the various species of animals resulted from a process of "natural selection," with the "favored races" being preserved in the "struggle for life." Is this merely a scientific theory, or is there more?

"Darwin was fully aware that his idea was a frontal assault on the very notion of an intelligent Designer behind the world. In fact, he might very well have formulated it precisely for that purpose. The idea of a spiritual realm apart from matter seems to have been anathema to him as a young man already. The primary inspiration for his theory of natural selection did not come from observation of nature. Perhaps not incidentally, his writings also reveal glimpses of specific antipathy to the God of the Bible, especially concerning His right to judge unbelievers in eternity." (Wieland).

What challenge to Darwin is found in the details of life?

Evolutionary theory proposes that life forms start out at a very simple level and then, by natural selection, eventually become more and more complex as changes occur. However, biochemical and molecular biological research continues to gather convincing evidence that the living cell is totally useless unless, and until, it reaches its final form, and then, having reached that form, any change at all actually destroys, not enhances, its function. Darwin's greatest challenge comes from the question of how the individual cell developed. Scientists studying this issue have described the living cell as "irreducibly complex."

More and more scientists are reaching the conclusion that living organisms, even the most "simple," show clear evidence of a creator because of their incredible complexity at even the most fundamental levels. The scientific literature is

strangely silent when it comes to the question of how these molecular structures, the basis of life, developed. How could all this have evolved?

Has science accepted Intelligent Design?

Proponents of Intelligent Design have made great headway in recent years. Their findings have added muscle to the long-held Creationist arguments on the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which, simply put, says that the way of all things, both living and non-living, is to go from a state of order to various states of increasing disorder, not the other way around.

Other arguments being put forward are based on dubious dating-methods used by evolutionists, and on the fossil record—the latter still showing no conclusive transitional stages in types or kinds (one would think every fossil would show a transitional stage). Together, these evidences, along with many others, form a convincing case for the idea of Creation and Intelligent Design.

What stands in the way of Intelligent Design?

Evolutionists appear unwilling to address the findings of biochemistry and other related fields. They are quick to say they are defending science, yet when confronted by an Intelligent Design paradigm that explains the data better than their own (such as on the human eye, a bird's wing or the processes of blood-clotting), they offer no scientific defense at all. Instead, they lash out, ridiculing the Intelligent Design paradigm as nothing more than "religious."

What is happening in the scientific community?

Those who prefer the Creation and Intelligent Design explanation for life cannot be conveniently stereotyped as backward, ignorant, flat-earth fanatics. To the contrary, believers in special Creation and Intelligent Design are discerning, rational people—tens of millions of them—who, upon weighing the evidence, have dismissed evolutionary theory as untenable. And these millions are being joined by growing numbers of biologists, geologists, paleontologists, physicists, medical doctors, mathematicians and other professionals in the pure and applied sciences.

A molecular biologist explains that evolutionary theory

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has an influence “far removed from biology” and is one of the “most spectacular examples in history of how a highly speculative idea for which there is no really hard scientific evidence can come to fashion the thinking of a whole society and dominate the outlook of an age” (Denton, p. 358).

As one biochemist puts it, “To a person who does not feel obligated to restrict his search to unintelligent causes, the straightforward conclusion is that many biochemical systems were designed. They were designed not by the law of nature, not by chance and necessity; rather, they were planned. Their designer knew what the systems would look like when they were completed, then took steps to bring the systems about. Life on earth at its most fundamental level, in its most critical components, is the product of intelligent activity” (Behe, p. 193).

Is there room for Intelligent Design?

As much compelling evidence as there is for a young earth and a worldwide hydraulic cataclysm (the Noahic Flood, which explains much about our planet’s geology and paleontology), Intelligent Design, on its own merits, can be argued effectively without a single reference to the Scriptures. This natural knowledge of a Creator is not the same as advancing a set of specific theological and doctrinal beliefs about that Creator.

If evolutionists persist in saying that creation cannot be divorced from religion, then they themselves must be prepared to admit that their orthodoxy—that life in all its beauty, organization and complexity arose from random mutations and other Darwinian speculations—is just as dogmatic, just as much a religion, really, as what they scorn. If Creation is theistic, calling for an intelligent, purposeful Author of Life, then naturalistic Evolution is atheistic, denying the existence of that Author and any supernatural acts wrought by His hand.

For generations, Evolution, with all its weaknesses and unexplained gaps, has reigned unchallenged in American public life in our zoos, science centers, museums and mass media, and yes, perhaps most clearly in our schools. The theory of Evolution is simply handed down as fact. Only now, finally, is Evolution being contested on its own terms: objective science.

On the blackboards of America’s public-school science classrooms, and in the pages and on the screens of the media, the time has come for the words “Evolution,” “naturalism” and “neo-Darwinism” to make room for “Intelligent Design.” Anything less, based on the evidence, would be intellectually dishonest.

Can we “baptize” evolutionary theory?

It would be a mistake on our part to think that simply by presenting the evidence for Intelligent Design, a person will become a Christian. Believing that God is our loving heavenly Father who created the heavens and the earth is an article of faith. Believing that there is an intelligent designer is a far cry from believing that we are sinful human beings in need of a Savior and then trusting in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is our Savior from sin, death and the power of Satan. Such a living hope is a gift of God, given by the Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of scientific study or analysis. Faith is as miraculous an event in our life as is God’s work of Creation in the world. In fact, it is no accident that those who are in Christ are called “new creations” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believes, teaches and confesses that Adam and Eve were real historic individuals and that the Genesis account of Creation is true and factual, not merely a “myth” or a “story” made up to explain the origin of all things.

We would also be making a very serious error simply to accept the theories of science without question. Many aspects of evolutionary theory are directly contradictory to God’s Word. Evolution cannot be “baptized” to make it compatible with the Christian faith. Those who attempt inevitably wind up watering down the teachings of the Bible. Christians have no need to fear the findings of science, nor do they have any reason to give “science” more credence than they give the Word of God.

As scientists continue to study and explore the wonders of God’s creation we join the ancient Psalmist in saying, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:14).

For Further Study:

Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

William Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Chevy Chase, Md.: Adler & Adler, 1985).

Carl Wieland, “*Darwin’s Real Message, Have You Missed It?*” *Creation Ex Nihilo* (14(4):16-19, Sept.-Nov. 1992).

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

The Jehovah's Witnesses

Perhaps you have answered a knock at your door and found two people wanting to talk to you about various social concerns, or at least they say they do. From there they hand you material printed by the "Watchtower." As you speak to them, you find out that they are Jehovah's Witnesses. The purpose of this pamphlet is to help you understand who the Jehovah's Witnesses are and what they stand for.

Who are the Jehovah's Witnesses?

The Jehovah's Witnesses are persons who are members of the organization known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, headquartered in Brooklyn, N.Y. It is very important for Christians to understand that the Watchtower Society is un-Christian. In fact, it is decidedly anti-Christian. The Jehovah's Witnesses are definitely not merely a different Christian denomination.

How did the Jehovah's Witnesses begin and grow?

The founding father of the Jehovah's Witnesses was Charles Taize Russell (1852–1916). Russell came to the conclusion that Christianity was not the correct way to understand the Bible. He made contact with groups (known as Adventists) who emphasized the immediate return of Christ. Russell began a series of Bible studies and started to gather followers. Russell agreed with the Adventists' predictions that Christ would return during 1873–1874. When that did not happen, Russell predicted more times for Jesus' return—all of which proved to be false, of course.

Eventually, in 1884, Russell officially incorporated the "Zion's Watchtower Bible and Tract Society." Twelve years later, the word "Zion" was dropped. In 1908, Russell moved his organization to Brooklyn, N.Y. Toward the end of his life, Russell lost considerable respect among his followers because of a number of slander cases he lost in court.

After Russell's death in 1916, leadership of the Watchtower Society passed to Judge Joseph Franklin Rutherford. Rutherford was largely responsible for the rapid growth of the Watchtower Society. He spread the Jehovah's Witnesses' message via phonograph machines, which he used to play his recorded sermons. These sermons were more often than not harsh attacks against denominational Christianity, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, with vivid descriptions of

the judgment to come against anyone who did not embrace Jehovah's Witnesses' views.

After 1944, the Watchtower Society no longer used media but instead emphasized personal visits, marked by aggressive techniques to gain entry into homes in order to share their message. This has been the approach of the Watchtower Society since that time. Rutherford increased his control over the Watchtower Society and devised what he termed the "theocratically controlled" organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. In 1931, the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" was officially adopted to distinguish the followers of Rutherford from those who had left to form their own organizations.

When Rutherford died in 1942, Nathan Knorr took over (1905–1977). Knorr worked tirelessly to create a better image of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the public mind. Knorr spearheaded a massive printing effort, which continues to this day. The two magazines widely distributed in multiple languages that the Jehovah's Witnesses are most known for are *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*.

Under Knorr's leadership, the Jehovah's Witnesses produced their own Bible translation, *The New World Translation*. From 129,000 members in 1942, the Jehovah's Witnesses grew to 410,000 members in the United States alone by 1971. They number nearly 900,000 members in the United States alone, with about 3.5 million members in 200 different countries.

What is the key emphasis of Watchtower teaching?

The Jehovah's Witnesses' movement's primary concern is the end-time (eschatological) renewal of human society. They believe that Jesus Christ will return to establish a new kingdom, which they call a "theocracy," in which Jehovah God will bring total tranquility to the earth. They believe this utopia will come only after the Battle of Armageddon, in which the present world order will be destroyed. The Jehovah's Witnesses view all earthly institutions, organizations and governments as evil. They believe that only the Watchtower Society is capable of speaking truthfully about God in the world today.

What do the Jehovah's Witnesses believe about Jesus?

The Jehovah's Witnesses movement is surprisingly similar to the ancient heresy known as Arianism. The Christian church rejected this false teaching about Jesus. The Jehovah's

What About the Jehovah's Witnesses?

Witnesses believe that Jesus is “a” god, but not the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. They believe there was a time when He actually was created by Jehovah God. They do not believe Jesus is true God, as does historic Christianity. They do not believe the Holy Spirit is God, but only an impersonal force. Thus, they do not believe in the Holy Trinity.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' Bible, *The New World Translation*, goes out of its way to mistranslate various verses of the Greek New Testament. An example of this type of mistranslation is found in John 1:1. The Greek text says, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” *The New World Translation* translates the Greek this way: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was a god.” You can see how through such deceptive translating, the Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to mislead people.

How do Jehovah's Witnesses believe that people are saved?

Based on misinterpretations of passages from the Book of Revelation, the Watchtower Society believes that Jehovah God extends salvation to two different groups of people. First, there are the 144,000 who shall inhabit heaven. The rest of those saved will inhabit earth in the new kingdom that Christ will establish when he returns after the Battle of Armageddon. They believe that the only persons who will be numbered among the 144,000 are those who have adequately met specific requirements and have lived well enough in imitation of Christ.

For Jehovah's Witnesses, salvation is not an accomplished fact by Jesus Christ, given as a free gift, but only something that is earned by doing good works. Chief of these works is aggressive personal visitation of non-members. This explains in large part why the Jehovah's Witnesses are so zealous for personal visitation.

What are some other distinct Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs and practices?

Many people hear about Jehovah's Witnesses when they learn that a Jehovah's Witness has refused a blood transfusion. The Watchtower Society forbids members from receiving blood transfusions because they believe this is a form of “eating blood,” which was forbidden to the Old Testament people of God.

Jehovah's Witnesses also believe it is wrong to serve in the military, to vote, to salute the national flag, or to express any sort of citizenship in this world, since they believe the world will be destroyed and replaced by Christ's kingdom.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not observe Christmas, Good Friday, Easter or family birthdays, believing these celebrations to be pagan festivities. Most Jehovah's Witnesses also avoid dancing, movie-going and watching television.

The average Jehovah's Witness makes personal visits on people in their homes for an average of ten hours per month. There are some 900,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in this country making calls like this. Those Witnesses who are “pioneers” devote 100 hours a month to this work of calling on homes. Since their record of calls is the only record kept of their membership, this work is vital for them.

How can Christians reach out to Jehovah's Witnesses?

We need to recognize that Jehovah's Witnesses are besieged by the Watchtower Society with literature that trains them in how to share their false theology and to contradict Biblical truth. They immediately have many Christians at a disadvantage, since they are well prepared and ready to speak to you, while their visit takes you by surprise.

Entering into an extended and detailed discussion with Jehovah's Witnesses is best done by those Christians who have carefully prepared to do so. It is possible, however, for all Christians to give a clear and simple witness to their faith when speaking with a Jehovah's Witness. It is important not to permit them to sidetrack you when you speak to them.

While every conversation is definitely going to be unique, here are some things that need to be said to Jehovah's Witnesses: “I trust in Jesus, not in an organization (John 3:16). I know I have eternal life (1 John 5:13) and that I will be saved by Jesus forever. I am not saved by what I do. I do good works out of love for God (Ephesians 2:8–10). I will pray that you too come to know the peace and joy I have been given in Christ Jesus my Lord (Romans 5:1).”

You may also be able to plant a seed of doubt in the mind of a Jehovah's Witness about the Watchtower Society. Invite them to your church and invite them to speak to your pastor. Urge them to read the Bible, and not to rely on their Watchtower Society materials. Challenge them to lay these materials aside for one week or one month and read only the Bible.

After you have shared the Word with them, pray for them, asking God the Holy Spirit to work faith in their hearts, so that like Thomas, they may look to Jesus and say, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

For further study: An excellent short book on the Jehovah's Witnesses is *How to Respond: The Jehovah's Witnesses*. It is available from Concordia Publishing House.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Islam

What is Islam and who are the Muslims?

The word “Islam” comes from an Arabic word, *salama*, that has a double meaning: “to surrender” and “to be at peace.” A “Muslim” is a person who surrenders his entire life to the will of Allah.

A sincere, devout Muslim is a person of deep religious conviction and faith, not unlike a devout Christian. Negative stereotypes of Muslims in the Western world are partially due to the fact that our culture has become so secular that people have a hard time understanding anyone who holds to religious beliefs strongly.

As of 1995, there are approximately one billion Muslims in the world. There are about five million Muslims in the United States.

How did Islam begin?

Muhammad, an Arabian trader, became familiar with Christianity and Judaism as a result of his work as a camel driver. Muhammad was deeply troubled by the status of religion and morality among his people. In the year 610 a.d., he claimed that the angel Gabriel revealed to him the name of the one and only true god, “Allah.” At that point, Muhammad’s career as the founder of Islam began. Islam spread rapidly through Muhammad’s military conquests.

What do Muslims believe?

Above everything else, a Muslim believes that: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.” This motto, called the *Shahadah*, is used in every aspect of Muslim life. The sacred book of Islam is the *Koran* (often spelled *Qur’an*), which is believed to be the record of Allah’s revelations to Muhammad. Muslims believe in Allah’s angels, in Allah’s books and in Allah’s messengers and prophets (Jesus is considered one of Allah’s prophets). Most Muslims also believe that Allah predestines people to go either to heaven or hell. Muslims believe in a paradise after death for those who are worthy, that is, those who have adequately fulfilled Allah’s requirements and are chosen by Allah. They believe that Muslims may spend some time in hell, but will eventually end up in paradise. Muslims believe all who do not worship Allah, following the five “pillars” of Islam, will be cast into hell when they die.

What are the five most important practices of Islam?

Everyone who claims to be a Muslim is expected to follow the “Five Pillars of Islam” and therefore to:

1. Daily recite the *Shahadah*.
2. Pray five times every day facing Mecca—at morning, noon, mid-afternoon, after sunset and before going to sleep.
3. Give alms. The Muslim is expected to give 2.5 percent of his income annually and to give other alms directly to the poor and for other needs.
4. Fast during the holy month of Ramadan.
5. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during one’s life.

Are there differences among Muslims?

Each national group of Muslims has a distinct culture and traditions. While the five pillars of Islam are common throughout Islam, there are three major groups of Muslims. Ninety percent of the world’s Muslims are either *Sunni* or *Shia* Muslims, who believe that Allah is eternal and that the *Koran*, is also eternal. They believe that Allah’s most important characteristic is omnipotence. They believe that because man has a free will, Allah rewards and punishes according to man’s behavior.

The other group of Muslims are *Shi’ite* Muslims. While by far a minority group within Islam, *Shi’ite* Muslims have captured much media attention because most major terrorist organizations that claim to be Muslim are associated with the *Shi’ite* branch of Islam. For instance, *Shi’ite* Muslims predominate in the country of Iran. *Shi’ite* Muslims trace their origin to the death of Muhammad’s son, Ali. They have added to the creed of Islam, “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet,” the phrase, “And Ali (the first *Imam*) is Allah’s confidant.” They also have added a sixth pillar to Islam, namely, “*Jihad*” or “holy war.” This concept is understood to refer not just to literal warfare, but also to the effort to spread the *Koran*, and hence Islam, throughout the world.

Are there any similarities between Christianity and Islam?

Like Christians, Muslims have a profound sense of the presence of the Deity in their lives. They believe that Allah is totally in control and believe it is their duty to submit completely to his will. Like Christians, Muslims try to live according

What About Islam?

to clear moral codes of right and wrong, and want the same for their children and for their societies. Muslims are interested in supporting traditional morality in regard to issues such as marriage, sexuality, abortion, homosexuality and the break down in the family. In these ways, there are similarities between Christians and Muslims.

Do Christians and Muslims believe in the same God?

Christians know and believe in the Holy Trinity, that is, one God who has revealed Himself as being three equal, yet distinct, persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Islam rejects the Trinity and insists on belief in “Allah.” Muslims believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is blasphemous idolatry. Therefore, it is important to understand that when Muslims use the word “God,” in English, they are referring to Allah, the subject of the *Koran*, and are most certainly not referring to the Holy Trinity, when they use the word “God.” One must be a bit cautious in making this point, simply because among Arabic speaking Christians, “Allah” is the word used for “God” in Arabic translations of the Bible. The point to be made is that Christians and Muslims may use similar words, but don’t mean the same thing when they speak of “God.”

What do Muslims believe about Jesus?

Muslims have great respect for Jesus, believing Him to be the prophet who announced the coming of Allah’s greatest prophet, Muhammad. Muslims even believe that Jesus was sinless, born of a virgin and did many miracles, but only because he was one of Allah’s prophets.

Christians believe, teach and confess that Jesus was not just a prophet, but actually the Son of God, true God and true Man, sent by the Father to be the world’s Redeemer. Muslims do not believe that Jesus died and rose again from the dead to win our salvation. Muslims generally respect Christians as “People of the Book” and do not view them with the same displeasure that they view persons who are atheists or agnostics.

How do Islam and Christianity differ over salvation?

Above all other differences, this is the most important. Christians believe that salvation is a gift of love from God—a gift earned for us by our Savior, Jesus Christ, who willingly came into this world of sin and death, living perfectly in our place, fulfilling all of God’s demands, giving up His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and then finally rising from the dead as the complete victor over sin, death and Satan. Forgiveness of sins is a gift from God and cannot be earned. Christians know God to be their loving heavenly Father, a concept that is nearly unknown among most Muslims, who do not speak of a personal relationship with Allah, even though they

are very much aware of his constant presence and his control over their lives.

Muslims believe that they can be saved if they follow the five pillars of Islam well enough, and thus earn the favor and blessing of Allah. But they can never be certain or confident of their eternal salvation. Christians who have converted from Islam describe how liberating it was for them to come to know and believe in the true God of love and kindness, who gives them forgiveness, life and salvation as a gift because of what His Son, Jesus Christ, did for them.

How can Christians reach out to Muslims?

Discussions about religion with Muslims should not be one-sided. Christians must be willing to listen respectfully and learn about the faith of Islam. Christians should pray that God will touch the heart of their Muslim friends and neighbors and make them open to the Gospel. In many cases, the best opportunity for outreach comes when Muslims move into our communities and neighborhoods. Rather than trying to engage Muslims in heated debate (which generally is unsuccessful), Christians can reach out through meaningful friendships and relationships with Muslims, demonstrating what Christian love, compassion and forgiveness is all about. As is usually the case, a Christian’s lifestyle can go a long way toward helping Muslims at least to consider the possibility of the Christian faith. On the other hand, if Muslims witness behaviors that are unloving and reflect a prejudice against them this can turn them away from Christianity.

When opportunities for discussion about religion arise, Christians need to stick to the most important issues. God is a God of love and mercy, who gives us forgiveness freely, as a gift, because of Jesus, who is the Son of God, not merely a human prophet. Encourage Muslims to read the New Testament for themselves. Most Muslims know Jesus only from what little is said about Him in the *Koran*.

What resources are available to help us reach out to Muslims?

A short presentation on Islam is *How to Respond to The Muslims*, by Ernest Hahn. A longer treatment of Islam is available in the respectful and sensitive presentation of the Muslim world view by Roland Miller in his book *Muslim Friends, Their Faith and Feelings: An Introduction to Islam*. Both books are available from Concordia Publishing House.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



What About . . .

Mormonism

The Rise of Mormonism

If anyone doubts that the Mormonism is a growing concern, just consider these facts. The Mormon church has grown from 2 million members in 1963 to 9.7 million members today with “stakes” (as they call their districts) in 160 different countries. In the United States alone there are approximately 5 million people who claim to be Mormons, Latter Day Saints (LDS)!

As we express our deep concerns about the anti-Christian nature of Mormonism, it is important that we recognize that many Mormons are fine people, with high moral values and deep devotion to their family. The sincerity of the Mormon people is beyond question. But, they are sincerely wrong—very wrong—about the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Mormonism is an anti-Christian cult that uses many of the same terms as Christianity, but gives them entirely different meanings. Mormonism bases its religion on the *Book of Mormon* and the “inspired” revelations of its leaders, rather than on the Holy Bible, which *alone* is the Word of God.

The Beginnings of Mormonism

Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of Mormonism, claimed that an angel had visited him and led him to discover plates of gold upon which was engraved, in what he called “a reformed Egyptian language,” the *Book of Mormon*. Smith gathered all his various documents together in 1833 into what Mormons today refer to as the *Doctrine and Covenants* (abbreviated D.C.). This is the source of their religion.

Unlike the Holy Scripture, there is not a single shred of verifiable, archeological evidence to support the *Book of Mormon's* fantastical claims of ancient civilizations and epic battles here in the Western Hemisphere. Even the claim of a “reformed Egyptian” language has been proven time and again to be a myth.

After Smith's death in 1844, the largest group of his followers accepted the leadership of Brigham Young and migrated to Salt Lake City, Utah, the present-day headquarters of the LDS.

Mormonism's Key Beliefs

“Restorationism” is the most important principle for the Mormon Church. It is their belief that the true church died with the first generation of apostles and was restored with Joseph Smith. The Mormons are experts at using terms

familiar to Christians, but giving them different meanings. Let's take a moment now to examine a few key teachings of Mormonism.

The Holy Trinity

An official statement from the Mormon Church claims: “A paramount doctrine . . . is a belief in God the Father; His Son, Jesus Christ; and the Holy Ghost. The three make up the Godhead. They are one in purpose but separate in being.” (LDS Internet site). This sounds very similar to Christianity, but a study of what Mormons mean when they use words like “god-head” is very revealing.

Mormonism rejects the Holy Trinity. The key to the Mormon doctrine of the Trinity is found in the words, “one in purpose but separate in being.” Joseph Smith wrote, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of spirit” (D.C., 130:22).

Mormonism explicitly denies the God revealed in the Holy Scripture and the God confessed by all true Christians through the ages. Matt. 28:19 reveals that the Triune God consists of three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Triune God is three persons, equal in their divinity, yet one God. They are not separate, but of the same divine essence.

The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

Many Mormons today hold that God the Father had sexual relations with Mary to produce a body of flesh for Jesus to live in. But some say that Brigham Young was “inspired” when he wrote that the Father of Jesus “was the first of the human family, Adam. . . . Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the Garden of Eden, and who is our Father in heaven” (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. I, pp. 51, 51).

Obviously, since Mormons do not believe in the Son of God as He is revealed to us in the Bible, they also reject what He has done for us, namely, paid for all sins with His death on the cross. It is therefore no coincidence that you rarely, if ever, see a Mormon painting of the death of Christ. The crucifix is particularly offensive to Mormons. Why? Because they believe that the blood of Jesus Christ did not atone for all of our sins.

Salvation

What about Mormonism?

Holy Scripture teaches clearly that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, apart from works (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-11). In contrast to Christianity, Mormonism teaches that salvation is not a free gift of God, but something to be earned. A person may earn this salvation by believing in God, by receiving baptism by immersion, and then by fulfilling required works. Mormonism expressly rejects the doctrine of justification by faith alone. One of their “apostles,” James Talmage wrote, “The sectarian dogma of justification by faith alone has exercised an influence for evil since the early days of Christianity” (*Articles of Faith*, 1909, p. 120).

How does a Mormon believe a person is saved? A Mormon theologian puts it this way: “Without the *Book of Mormon* and other latter-day revelation, Christians are left without a full understanding of . . . Jesus Christ. This same Jesus Christ, God of the Old Testament and Redeemer of all, has once again benefited humankind by restoring the same teachings, principles, ordinances, and organization that he first brought to the world two thousand years ago” (Rex Lee, *What Mormons Believe*, p. 24-25).

Mormonism teaches its followers that they must do certain things to gain heaven. Since they reject the true Son of God, Jesus Christ, they can never have the assurance that they are saved by the love of God, revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Mormon church officially states: “The Purpose of Life” is the following: “All have the potential of eternal life, conditional upon individual worthiness and obedience to the Savior’s ordinances and teachings.” How tragic!

How Can We Reach Out to Mormons?

We need to approach this challenge with the attitude that it is God alone who converts a person to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. We are merely God’s instruments and our calling is to speak the truth *in love* (Eph. 4:14). We know from God’s Word that we are to be prepared to “give an answer” to everyone who asks about the hope we have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15).

Based on the observations of those who have spent many years living and working among Mormons, here are some practical suggestions for witnessing to Mormons. It is important not to get into arguments with Mormons. As we defend our faith, we must always do so lovingly and with compassion, never merely for the sake of scoring debating points.

When we witness to Mormons, we need to be careful that we base our understandings of Mormonism on reliable sources. An excellent resource is available from Concordia Publishing House. I highly recommend the helpful booklet, *How to Respond to . . . The Latter-day Saints*, by Pastor Edgar P.

Kaiser. You may obtain a copy from CPH by calling 800-325-3040. The best thing we can do is to share with Mormons God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ. We need to emphasize the powerful comfort we have knowing that God loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to provide, totally and completely, for our salvation. We do not have to look to our own efforts for our salvation. The Mormon Gospel is only a new law. The true Gospel is the good news of God’s work in Jesus Christ, which atones for all sin. The bottom line in witnessing to Mormons is to be aware of the fact that our job is to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the one who converts a Mormon through God’s Word. Finally, pray that the Lord would bless your words as you present the hope that is within you. Pray too for the Mormon with whom you are speaking, asking that the Lord would break through the fog of error that clouds his mind so that he may come to know who God really is and what His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, is really all about.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
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