

seeds for the parish

Spring 2012

Resource Paper for Leaders of ELCA Congregations

www.elca.org



On word and sacrament

By Martin Marty

"We are not divided; all one body we." When we sing such lines in old familiar hymns we may be voicing a claim that sounds like a lie to observers and should prod consciences of believers. So when we state that "We are a church whose unity is in Jesus," we are telling a truth but mainly pointing to an ideal. Yet ideals can get somehow realized, and they do. The rest of the theme's opening sentence about Jesus points to places and times where elements of that unity are real, appearing as signs of hope and probes of conscience. Open your eyes, this sentence implies, and find our Jesus gathering us "around words and water, wine and bread."

Gather where else than there? God is invisible and God in Christ, we say in the creed, "sits on the right hand of the Father," which means out of sight and often out of

mind. So we are back to finding Jesus in the gathering, which means in the setting of very visible, palpable, testable "means of grace" and the communities they reach and form. Since the wine of the sacrament may be sour and stale, the bread may lack freshness, the water will not always be clear — and the spoken word is also cloudy, we may seek refuge back in the world of invisibles and ideals. Some people then prefer to speak of "spirituality" as being a sufficient bearer of the divine word. Then they make fads out of peddling versions of that utterly spiritual word, which makes no demands on us in dealing with fellow members of the body of Christ. No demands? Also, no fulfilling gifts.

"Spirituality" can be a good word if it signals the presence and gift of the Spirit, but these endowments always come con-

nected with the material. One Anglican writer, Martin Thornton, rubbed this contrast, "the material," in our faces. His intent was to help us learn afresh to be connected with God in Christ. He tried to shock us if we want to keep the ways and word of God at an ethereal distance. We are wrong when we shelf Christian faith into the slot marked "spirituality." No, Thornton pressed on: Christianity is the most material of the religions. Why? A bit of wit comes with his dead serious line: "You can't even get Christian faith started without a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, and a river" — connected, we Lutherans like to say, with the word.

It would be eye-opening and heart-moving if for a month we looked around for signs. Advice: Regard the fellow-baptized, those receiving the bread and wine, and

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The language of worship is unique yet uniting.

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Unity in the words of worship

What words do you use in worship to sing, pray and confess your faith? Which biblical texts does your congregation read on any given Sunday of the church year?



Every worshiping assembly uses a mixture of language. Age-old words of the prophets and apostles are proclaimed in Scripture readings. The words of Jesus are prayed in the Lord's Prayer. Carefully crafted language may be used during the prayers of intercession. Poetic, scriptural language is sung in hymns, liturgical music and songs. More conversational language may be used in preaching and invitations to ministry. Heart-felt responses are spoken by the assembly in prayers and proclamation. Responsorial phrases, known by heart, are exchanged between leader and congregation.

Worship language holds the tension between what is unique to each worshiping assembly and what is shared throughout the church. Language reveals both our uniqueness and our commonality between congregations and across denominational lines. When we use language in worship that is shared with other congregations, we proclaim our connectedness by the words we share.

As a visible sign of unity in the church's worship, most English-speaking, mainline Protestant congregations in North America share a body of worship texts. As a sign that we share the same gospel, we read

the same biblical texts on Sunday mornings, pray the same words in the Lord's Prayer, sing the same texts in liturgical song and confess the same creeds.

But where do these texts

come from? The Consultation on Common Texts (www.commontexts.org) offers us the Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year series of Bible readings for the worshiping assembly. This group of representatives of various North American church bodies and scholars also suggests a daily lectionary and other worship resources.

The English Language Liturgical Consultation (www.englishliturgical.org) suggests common language for the Lord's Prayer, Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed and shared liturgical songs such as the "Sanctus" and "Lamb of God." The consultation last met and suggested language changes for these shared texts in the 1980s. Showing a commitment to the unity of the church in worship language, ELCA worship resources published after 1988 use the most recent texts of this body of scholars. A document titled "Praying Together" explains the rationale for all the language changes and is available on their website under the "texts" tab.

While common worship texts unite us between congregations and across denominations, the language we use in worship can also unite those who gather in any particular worshiping assembly. In each gathering for worship, the Holy Spirit

gathers people of different ages, cultures and economic status. In everyday life, each may use language very differently. However, when we all respond "And also with you" to the presider's bid, "The Lord be with you," language unites us beyond our differences. The unique language of worship points us to the good news we share in the body of Christ.

The language we use in worship forms and shapes our faith individually and communally as the body of Christ. Fresh images and language open our hearts to experience the gospel anew. And also, small changes in a well-worn phrase in a creed or prayer may be unsettling precisely because of the faith-formative power of language. Our worshiping assemblies do well to celebrate the common language we hold as a visible sign of the unity of the whole church while also finding unique ways to express the faith of the church anew each week.

Resources:

- The Revised Common Lectionary: The Consultation on Common Texts (Abingdon Press, 1992) http://www.amazon.com/Revised-Common-Lectionary-Consultation-Texts/dp/0687361745/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1329359124&sr=1-1
- Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings: Consultation on Common Texts (Augsburg Fortress, 2005) <http://store.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/7060/Revised-Common-Lectionary-Daily-Readings-Consultation-on-the-Common-Texts>

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www.elca.org/seeds
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listening to the words of others — preachers, teachers, fellow members, families — when they speak the word which is the word of God. By extension, we will find all of this very concrete and not abstract, very real and not ideal, in works of love, in church budgets, in not always eloquent homilies or classes or of some slightly off-key choir anthems, in the weak grammar of many teachers' attempts to excite post-nursery children, among youth struggling to find a faithful way, in celebrations of those who suffer diseases,

including mental versions of these. In and despite and beyond many of these we will find each other, gathered and bound through unity "in Jesus."

Sometimes we lose patience with someone in conversation and spit out the words "Get real!" My favorite way of being prodded into that reality is to recall Dietrich Bonhoeffer's startling word: "Jesus Christ exists as community" and not only "in community." If he is where two or three are gathered in his name and if we are "the body of Christ," we

have new reasons to gather, and we will realize gifts that go overlooked when we are in isolation, when we are not gathered and not gathering. Look other members of Christ's body in the eye and realize the unity to be found in him, which largely eludes us in the organizations called churches if and when they neglect to grasp his beckoning hand when it is offered. Which is always, whenever it is summoning, pointing or giving.

The Millennial generation and religion

Maybe you've seen the video on YouTube. It's a video titled "Why I Hate Religion but Love Jesus." It is the venting of one young man's frustration over what he defines as the difference between "religion" and Jesus.

It is a spoken-word poem written and performed by a young man who is clearly frustrated by his perceptions of the institutional church. He blames religion for starting wars and accuses religion of behavior modification and moral deliberation that is graceless, unforgiving, condemning and intolerant. It's a harsh critique, and with over 19 million views, it has stirred a lot of controversy across faith and denominational lines.

I know there are a million things we can nitpick apart about this young poet's ecclesiology, theology or whatnot, but instead, I would rather simply state that, whether you like it or not, this is a perception of the church by the Millennial Generation. These are the feelings they have toward church. So instead of taking it apart, let's instead deal with this video as an introduction to the Millennial Jesus.

Defining religion

His first line starts it all — "What if I told you Jesus came to abolish religion?" For some, this just seems ludicrous. But before you pick it apart, you have to understand that to Millennials "religion" means something different than it does to older generations. Baby boomers and the silent generation would define religion as a synonym for faith. Religion is your faith at work.

But to the Millennial, religion is defined as the empty rituals taken on by people to affect a faithfulness they don't truly possess. To the Millennial, "religion" is not faithfulness but rather the habits — the work — that merely appear as faith but leave out the greater reality of the relationship with Christ. As the poet states, "Now I ain't judging, I'm just saying, quit putting on a fake look, 'cause there's a problem if people only know you're a Christian by your Facebook." Ouch. It addresses the feeling that people are acting Christian or say they are Christian as a secular identity, not as a faith statement.

It is the age-old accusation of hypocrisy in the church. Every generation has shared that old balliwick so we cannot say it is particularly unique to this generation. But when you compare how many signals this generation receives concerning disease in the church — sex abuse scandals,

multimillion-dollar buildings, pastors who preach against being a gay person only to be caught with male prostitutes, talking heads selling snake oil get-rich-quick schemes over morning TV — well you can see that in their eyes this accusation is earned. When we tell a Millennial we are a Christian, these are the images they first think of.

The role of grace

Millennials are also greatly attracted to grace as core to theology. As he states, "Religion is man searching for God. Christianity is God searching for man, which is why salvation is freely mine, and forgiveness is my own, not based on my merits but Jesus' obedience alone." This is great theology! But their frustration is the great disconnect between the grace-filled proclamation of Jesus and the gospel that turns grace into an ultimatum.

At the same time, Millennials are aware of the nature of grace to change one's life. It is not a call to morality or an earning of the destiny paycheck for a life well-lived but rather a free gift given by God's continual searching for us. Millennials are also aware of the sanctification dimension of grace. Inundated by images of poverty, abuse, sex-trafficking, bullying and other injustices, the Millennial cannot reconcile inaction on the part of the church. If grace has freed us, the Millennial believes it has freed us not just for life everlasting (justification) but for life today (sanctification). Cheap grace is on the mind of the Millennial.

"Because if grace is water, then the church should be an ocean." This is the challenge to the church in America. It is a prophetic word from this young man. Granted, his view is quite myopic in only seeing the darkness within the church rather than the abundant (and oft unpublicized) light. But if this is the perception of the Millennial, then this is the reality we are called to deal with. We cannot try to prove him wrong with more blog posts, responses via YouTube, through sermons or even in articles like this. We must begin to turn toward understanding our youngest ones and hear their prophetic heart calling us back to costly grace.

Resource:

- YouTube video "Why I Hate Religion, but Love Jesus," www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IAhDGY1pqY

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Introducing our new missionaries

This winter, new missionaries have been trained and deployed with several additional missionaries being recruited for summer training. While many mainline Protestant denominations require their missionaries to raise their own support, the ELCA continues to support its long-term and contract missionaries through the support of ELCA Missionary Sponsorship. This program allows congregations, groups and individuals to support missionaries through prayer, financial support and communication.

Each year, the ELCA receives more requests for missionaries than it can financially support. Generous support of missionaries ensures that our global companion churches are strengthened in their ministry, even as we receive the spiritual gifts of our companions

through the home visits of missionaries. For more information on how to be a part of this program, write missionarysponsorship@elca.org.

Here is information on three of the newest members of our missionary team for you to add to your prayer list:

**The Rev. Miriam Schmidt
Jeremy Blyth
Slovakia**

Miriam serves as the pastor of the Bratislava International Church and coordinator for the Young Adults in Global Mission program in Central Europe. Jeremy serves as associate to this role.

**The Rev. Tessa Moon and Jon Leiseth
Republic of South Africa**

Tessa serves as the country coordinator for the South Africa-based portion of the Young Adults in Global Mission program. She facilitates and oversees all in-country operations. Among other things, she has overall responsibility for the volunteers' well-being, support and guidance. She consults with ELCA staff and local South African leaders to ensure cooperation, mutual decision making and open dialog. Jon brings his gifts in storytelling and theatre, teaching and learning, reflection, discernment and his passion for healing and reconciliation.

**The Rev. Victor Makari
Sara Bailey Makari
Middle East - Israel/Palestine**

Victor serves as regional consultant for the Religion & State-Kairos Middle East

program launched by Diyar Consortium of Bethlehem. Especially in the wake of "the Arab Spring," this region-wide program examines constitutions, laws and policies of Middle Eastern countries where religious references enshrined in those legal documents may violate or inhibit human rights and/or religious freedom of citizens, specifically minorities. The program has two over-arching goals: 1) to strive for achieving guarantees that assure freedom and human dignity for all; and 2) to seek a unifying vision among the Christian communities of the Middle East that witnesses to and advocates for fulfilling the aspirations of the people of God for the benefit of all. Sara serves as editor of Diyar's English-language publications.

Adult baptism

By Keith Spencer

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV).

One Sunday Christmas Eve morning, still in the season of Advent, amid the hustle and bustle of preparing for a full evening of three different services, counting candles for the third time, organizing stacks of bulletins, ensuring that the wireless microphone had fresh batteries, and watering a choir room full of poinsettias waiting to be arranged in glorious splendor around the chancel, worship happened. Not just any worship, but a baptism. And not just any baptism, but Larry's baptism — Larry in the last half of the last year of his six-odd decades of life already dying of cancer, the drugs holding it at bay for a while, but unable to conquer, unable to cure.

We met a few years before that Christmas Eve. Larry's sister-in-law invited my wife and I to a family get-together since I was her pastor and she was generous with her hospitality. Over time we entered into their extended family and found ourselves a part of many of their gatherings. No one could miss Larry, a man well over 6 feet tall, a medical doctor with a keen intellect, full of thoughtful questions and with a deep well of grace and wisdom.

I'll never forget the day that Larry pulled me aside and informed me: "I'm thinking

about it, but I have questions." It was Larry's way of sharing his interest in being baptized. We talked a lot, Larry and I.

These conversations covered a lot of ground: his faith and journey, his observations about life and the way that the world worked, his deep wonderings about life after death, heaven

and hell, grace and the workings of God.

And then came the cancer and the drugs, one after another holding it at bay for a while, then surrendering, giving way to another drug, another battle. His face grew thinner. His suits hung about his body, ill-fitting. He grew unsteady on his feet.

"It's time," he said one Sunday, pulling me aside, away from family.

"Are you sure that this is what you want to do?" I asked.

And it was exactly what he wanted to do — years in the making.

On my birthday, some six months later, my wife and I rushed over after a frantic phone call because he could not be roused. Hours later, and we all years older, a confused and now awake Larry wanted to know what all of the fuss was about. It became a dress rehearsal for the day that was surely coming and did as we all knew it would.



Adult Baptism at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, North Hollywood, Calif.

Over the years, I have been with a handful of people in their death and only once, this one time, assisted the worker from the coroner's office in carrying the body out. Letting go of Larry, entrusting him to God's care, grieving the loss of a friend and brother in Christ proved a struggle. As much as I had walked

with him over the years in his faith journey culminating in his baptism, he also taught me so much about the power of relationships in this ministry of ours to live out the Great Commission. It is one thing to talk about living out the Great Commission and another to truly invest in friendships in our embodying of the gospel.

Gaze into the future with me and tell me what you see. With congregations renewing their mission, finding their passion to empower and equip disciples and send them out into the world, encouraging their people to embody Christ in their life, in their relationships — what do you see? Or perhaps looking at it in another way: What are the consequences of such bold actions for our congregations and the people that compose them?

The days of young church families bringing their babies to be baptized may continue,

perhaps more so in some contexts than in others, but the reality is that if we embrace what it means to live into the future together and embrace the call of the Great Commission to become communities of discipling disciples, we will hopefully baptize a lot more Larrys.

And since I would never ask someone to do something that I myself would not risk, I'll share. When I gaze into the future I see people. I see people like Larry and families of the unchurched people like "Bill" and his kids and teenagers whose families remain unchurched but come because others have invested in relationships with them. People have taken the time to get to know them and make them feel safe in asking their questions, cared about their journeys without judgment, and welcomed them to worship as an act of hospitality.

And I see them soaking wet. And I'm smiling. Laughing! Because as the water drips down their faces and makes a mess everywhere, challenging makeup and assaulting hair gel, they look up at me and smile. And that smile does not communicate: "Is this it?" But rather "This IS it!"

Look into your future and what do you see?

Resources:

"Flowing Water, Uncommon Birth: Christian Baptism in a Post-Christian Culture" by Samuel Torvend, Augsburg Fortress, 800-328-4648, www.augsburgfortress.org/

"Baptism: A User's Guide" by Martin E. Marty, Augsburg Fortress, 800-328-4648, www.augsburgfortress.org/

Words of life

By Ben McDonald Coltvet

This year, the Revised Common Lectionary texts take us through Mark's Gospel. In Mark, Jesus gathers people around story, including parables and (sometimes puzzling) pronouncements. He gathers an unlikely assortment of individuals — children, lepers, demons — who are all hungry for a word of life.

This word of life is proclaimed faithfully in worship every week at ELCA congregations across the continent. Pastors preach, the Holy Spirit works — and people engage the holy story found in Scriptures.

But that's not as easy as it may sound. For preachers, many of whom are weary and stretched thin, preaching is not simply a matter of standing up and sharing family stories vaguely connected to the day's texts. It's a process that takes time, conversation, study, prayer and inspiration.

What's a working preacher to do?

WorkingPreacher.org, a free online preaching resource from the Center for Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, is one of the tools that pastors are increasingly relying upon for support in this process.

Each week the site features:

- written commentaries (in English and Spanish) by Bible and preaching experts from Christian seminaries across the country;
- a podcast, "Sermon Brainwave," where several Luther Seminary faculty members play with the lectionary texts and discuss how to interpret and proclaim them in new ways; and
- a weekly column, "Dear Working Preacher," in which David Lose, director of the Center for Biblical Preaching, shares words of encouragement and challenge for preachers.

Pastor Jennifer Rome from Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Eagan, Minn., said: "My favorite part of Working Preacher is the "Sermon Brainwave" podcast. I check in on Monday mornings when I know I'll be writing a sermon during the week and I love to hear the interaction of the people speaking and joking about the text and getting my imagination started about what I could be preaching about that week. I appreciate the entryways they give me into the text."

Pastor Jen's frequent visits to WorkingPreacher.org were among the 1.2 million visits in 2011 to the site from over 200 countries and territories. And she's not alone in her enthusiasm: 94 percent

of survey respondents said they've recommended the site to others, and 91 percent said the site is extremely or very useful.

Narrative Lectionary gaining

Not all ELCA pastors are preaching from the Revised Common Lectionary, though. And to support that, WorkingPreacher.org added in September 2011 a weekly commentary on the Narrative Lectionary.

The Narrative Lectionary is a four-year cycle of readings. On Sundays from September through May each year, the texts follow the sweep of the biblical story, from Creation through the early Christian church.

The Narrative Lectionary started in 2010 when professors Rolf Jacobson and Craig Koester of Luther Seminary partnered with congregations across North America. Interest in the Narrative Lectionary has been steadily growing.

WorkingPreacher.org posts Narrative Lectionary resources weekly (including written and podcast commentaries) for use by preachers whose congregations are ready for a new way to engage Scripture in weekly worship.

Lois Garbisch is an ELCA member who enjoys the Narrative Lectionary. "Our church, Trinity Lutheran, in Cook, Minn., is in the second year of using the Narrative Lectionary and it has been rich and interesting," wrote Lois. "There are so many things that I've forgotten or never known. I've been attending a midweek study since 1977, and this approach has been one of the most engaging I've been part of."

That's the word of life, faithfully received. When preachers proclaim the word and members receive it, Jesus is there, calling us to respond.

The Gospel message takes us to unlikely places — in the wilderness and on the mountaintop, inside places of worship and out among the graveyards, on wind-swept waves and in houses filled to bursting. In all these places, Jesus is there to gather us.

Learn more:

- Access free preaching resources and a worldwide community of preachers, visit WorkingPreacher.org.
- Download Narrative Lectionary readings for 2012-2013 at WorkingPreacher.org/narrativelectionary or email nl@luthersem.edu.
- Find weekly Spanish-language commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel text at WorkingPreacher.org/espanol.

Q & A

For this issue of Seeds we asked ELCA Resource Center staff and others to pull together a Q & A on: What sacramental resources focusing on word, water, wine and bread would you recommend? We received the following ideas.

I recommend "A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology" by Lutheran School of Theology professor of worship Benjamin M. Stewart.

—Carol LaHurd, adjunct professor
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

I continue to recommend the old classic, "Grandma's Bread" (video and DVD). After a young boy's grandmother dies, his parents learn to prepare her special Easter bread together for the boy's first communion celebration. This is a wonderful video for parents to share with children who are asking about Holy Communion and the meanings of wine and bread.

—Ellen Johanson, director
United Methodist Church Regional Media Center

If I were to recommend one thing for our common life focusing on water, word, wine and bread, it would be to consider attending one of the Living Liturgy offerings led by Susan Brielh, Ben Stewart, Marty Haugen, Mary Preus and Tom Witt. These talented worship leaders help participants experience sacramental worship. The next offering is *Worship and a Way of Life* scheduled for June 4-8, 2012, at Holden Village in Washington State.

For small group study, I'd also recommend the following:

Samuel Torvend's "Daily Bread, Holy Meal: Opening the Gifts of Holy Communion" (Augsburg, 2004). From the *Worship Matters* series, this rich treasure offers an ideal format and fertile content for adult study. Beginning and ending with his grandmother's gift of golden molasses bread, Torvend brilliantly unwraps the gifts of the Lord's Supper. He invites conversation and reflection that will enrich every reader's experience of the Eucharist.

"Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion" by Sara Miles (Ballantine, 2007). "Stunning" best describes the story that unfolds here. This beautifully written memoir vividly illustrates the power of the Eucharist to transform lives and reveal the presence of God. It's about bread that is more than bread and what it means to be food and drink for one another.

—Julie Aageson, coordinator, ELCA Resource Centers
Director, Eastern North Dakota Synod Resource Center

The classic video "Called by Name" (Franciscan Communications, 1989) interweaves several short-short stories with images of water and juxtaposes them with scenes from the Easter Vigil Baptismal Ceremony. The nature cycle contrasted with the faith cycle challenges viewers to reflect on their own Baptisms by way of beautiful images and engaging story.

—Catherine Fink, director
Heilig Resource Center

Don't miss "Washed and Welcome" and "Fed and Forgiven"! These cutting-edge, sacramental faith formation resources from Augsburg Fortress are for all ages. Congregations will find these foundational resources invaluable for helping unpack the many meanings of word and sacrament ministry.

—Beth Lewis, CEO
Augsburg Fortress Publishers

Family violence resource now available in Spanish

Intended to be used by pastors, youth workers and congregational leaders, "Ministry with the Abused" will help your group understand what family violence and abuse are, how to recognize if an individual is experiencing abuse and how to offer immediate assistance to a victim. The resource includes information and statistics on

elder, adult and child violence and abuse in both the United States and Canada.

Use this resource to raise awareness and to help make your congregation and community safer places for families to thrive. The ELCA now offers the "Ministry with the Abused" resource in Spanish as well as English. Both versions of this re-

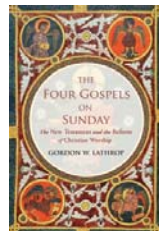
source are free and can be found at www.elca.org/justiceforwomen under "Social Issues" and "Violence Against Women."

To learn more or to view additional resources on domestic violence, please visit www.elca.org/justiceforwomen.

'The Four Gospels on Sunday: The New Testament and the Reform'

In his preface to his book on the four Gospels, Gordon Lathrop says, "The order of questions is this: What are the Gospels? What did they say about ancient Christian worship? What do they say to Christian liturgical assemblies today? And how may we still engage in a biblical-liturgical movement for renewal?"

Lathrop looks at each Gospel historically to see what they tell us



about early Christian worship and Christians' relationship to Christ. He then examines them for their importance today in our approach to the assembly, ministry, baptism, liturgy and ecumenism. Lathrop sees the Gospels as "a true catalyst for liturgical theology and liturgical renewal."

The book "imaginatively traces how the gospels interacted with, and attempted to shape, early

Christian assemblies and then draws suggestive implications for contemporary practice," says Harold Attridge, dean of the Yale Divinity School. "Informed and insightful, Lathrop's synthesis of scripture and liturgical theology will be valuable for anyone who reads scripture and leads worship today."

Available online at www.augsburgfortress.com or by calling Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648, or from other local and online booksellers. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9852-2.

Preaching the stewardship sermon

If you are looking for ideas for your stewardship sermon you may want to check out "Preaching and Stewardship: Proclaiming God's Invitation to Grow," written by well-known preaching teacher, Craig Satterlee.

Preparing a stewardship sermon can be a challenge for both new and veteran pastors. Satterlee offers a wide range of

help in this book, which is described as "a nuts-and-bolts handbook on preaching stewardship, raising issues preachers need to consider when preparing stewardship sermons and offering advice on how to address them."

In each chapter Satterlee asks a question that pastors should ask themselves before preparing the stewardship sermon,

such as "What do you mean by stewardship?" and "Why should we give to the church?" Anecdotes from congregational life are offered throughout, and stewardship sermons from pastors are used to illustrate his points.

Available online from the publisher, The Alban Institute, and from other local and online booksellers.

World Malaria Day is April 25, 2012

Did you know that malaria kills 800,000 people each year, most of whom are children under 5? That means one child dies every 45 seconds from this preventable — and treatable — disease.

We have a unique opportunity to reverse these statistics — for good. Our church has committed to raise \$15 million for the ELCA Malaria Campaign and join hands with 11 African companion churches in the global effort to prevent, treat and contain malaria by 2015.

Our work is just beginning. Your help is needed now as we educate communities, distribute mosquito nets, and train health care providers. **Here's how your congregation can get involved. Consider observing World Malaria Day on Sunday, April 29.**

- Share the five-minute ELCA Malaria Campaign video with your congregation.
- Conduct a Bible study on malaria by using the ELCA Malaria Campaign Bible Study Leader Guide.

- Start a fundraising campaign in your congregation or synod, starting with a special offering on April 29. Use ELCA Malaria Campaign offering envelopes to collect offerings starting on April 29.

Find these resources, activities and more at www.elca.org/malaria.

What does this mean?

What does it mean to be a Lutheran? Using a question and answer format, Martin Marty explains Lutheran theology and beliefs in "Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith."



Each of the 13 chapters explores a general topic, such as "Lutheran History and Heritage," "Worship" and "Christian Life." The questions cover such ground as:

- "What makes Lutherans different from Presbyterians or Methodists or Baptists?"
- "How do Lutherans interpret the Bible?"
- "What is the meaning of the cross?"
- "What is the priesthood of all believers?"
- "What do we believe about the end of the world?"

An excellent resource for either individual or group study, confirmation or new member classes, "Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers" is available from Augsburg Fortress, at www.augsburgfortress.com, by calling 800-328-4648, or from other online booksellers and local book stores. ISBN: 978-0-8066-5350-1.

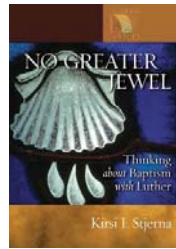
New digital ministry book available

"The Digital Ministry Bible" by Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson is a hands-on strategy guide for clergy and church leaders developing digital social media including for congregational ministries, Christian education, mission, community development, and outreach. Keith Anderson is a Gen-X ELCA pastor and popular blogger.

The Digital Ministry Bible can be ordered through any religious, or secular bookstore or through any online bookseller.

The family jewels

In “No Greater Jewel: Thinking about Baptism with Luther” author Kirsi Stjerna expands on Martin Luther’s passage in his Large Catechism: “No greater jewel, therefore, can adorn our body and soul than baptism, for through it we become completely holy and blessed, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.”



The author states in the introduction, “To Luther, baptism was a matter of intimacy with God and finding oneself in that relationship while at the same time, it never remained solely a private matter. Quite the contrary: as a spiritually transformative event, baptism for Luther promised changes in the lives lived with others as

well. Baptism for Luther was a beginning of spiritual — or Spirit-filled — life and, as such, it was something quite incredible.”

Free single or multi-session study guides can be downloaded at www.augsburgfortress.org. This book is part of the Lutheran Voices series, also available for purchase on the Augsburg Fortress website or by calling, 800-328-4648, or through other booksellers. ISBN: 978-0-8066-8008-8.

‘A Gardener, Two Travelers and a Cheat Course Kit: People of Faith’

Looking for something a little off-beat for an adult Bible study? This kit from Augsburg Fortress may be just what you are looking for. It’s described as “a fun, light-hearted study complete with cartoon drawings and group activities.”

The course explores the lives of Adam, Abraham, Sarah and Jacob. It is part of the

People of Faith Bible Study series, which provides a variety of learning experiences that include Scripture readings, activities and discussions about the character in each story. Activities suggested include creative writing, role playing and drawing. The materials can be adapted for intergenerational groups as well.

Each course kit provides a leader guide, learner guide and a DVD.

Available online from Augsburg Fortress at www.augsburgfortress.com or by calling 800-328-4648. ISBN: 978-0-8066-9529-7.

What is God’s image?

In “Amazing Gifts: Stories of Faith, Disability and Inclusion,” author Mark I. Pinsky gathers a variety of stories about people with disabilities who have been welcomed into differ-



ent types of communities of faith. The disabilities include lupus, chronic pain, traumatic brain injury, depression and mental illness.

Pinsky’s intent is to share how faith can be experienced in the context of a disability, and how congregations benefit from being more inclusive. He adds, “Although pastoral leadership can be critical,

making faith communities welcoming and accessible to people with disabilities should not be a mission that falls mainly on the shoulders of clergy or other advocates. It is largely a matter of attitude on the part of lay people in the pews.”

Available online from Alban Institute and other local and online booksellers.

ELCA youth accept 100 Wells Challenge

The water crisis doesn’t often make headlines, but the truth is that it claims more lives per year than war or natural disasters. Every day, women and children in sub-Saharan Africa walk an average of three miles to collect water. Sadly, too often the water they find is not safe to drink. Contaminated water causes millions of people, especially young children, to contract preventable, deadly diseases every year.

The 100 Wells Challenge is a unique way to make a difference. ELCA youth are

joining together with a \$250,000 fundraising goal to support the water projects of ELCA World Hunger where they are needed most.

Just think, \$250,000 could mean 100 wells — with the potential of bringing clean water to 500 families at a time. When families have clean, safe water they become healthier and stronger. They have time for work and school. They earn more money and secure better opportunities for the future. Just one well can help transform an entire community.

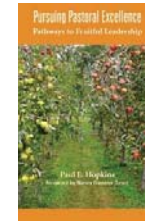
Will your youth group join the cause?

If you’re coming to the 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, bring your gifts to be counted among the national total. If not, send them at any time in 2012 to ELCA World Hunger, P.O. Box 71764, Chicago, IL 60694-1764. Be sure to write “100 Wells Challenge” on the memo line of your check.

Visit www.elca.org/100wellschallenge for more information.

Following the leader

In the book “Pursuing Pastoral Excellence,” pastoral counselor Paul Hopkins profiles seven pastors, which in his opinion has are excellent leaders. Their stories are told to help other pastors



become good leaders of their congregations and the communities where they serve.

Hopkins highlights the elements that can lead to effective pastoral leadership. The discussion takes place in the context of the rapidly changing vocational world that today’s pastors find themselves in.

One reviewer commented in part:

“Too often, as a spiritual director and counselor, I come across pastors whose lives become unbalanced because they’ve let their ministries slide from being passionate for God to feeling trapped and discouraged. They silently suffer, but do so needlessly. ... By exploring stories of both burned-out and healthy pastors, the author shows how we all can lead in ways that make ministry exciting, rather than excruciating.”

Available online from the publisher, Alban Institute, and other local and online booksellers.

The spirit of the day

In “A Graceful Life: Lutheran Spirituality for Today” Bradley Hanson explores major themes of Lutheran spirituality. Topics he addresses include the human condition, trusting in God’s grace and reliance on the word of God. He examines Lutheran spirituality and offers ways to nurture it. In the concluding chapter he speculates on the future of Lutheran spirituality.

Each chapter includes questions for reflection, making this book useful for adult Bible study groups. Hanson is professor emeritus of religion at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

“A Graceful Life” is available from local booksellers or online at www.augsburgfortress.com, or by calling Augsburg at 800-328-4648. ISBN: 978-0-8066-3806-5.



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Our unity is in Jesus.
Find resources for word and water, wine and
bread in this issue of Seeds for the Parish.



IT TAKES A SPECIAL INVESTMENT
TO TURN A BOWLING ALLEY
INTO A SANCTUARY.

March 18, 2009. Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, Orlando, Florida.

When you invest your savings with the Mission Investment Fund you get more than a great financial return. That's because we use the money you invest to fund building and renovation loans for ELCA congregations like Spirit of Joy. Thanks to an MIF loan, this congregation transformed a bowling alley into a one-of-a-kind worship space where it provides shelter for the homeless, adult literacy tutoring and meals for hungry families. "Do unto others." How's that for an investment strategy? To learn more, contact us at 877-886-3522 or elca.org/mif.



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