

WORSHIP & OUTREACH:
A LUTHERAN
PARADIGM



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for the Symposium of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
September 20-21, 2010

The man and woman left with a promise ringing in their ears and resounding in their hearts. Their leaving, however, was neither pleasant nor voluntary. Their Maker drove them out of the home they had abused and chased them into the world they were meant to crown. The crown, however, was now tarnished, and Creation itself groaned under the fury unleashed when they had eaten the fruit forbidden them.

Their Father had meant for them to fulfill that most visceral human desire: to live, and to live, and to live—to never die, but to enjoy God’s blessings forever. Somehow, this was not enough. As they were driven from the Garden the grim nature of their new reality dawned. The skins they wore to cover their shame also bore testimony to the epochal transition that had occurred. Rather than life unto life, they had entered into the age of the dying. The human existence had become nothing but one of death deferred—a fact underscored with the sounding of the death knell for each generation: תָּמָּוֹת, תָּמָּוֹת.¹

There would be no return to the Tree that gave Life; they had been banished. Behind them stood the cherubim and the flaming sword; before them waited their new life east of Eden in the world of the dying. Yet they did not leave the Garden empty-handed. They left with a promise² ringing in their ears and resounding in their hearts.

The LORD God promised to send the Seed of Woman to crush the serpent’s head; the LORD would come to right all that man had wronged and restore his Creation to the perfection with which he made it and for which he intended it. Adam believed the promise of God, and in the face of a world now defined by death, he named his wife, Life.³

Faith in the promise of God changed the hearts of Adam and Eve, but it didn’t change the nature of the dying world or the nature of sinful man. As generations were born in sin, some believed the promise and others believed the lies. Some followed the path of Seth; others followed the path of Cain.

In the land of Nod the city of Enoch grew where men herded and made music and forged with iron and bronze. Their outward prosperity, however, belied the rot within. The devilish actions that sprang from the unbelief of Cain⁴ marked the children as clearly as God had the father. For generations among the children of men father begat son with sin and wickedness in common. They despised God and his plans and his purposes. Listening to the song of Lamech one sees Psalm 73 proleptically fulfilled: they wore pride as a necklace and clothed themselves with violence.

When the children of Seth looked out at the world around them, they found it increasingly filled with the lost and the wicked who had either rejected God or did not know him. The children of God clung to his promise and walked in his path. But the time had come for something new.

¹ And he died...and he died...and he died...

² The Lutheran Reformers liked to use the word “promise” for the gospel. The term for gospel in the New Testament, *εὐαγγέλιον*, means “good news.” But the Lutheran Reformers liked to use “promise” because it explains the nature of this gospel a little more clearly than “good news.” The gospel is not merely the opposite of bad news, just as faith is not merely knowledge of historical events. The gospel is the promise of forgiveness of sins and of justification for Christ’s sake. (*Apology*, IV, 43).

³ חַיָּה

⁴ 1 John 3:12

The people of God were not of the world, but they were in it. And so אָז הַיְהוָה לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: “Then it was begun to proclaim the name of the LORD.”⁵ This was more than merely praying to God; this was more than private acts of worship. At this time of great and growing unbelief, they began to publicly proclaim the name of the LORD—to tell abroad all that God revealed about himself.

Exodus chapters 33-34 explain that לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה is primarily the declaration of God’s nature and God’s acts. God promised that he himself would proclaim his name to Moses.⁶ God’s use of this expression removes any doubt as to whether the phrase לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה means to invoke God’s name in supplication or to proclaim his name and all that he has revealed about himself. God proclaimed his name to Moses, and the message centered on that promise of a God who justifies sinners by grace through faith:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”⁷

Worship and outreach are bound together because the Church is in the world but not of it. The Confessions remind us that the chief worship of God is to preach the gospel.⁸ To proclaim the name of the LORD is to worship him as he revealed himself: as the promise keeper, the Savior God of grace and love toward sinners. The public worship of God did two things for the children of Seth: the act of praise strengthened and reaffirmed their faith in the promises of God by declaring his acts of grace and mercy; it also gave public testimony to the unbelieving world around them.

The same promise that was on the heart of Adam as he left the garden was also on the lips of the ancient patriarchs when they interacted with the world. Scripture gives us a glimpse of their paradigm for worship and outreach when it calls the last of the ancient patriarchs, Noah, a herald, a preacher of righteousness.⁹ In their paradigm of worship and outreach the patriarchs called out the name of the LORD, publicly proclaiming him and heralding his righteousness to the world.

⁵ Ge 4:26. The NIV translates “call on.” That translation is certainly merited in 1 Kg 18:24; 2 Kg 5:11. Here, however, no answer from the LORD is envisioned, and so an equally well authenticated meaning is “joyful, thankful confession or public proclamation.” See Lawrenz and Jeske’s discussion in *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11*, 205ff.

⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֵעָבִיר כָּל-טוֹבֵי עַל-פְּנֵיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וַתִּנָּתֶן־לִי Ex 33:19

⁷ Ex 34:6-7

⁸ Apology XV, 42. *Praecipuus cultus Dei est docere evangelium.*

⁹ Νῶε δικαιοσύνης κήρυκα 2 Pt 2:5

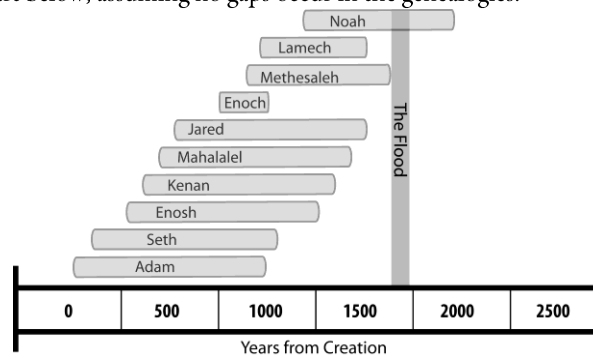
As the patriarchs proclaimed the name of the LORD they did more than strengthen the faithful; they were light and salt to a world benighted and beset with the darkness and decay of sin.¹⁰ Where sin increased, grace increased all the more. As mankind wandered further and further from the truth, God sent his messengers into the world to be preachers of righteousness through public acts of worship and outreach.

Abraham, too, left his home with only the promise of God ringing in his ears and resounding in his heart. When he had traveled to a foreign land filled with unbelievers, he pitched his tent and he did what carriers of the promise always did: he worshiped God and proclaimed his name and his promises to the world. “There he built an altar to the LORD and proclaimed the name of the LORD.”¹¹ Isaac, too, kept up the practice of the patriarchs at Beersheba, building an altar and proclaiming the name of the LORD to the world around him.¹²

The Church of the New Testament was no different. That little group, left leaderless by the ascension but made powerful by Pentecost, had in its possession the promise of God fulfilled. Surrounded by the world, they did what the Church always did: they worshiped. And in their worship, they proclaimed the promise to the world around them. In their homes, in the streets, and in the place of public worship they proclaimed the promise to strengthen faith and to create it in the lost.¹³

Worship and outreach are joined in an indissoluble nexus by the central teaching of Scripture: the justification of sinners by the grace of God. Both the act of worship and the act of outreach communicate the promise of God’s radical act of

¹⁰ The preservative nature of believers and their public message and witness is attested to by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:12-13). Consider also, whether God meant to teach that through the lives of the patriarchs. The תולדות of Genesis might certainly have gaps in the genealogy, especially noting that there are ten generations listed. If, however, one takes the years given between generations as being without omission or gaps, an interesting picture emerges. This was Luther’s view (see LW1:333-342 and 2:381). Then the age of the patriarchs is marked by the living witness of Adam and Seth—nine patriarchs alive with their descendants, in full agreement in the hope for the blessed Seed that had been promised (LW 1:342). The witness of these nine patriarchs provided light and salt for a world in deep need of both. Then the patriarchs die, one by one, until finally Methuselah the Aged expires in the very year of the Flood. The voice of the children of God shrinks to the sound of one man’s family, that faithful preacher of righteousness, Noah. With the public proclamation of the promise so greatly diminished, so also is the effect of the salt of the earth. God looks upon the earth and sees only wickedness; the time had come for a deluge of washing and renewal—a salvific act that would find its fulfillment in Baptism. Note the chart below, assuming no gaps occur in the genealogies.



¹¹ Gen 12:8. וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱשֶׁר מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה

¹² Gen 26:25

¹³ Acts 2:42-47

grace in Jesus Christ. From the beginning, God joined worship and outreach in the proclamation of that grace to the world.

The Necessity of a Lutheran paradigm for worship and outreach

Worship and outreach are bound together because both of them proclaim Jesus. Therefore, worship and outreach are not mutually exclusive—to be pitted against each other. Nor are they substitutes for each other—as if you could replace worship with outreach or outreach with worship. Statements like “The Lutheran style of worship doesn’t connect with the unchurched” and “Outreach has no place in worship,” both miss the point that worship and outreach are joined inseparably, because both revolve around the teaching on which the Church stands or falls. Both are centered on the radical act of grace that is the *res* of Scripture’s *verba*.¹⁴ So why is there so much debate over whether worship and outreach belong together or not?

Personal gifts and experience

Some of it simply stems from the fact that in our church body when it comes to specialization in these areas we tend to have men who are “worship guys” or men who are “outreach guys.” Once properly pigeon-holed, a man gains experience, scholarship and many opinions in his area. The worship guys know worship well, and they think they get outreach, too. The outreach guys know outreach well, and they think they get worship, too. Of course, when the groups evaluate each other, they generally agree with the first clause and not with the second. As a result, each group disregards most of what the other would say about the field where they are not the expert. Instead of each group informing the other and adding to experience and scholarship, the result is often nothing but the hardening of opinions.¹⁵ A paradigm that incorporates both groups seeks to use their combined wisdom to decide on questions of freedom.¹⁶

Distinguish between private worship and corporate worship

Another reason that makes the debate such a visceral one is because worship is an intensely personal activity. The creature and its Creator are in communion, feeding and being fed, proclaiming and praising. The great effect of the Lamb slain before the creation of the world righted man’s relationship with his God, and the Second Adam enabled all of Adam’s kin to leave behind the fear of God and live in communion with him again, even as we reside outside the Garden. Worship is intensely personal, a foretaste for each man of what is waiting for him when the flaming sword is gone and the gates to the new Eden welcome us home. At its very heart, worship deals with me and with God.

But God did not intend worship to remain a purely personal activity. He gave man the gift of the Church, the people called out of darkness into his light. As soon as the Church emerged from the work of God’s gracious Spirit, worship took

¹⁴ See Martin H. Franzmann, “Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, (April, 1969). He discusses Luther’s hermeneutical maxim: *Qui non intelligit res non potest ex verbis sensum elicere*. “Unless one understands the things under discussion, one cannot make sense of the words.” *Res* is the subject matter, and *verba* are the words. Theses II and III: The *res* of the Lutheran Confessions is justification by grace through faith, which is shorthand for “radical Gospel,” that God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ creatively opened up the way which man may and must go.

¹⁵ This was the impetus behind working to form an Institute for Worship and Outreach: that men experienced in outreach and men experienced in worship might come together to sharpen each other, like iron on iron, for the broadening of experience and scholarship and the benefit of the Church. This group formed in 2009 under the auspices of the Conference of Presidents. The group has held three initial meetings and number of listening sessions throughout the districts.

¹⁶ See the upcoming section *Balancing freedom and wisdom in worship*.

on another aspect. God wants his Church to worship publicly, corporately—a gathering of believers for praise and proclamation.

And suddenly, worship becomes something else. Not purely personal—rather, public worship is intensely *communal*. It is the activity (singular) of the body of individuals (singular), not activities (plural) of individuals (plural). Worship is a first person plural event.¹⁷ “We” is the proper subject of public worship, not “I.” The first person plural nature of public worship demands that corporate worship be far different than what works for an individual. This intensely communal event requires an understanding of worship that transcends personal taste or preference and seeks the benefit of the body over the individual.

The natural opportunity for outreach in worship

An inevitable fact of 21st century America is that some of the “we” in that first personal plural of public worship will be unchurched people or unbelieving people. Like it or not, in our culture worship has become the primary point of first contact with the unchurched.

Some say, “Worship isn’t the best place to invite an unchurched person.” Others say, “Outreach plans should bring prospects in through the side door, not the church door. Let them come to worship after some instruction.” To those people, I often want to ask, “Have you actually tried that?” In the exploratory, asking people to join me for Bible study in my basement did not lead to many opportunities to share the efficacious Word. How would you respond if your wife said, “Honey, I met this man at the grocery store, and I’m going to start doing Bible study with him in his basement?”

Worship provides a natural opportunity for outreach because it’s not threatening—it’s public. There is an assumption of a degree of anonymity—lost when accepting an invitation to my basement Bible study. It doesn’t require a commitment of weeks—it can be one and done.

Of the couple hundred adult confirmands at Faith, Sharpsburg, GA, in the last few years, a grand total of none—zero—have attended adult instruction class before coming to worship. We have many outreach lines in the water, but each of them ultimately has resulted in the unchurched attending worship before adult instruction class.

We are fooling ourselves if we think public worship has nothing to do with outreach. We are fooling ourselves if we fail to see that often the only Areopagus offered to the modern Church happens between the Invocation and the Benediction. We are fooling ourselves if we think worship is not the “correct” place for outreach.

Outreach happens whenever the lost or straying come into contact with God’s Word on the lips of his people. Ever since the Church found itself East of Eden and surrounded by great and growing wickedness and unbelief, public worship has always been a proclaiming of the name of the LORD to the glory of God and the salvation of man. Like it or not, our first contact with the unchurched is often public worship.

There is no problem with that, because worship and outreach are joined together by the public proclamation of the radical act of God’s grace. In worship the unchurched will be afflicted by the law and comforted by the gospel; they will hear the praise of God’s people that consists of proclaiming God’s saving deeds; they will be surrounded by the shining light of Christian love to the praise of the Father.

¹⁷ Howard A. Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, 121.

The need to a better job of both worship and outreach

Another reason for the debate stems from the current state of worship and outreach among us. As a national body we have spent much time and effort talking about improving worship. We have spent much time debating worship practices. This is time well spent. Excellence in worship should be of highest priority to the Church. However, in every congregation of our synod, the Word is preached, the Sacraments are rightly administered, law and gospel are divided, the people of God are fed. It might not always be done in exciting or innovative ways. It might not always be done with outstanding delivery or performance. It might be done in contracting churches or closing missions. But the gospel is being shared with God's people.

Can that be equally said of our outreach ministry? Every WELS congregation has a worship plan to share the Word with the flock, to praise God and to administer the Sacraments. Does every congregation have a similarly regular, consistent and faithful plan to find the lost in their community and share the gospel with them?

The goal of outreach is to find the unchurched and share the Word with them. Period. How are we doing at that as a national church body? Think about these numbers for a moment: 51% of our congregations confirmed one adult or less last year.¹⁸ 521 congregations reported zero adult confirmands.

Let's be very clear: numbers can in no way be used to evaluate faithfulness in ministry. God grows the Church when and where he wills. Numbers can, however, help me to ask some questions about my stewardship of the means of grace. Am I taking advantage of the opportunities for gospel outreach that God puts in front of me? Am I seeking the lost in my community and actively engaging them with the gospel? Am I doing all I can as a minister of Christ to be an ambassador to the lost as though God were making his appeal through me?

If the answer is, "Yes!" then take comfort in the fact that the Word is efficacious and the Spirit works when he wills. Take comfort in the fact that perhaps God has called you to a Jeremiah 15 ministry.¹⁹ Let no one use numbers or outward success to impugn your faithfulness to Christ and kingdom. Let God's word of judgment on hardened hearts remain: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to these people. Send them away from my presence!"²⁰

But is that the reality for 50-60% of the communities served by the WELS?

If the answer rather is, "Well...we try our best." Then perhaps we should give our community the benefit of the doubt before consigning them to the fate of apostate Israel. Perhaps we should renew every effort to be the best stewards of the means of grace.

Worship can't replace your outreach program, but it can play an important role in it. Today, we won't talk about the whole gamut of outreach practices or worship practices—we're here to talk about what role worship plays in outreach.

¹⁸ 2009 WELS Statistical Report. Of the 1279 congregations, reported adult confirmations:

- 0 = 521 congregations
- 1 = 139 congregations
- 2 = 142 congregations
- 3 = 115 congregations
- 10+ = 99 congregations

¹⁹ "I will make you a wall to this people!" Jer 15:20

²⁰ Jer 15:1

We will find nothing novel; we will find only the experience of the Church that is in the world but not of it. We will find that proclaiming the name of the LORD binds worship and outreach together. However, any paradigm for worship and outreach we adopt must be a *Lutheran* paradigm—flowing from and embodying Lutheran theology.

The Balancing Act of a Lutheran Paradigm of Worship and Outreach

Balancing the inherent efficacy of the Word and stewardship of the means of grace

Consider these two truths:

- God's Word works: it is efficacious of itself because it is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to call people to faith. Nothing we do makes the Word work better.
- God commands us to be faithful stewards of the means of grace. We seek to use them in the best possible way.

These are both true statements. We believe that the Word of God is efficacious. That means our job is to preach the gospel and leave the converting to the Holy Spirit. The Word is always efficacious because it is the gospel: it is living and active; it is the power of God; it never returns to him empty. This call has the power to open the heart of man and reclaim it for God. It is able to make us wise for salvation.²¹

Yet at the same time, our Lord calls us to be faithful stewards of the means of grace and use them in the best way we can. He tells us to preach the Word and to be prepared in season and out of season, to do your best, to be a workman approved, to correctly handle the Word, to entrust to reliable men who are apt to teach.²² He tells his messengers to plant and water, and to go and teach.²³ He wants us to be faithful to God's Word and faithful with God's Word.²⁴

There is a tension in our ministry between these two truths. Nowhere does he tell us that the efficacy of the Word excuses a lack of working or planting or going. Nowhere does Jesus tell us that our working and going and planting are what saves. Efficacy cannot be an excuse for laziness; effort or results cannot be an excuse for pride.²⁵

God has a plan to save mankind: God has a part, the Word has a part, and you have a part. The dogmaticians like Johann Andreas Quenstedt help us here with their distinctions between the causes of salvation.²⁶ The efficient cause of salvation is the Holy Trinity;²⁷ the instrumental cause of salvation is the Word;²⁸ the ministerial cause²⁹ of salvation is the messenger.³⁰

²¹ Heb 4:12; Rm 1:16; Is 55:11; Rm 10:17; 2 Ti 3:15

²² 2 Tim 4:2; 2:15; 2:2; 2:24

²³ 1 Cor 3:6; Mt 28:19

²⁴ 1 Cor 4:2

²⁵ Note the related tension between the doctrine of election and the Great Commission. They are not meant to be reconciled, but both are meant to inform our ministry as ambassadors of Christ.

²⁶ Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia dictactico-polemica*, IV, XV: *De ecclesia*, XIII-XV.

²⁷ *Causa efficiens principalis est total SS. Trinitas*. Θεσις XIII. See also Θεσις XIV the impulsive cause that moves God is outwardly the extreme misery of the people and the merit of Christ. Inwardly it is his goodness, compassion and grace.

We are correct when we say that the Word is efficacious by itself and the Spirit works when and where he wills. We have no effect on the efficient and instrumental causes of salvation. However, Scripture does say, “And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”³¹ The only cause of salvation you and I have any control over is the ministerial cause.³² It is that cause which the Lord addresses when he tells us to be good stewards of the means of grace (the instrumental cause) that the Trinity (the efficient cause) might achieve its goal: the glory of God and the salvation of man.

A Lutheran paradigm of worship and outreach seeks to uphold both of those biblical truths: God’s Word is the efficacious tool God would use to save man, and God commands us to do our very best in sharing that Word with others.

A Lutheran paradigm also uses these two truths to inform each other. God says his Word works; then he turns right around and tells you to work like crazy: Plant! Water! Divide! Preach! Go! The efficacy of the Word doesn’t remove the urgency of Jesus’ words—rather, it informs our activity in ministry. After planting and watering and preaching and growing, the efficacy of the Word offers the great comfort of telling the ministerial cause that it is the instrumental cause that is efficacious and the efficient cause who has promised to work when *he* wills. The efficacy of the Word gives us the comfort of knowing that God is working; it never comforts us to be lax in our gospel-preaching work. We use First Article gifts to communicate Second Article truths with Third Article confidence.³³

The Word works; the minister works. God promises the former and commands the latter. Our goal is to strive to communicate the efficacious Word in the best ways we can.

Balancing nurture and witness in worship

The primary audience in worship is the congregation, and the primary purpose of worship is for God to serve us with the means of grace.³⁴ The German word *Gottesdienst* with its two fold meaning³⁵ serves much better than our English word

²⁸ *Causa instrumentalis sunt Verbum et Sacramenta.* Θεσις XVI.

²⁹ *Causa ministerialis, qua Deus in collectione et conservatione Ecclesiae utitur, sunt ministri verbi.*

³⁰ They are the servants who bid the bidden come, Lk 14:17; that I might save some, 1 Cor 3:22; given by Christ for the Church, Eph 4:11-12; workers together in God’s work of building, 1 Cor 3:9; ambassadors for Christ, 2 Cor 5:20; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel, 1 Cor 4:15. They are a *causa ministerialis* not by reason of the ministers’ person, but by reason of their ministry—namely that they preach the Word and administrate the Sacraments. See Baier, III, 9: *et suo modo etiam ipsi ministri ecclesiae.* Baier then quotes Gerhard “...non ratione personae, sed ratione sui ministerii, quatenus scl. verbum praedicant et sacramenta administrant. Sic evangelium est potentia Dei ad salute Rom 1, 16, et Timotheus, praedicans evangelium, salvat se ipsum et eos, qui ipsum audiunt 1 Tim 4, 16.” *Baieri Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, III 185.

³¹ Rom 10:14

³² This in no way equates the public ministry with the means of grace. The Word of God is a means of grace also when merely read (Pieper, III, 449 and FC SD, XI, 29). God is the efficient cause, the Word and Sacrament are the instrumental cause, and the minister is merely the mouthpiece, the herald, of the saving message. As God said to Jeremiah, “You will be my mouth.”

³³ This excellent thought comes from Prof. Richard Gurgel and is most recently published in *Preach the Word*, September, 2010.

³⁴ The words of St. Paul concerning worship cited below make that clear. The confessions are equally clear that worship is primarily us receiving gifts from God: Cf. Apology III, 107: *Vult sibi credi Deus, vult nos ab ipso dona accipere, et id pronuntiat esse verum cultum.* (God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.), cf. also 189: *Ita cultus et λατρεία evangelii est accipere bona a Deo.* (Thus the worship and divine service of the Gospel is to receive from God gifts.) *Concordia Triglotta*, 182, 207.

“worship.” For when Christians gather on Sunday morning they do far more than “ascribe worth” to God. God serves us and we serve God. St. Paul says:

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.³⁶

Paul says that in worship, the Word of God makes its house and home in us with great benefit (ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως); we sing psalms, hymns, and songs that are vehicles of the Holy Spirit (ᾠδαὶς πνευματικαῖς) not merely for praise but in order to teach and admonish. God does this by serving us with the means of grace (ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ).

The secondary purpose of worship is for us to serve God; God speaks and his people respond.³⁷ We serve him with our acts of praise and thanks; we give him glory with our prayers and proclamations of his saving deeds.

Public worship, however, means that we are gathered as a body. As such, the service of God to us and our service to God both serve our fellow worshiper. As I hear God’s Word, I encourage my brother. As I respond in faith, I spur him on.³⁸ And when there are prospects at worship, they are an audience, too. As God serves his people with the gospel, his Word is being shared with the prospect, too. When the bride of Christ responds with words of praise and proclamation, it is a witness to the lost or unchurched who are present.

Public worship serves both believers and the unchurched because it is a public proclamation of Christ. However, a Lutheran paradigm balances the audience and purpose of worship. Our public worship is *primarily* for the people of God; it is *secondarily* a witness for the lost. This helps us keep our worship practices in perspective. We primarily design worship for the people of God; we also make worship accessible to the unchurched, because they, too, are one of the audiences worship is meant to reach.

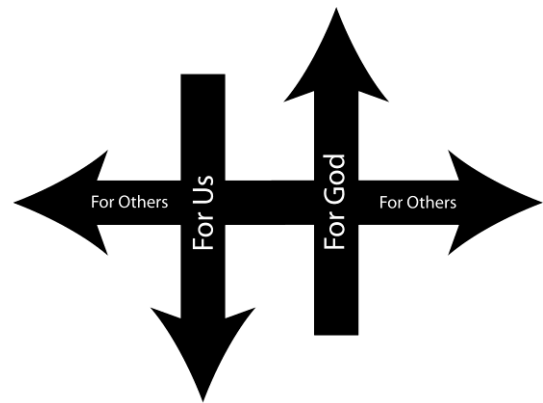


Figure 1. Who is Public Worship For?

³⁵ See the use of both the subjective and objective sense in “Ein Kleines Theologisches Wörterbuch,” by Prof. Daniel Deuschlander: “It is the ‘service of God,’ i.e., our serving Him in obedience to the Third Commandment; but it is also and more importantly His serving us in His Word and Sacraments; the word *Gottesdienst* is a constant reminder to both the shepherd and the flock that they have gathered as His people ‘nach seinem Wort und Willen,’ not merely to do their own thing.”

³⁶ Col 3:16-17

³⁷ Psalm 51:15 “O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.”

³⁸ Heb 10:25

A Lutheran paradigm recognizes the prominent role worship plays in the Church's outreach efforts; it also recognizes that it cannot *be* the Church's outreach effort. Being good stewards of the means of grace, then, means we don't design worship for the unchurched, but we ensure that it is accessible to the unchurched.³⁹

Balancing freedom and wisdom in worship

In the Old Testament, the people of God had no freedom in their worship practices. Every aspect of their services was prescribed by God and protected by law. The New Testament Church worships Jesus in freedom. "Christ is the end of the Law,"⁴⁰ and he is also the end of legal-ritual form of worship.⁴¹

Peter Brunner boils down worship to commanded and forbidden elements. The commanded elements are:

1. That the Word be proclaimed
2. That the Sacraments be administered rightly
3. That the gatherings be done in Jesus' name⁴²

At the same time any word or action that is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ must be barred from worship. Simple enough, right? But there's the rub: "The peculiar problem in the formation of the worship service is posed by the wide area that remains between the two boundary lines of the absolutely forbidden and the absolutely commanded."⁴³

The Lutheran Church never adopted an approved and required rite,⁴⁴ like the Anglicans did with the *Book of Common Prayer*. Dr. Luther, when introducing his *Deutsche Messe*, said:

As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same baptism and the same Sacrament [of the altar] and no one has received a special one of his own from God. That is not to say that those who already have good orders, or by the grace of God could make better ones, should discard theirs and adopt ours. For I do not propose that all of Germany should uniformly follow our Wittenberg order. Even heretofore the chapters, monasteries, and parishes were not alike in every rite. But it would be well if the service in every principality would be held in the same manner and if the order observed in a given city would also be followed by the surrounding towns and villages; whether those in other principalities hold the same order or add to it ought to be a matter of free choice and not of constraint.⁴⁵

Though free, Luther saw commonality in worship forms to be beneficial for the good of the common people.

³⁹ This concept will be expanded in the section: *A Lutheran paradigm makes the worship experience accessible to the unchurched*.

⁴⁰ Rom 10:4, its fulfillment and the difference between shadow and reality, Col 2:16-17.

⁴¹ Peter Brunner continues: "The New Covenant's end-time order of salvation may be summarized in the one statement that we sinners are declared righteous for Jesus' sake by faith in the Gospel and thus are justified in Jesus Christ. Therefore the outward framework of worship within which the Gospel is proclaimed and Holy Communion is celebrated can in no wise be made a condition for salvation. Questions regarding the pattern of this worship are thus moved into the freedom of those who by faith in the Gospel are liberated from any legal precept which would bind the conscience before God," *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, 220.

⁴² Brunner, 221-222.

⁴³ Brunner, 225.

⁴⁴ The Lutheran Church had the confessions, rather than a particular rite, to mark them as Lutherans. In fact, the German word for denominations is *Konfessionen*.

⁴⁵ LW 53:61

Now when your people are confused and offended by your lack of uniform order, you cannot plead, “Externals are free. Here in my own place I am going to do as I please.” But you are bound to consider the effect of your attitude on others. By faith be free in your conscience toward God, but by love be bound to serve your neighbor’s edification, as also St. Paul says, Romans 14 [15:2], “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.” For we should not please ourselves, since Christ also pleased not himself, but us all.⁴⁶

The Lutheran church wrestled with freedom and wisdom in worship during the time leading up to the Formula of Concord. The basic confessional texts regarding freedom and wisdom in worship are found in Augustana VII, XV, XXVI, XXVIII with corresponding coverage in the Apology, along with Formula of Concord X. Without question, they remove the Church’s outward form of worship from the question of salvation. They keep it, however, firmly in the area of wisdom and love.

Our confessions clearly state that not all ceremonies are to be removed, but we retain those beneficial to the gospel. All legalism is unequivocally rejected. The authority of the Church to change its rites is underscored. But liberty in worship forms does not mean a libertine use of worship forms.⁴⁷ They saw good reason for brothers in the same place to approve of each others’ rites. Actions of Christian freedom in worship must be normed by Scripture and done with both wisdom and love.⁴⁸

So then what place does the history of the worship of the Church have in determining our worship form today in a Lutheran paradigm? There needs to be a balance between freedom and wisdom. It would be unwise of us to close our eyes to twenty centuries of Christian wisdom in worship—that is not the way of Lutherans.

Only the Enthusiasts, who have no fathers and brothers, but are given to the delusion that the people of God on earth had their inception with them. “What! Did the Word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it reached?” (1 Cor 14:36 RSV) This critical question of the apostle, which the Enthusiasts in Corinth needed to hear, obligates the church of all times to approach with due respect and reverence the traditions of Christendom which do not conflict with Christ’s institution and the Word of God.⁴⁹

However, we also dare not try to reprimarize the worship of a past time and place from some “golden age” of the Church, whether we think that’s 16th century Wittenberg or 1950s Midwest WELS. To copy that worship today would be failing to respect the width and elasticity of time-tested Lutheran worship, because it would seek to regard a form from one point in our tradition as a norm. Luther maintained the same freedom in his day. When his friend Nicholas Hausmann

⁴⁶ LW 53:45 Luther’s “Letter to the Livonians” reads like it is written for the modern Church working through worship wars; all would do well to read it.

⁴⁷ Brunner reminds us, “The liberty which He gives His own through the Spirit of sonship is part of the very essence of His rule. But since He Himself is Lord in this liberty, the worship of the church dare not assume a form which would infringe on the gracious, liberating lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore everything that is inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit effective in it must be excluded from the form of worship,” 223.

⁴⁸ Note especially how Formula X answered the issues of the adiaphoristic controversy.

⁴⁹ Brunner, 231.

proposed an evangelical council to enforce liturgical uniformity, Luther objected to the use of compulsion. He felt that each evangelical center should be free either to devise its own liturgy or to borrow from others.⁵⁰

In worship there is a wide space between what is commanded and what is forbidden: everything between⁵¹ lies in the area of Christian freedom. Freedom in worship must be balanced by wisdom and love. Freedom that is not normed by love damages the body of Christ. Freedom that is not normed by wisdom fails in the stewardship of the means of grace. You may be free in making changes to worship practices; we will fight for your freedom to do just that. Do not, however, demand that we always call it wise.

Characteristics of a Lutheran Paradigm of Worship and Outreach

Ever since Montaigne coined the term in the 16th century, an essay has been the discussion of general ideas in personal contexts. Each man's personal context forms the prism through which he views the world; as such you should know mine.

My ministry experience was fired in the kiln of exploratory outreach. I was sent as a church planter in an exploratory restart effort in 1999. Our first service had nine in attendance. Adult instruction class was in my basement; worship was in rented space. From those days the Holy Spirit has built himself a large⁵² congregation in Sharpsburg, Georgia, almost entirely of adult confirmands. From the beginning, we were a group committed to the marriage of aggressive outreach and distinctively Lutheran worship. We have congregational canvasses and cross processions; we hold soccer camps and Easter Vigils; we reach out in a southern state with the western rite. From day one we were a church that practiced the Lutheran liturgy in a mission setting. Today we are a large church that still strives for a vibrant outreach effort and excellence in liturgical worship.

My context of ministry helped me see that worship can be a powerful tool for outreach, without turning the service into an evangelistic event. Worship can never replace your outreach program; worship can, however, play an important role in your witness to the community.

What, then, could a Lutheran paradigm for worship and outreach look like? This will not be an exhaustive listing of all the characteristics of Lutheran worship. Those can be found in the basic worship texts. Instead, we will consider some characteristics of a Lutheran paradigm for worship and outreach.

A Lutheran paradigm is invitational in character

When we started the exploratory in 1999, we had no facility, no property, and certainly no programs to use in our efforts to reach the community. We had one thing: Sunday morning worship. That was our solitary program. So we made use of it. Worship became the goal of all of our outreach efforts. Whether we were canvassing the neighborhoods or sending

⁵⁰ WA, Br 3, No. 793, 373-374, referenced in the introduction to the *Deutsche Messe* in LW 53. Note: the Weimar edition is now available for free through Google Books. There are no subscription costs, and the work is already over 50% complete.

⁵¹ *Mitteldinge*

⁵² Large for WELS; we have about 400 members.

direct mail or talking to friends and neighbors, our outreach strategy was invitational in nature—specifically inviting them to Sunday morning worship. Like Philip to Nathanael, our mantra was “Come and see!”

Sunday morning worship is a great place to invite prospects because there they see the Church function in all its roles: they hear the story of salvation; they listen to the Word preached; they see the Sacraments administered; they come into contact with the people of God.

Use the Sunday morning service as the ongoing point of invitation in your outreach program and use specific Sundays as your target dates for large outreach events. Set aside at least four Sundays or worship events annually to be the focus of aggressive outreach efforts.⁵³ Give your members special days to invite their friends; give them materials to use to invite them; invite the whole community with direct mail; invite your prospects with a phone call. Invitational Sundays give you a reason and a date to prepare the building, the people, and the callers. And then, expect people to come! Pray that God would give you the chance to reach visitors.

Worship is a fine place for the unchurched, because there is preached the Word of Christ: a hammer, a whisper, a working of the Spirit. Worship has exactly what the lost need: law and gospel, sin and grace, the death and resurrection of Christ. No matter what else we talk about today, nothing else matters so much in a paradigm for worship and outreach than simply getting people into contact with the means of grace.

I met a man early in my ministry and began outreach work with him that has lasted many years. I never had many chances to do law and gospel presentations in his home; he worked a lot and remained cool to the idea. I shared the gospel with his wife, who finished adult instruction classes and was baptized with their children. The father, however, wasn't ready for that. I invited him to just attend church as long as he'd like. For several years he came to worship regularly. Last year when I was holding a call out of the parish, he called to speak with me. He told me that he had been an atheist, but now he believed that Jesus was his Savior. In case I took this call, he wanted me to know that he now believed in Christ.

That soul was won for the kingdom not by calling programs or promotional campaigns (though we have those); it was won for the kingdom not by follow-up visits or attempted excellence in worship (though we try to have those, too); that soul was won for the kingdom by the simple preaching of the gospel in public worship. Like Luther drinking Wittenberg beer, the Word does it all, even while we are unaware.⁵⁴

God gives us examples like that to remind us again and again that he works faith when and where he wills through the working of his Spirit. And his Spirit is at work in worship, both nurturing the faithful and reaching the lost. Our goal is to find ways to connect more people to the Word that it might do its saving work.

A Lutheran paradigm is centered on the gospel

A Lutheran paradigm is invitational precisely because public worship is centered on the gospel and therefore clearly proclaims Christ for us from beginning to end. Worship that is Lutheran features a predominance of the gospel, the

⁵³ Christmas Eve, Easter Sunday, and Mother's Day are no-brainers. We always select a day in the fall as well.

⁵⁴ Luther, “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philips and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.” LW51:77.

Christocentric message of justification of the sinner by grace through faith, and the reliance on the means of grace to plant faith and build faith. If we want to use a Lutheran paradigm for worship and outreach, we are looking to create a worship culture defined by the means of grace.

For centuries, the Lutheran church has found no better way to do that than through the liturgy. Liturgical worship serves outreach because it not only centers on the gospel, but it creates a culture of the means of grace in the public worship life of a congregation. The great missionary sender Wilhelm Löhe said:

In the...worship of the congregation stand Word and Sacrament like rocks of the sea. Like the sea breaking on the rocks, so do the holy forms of the liturgy crash in upon the center of Word and Sacrament...The waves of the liturgy concentrically orbit the inner circle of the spiritual life which revolves around the poles of Word and Sacrament. Word and Sacrament determine the order of salvation, and these determine the order of worship.⁵⁵

Dr. Luther designed the liturgy of the Lutheran Church with outreach as a specific purpose. He wrote in his forward to the *Deutsche Messe* that the purpose of it and his *Formula Missae*⁵⁶ was to reach the lost with the message of Christ:

These two orders of service must be used publicly, in the churches, for all the people, among whom are many who do not believe and are not yet Christians. Most of them stand around and gape, hoping to see something new, just as if we were holding a service among the Turks or the heathen in a public square or out in a field. That is not yet a well-ordered and organized congregation, in which Christians could be ruled according to the gospel; on the contrary, the gospel must be publicly preached [to such people] to move them to believe and become Christians.⁵⁷

We might be served by a brief reminder of what liturgical worship is, and what it's not. Liturgical worship does not mean slavishly using page 15 or page 26 out of *CW*; it does not mean using music at least 150 years old. It is not merely an order of service or an alternating pattern of Word then music. It is not synonymous with the old WELS way of doing worship.

Simply put, liturgical worship uses the ancient songs of the Church, the seasons and readings of the Church Year, the vestments and patterns of worship inherited from our Christian forefathers. Liturgical worship uses the great texts of the Church (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Te Deum, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*, etc.) as the basis for its praise and uses the Life of Christ and the Teachings of Christ⁵⁸ as expressed in the liturgical calendar as the basis for its proclamation. It is the product of twenty centuries of Christian worship. It is not matter of worship style, but a matter of worship content.

The liturgy has its roots in the Old Testament synagogue service that was adapted by the first Christians, but the rite has never been static. Countless Christians across the globe have worshiped with the liturgy in countless languages and musical settings. The reality is that *liturgical worship* has nothing to do with formal or casual, high church or low church, KJV or NIV, confessional or non-confessional, traditional

⁵⁵ Quoted in David C. Ratke, *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament: the ecclesial theology of Wilhelm Löhe*, 114-115.

⁵⁶ Both are versions of the liturgy: the latter retained the Latin language and forms; in the former, Luther used the vernacular and replaced many of the songs of the Ordinary with the words arranged as hymns.

⁵⁷ LW 53:63.

⁵⁸ The Festival and Non-festival halves of the Church Year.

or contemporary. Liturgical worship is nothing more than worship based on the presuppositions, practices, and progression of the historic Christian liturgy.⁵⁹

When it comes to content delivered, the liturgy brings the gospel to bear by proclaiming *Christus pro nobis* from beginning to end. This alone would be enough to commend its use in outreach settings. Many, however, question the suitability of liturgical worship for outreach. Can it be used to reach the lost? Does today's prospect demand a different style of worship?

In our target area we have found worship style to be inconsequential in determining whether or not an unchurched prospect will come to church. The Barna Research Group conducted a survey of the unchurched in our community to determine the ministry approaches that the unchurched identified as reasons they would come to church (Figure 2).

Reaching the lost does not necessitate dumping the liturgy. In our community, worship style did not factor in the unchurched mind—contemporary, liturgical, or traditional. Church shoppers have lots of preconceived ideas of what they want worship to look like. But unchurched prospects tend to like worship at the place where someone brought them the Word of God that called them from darkness to light.

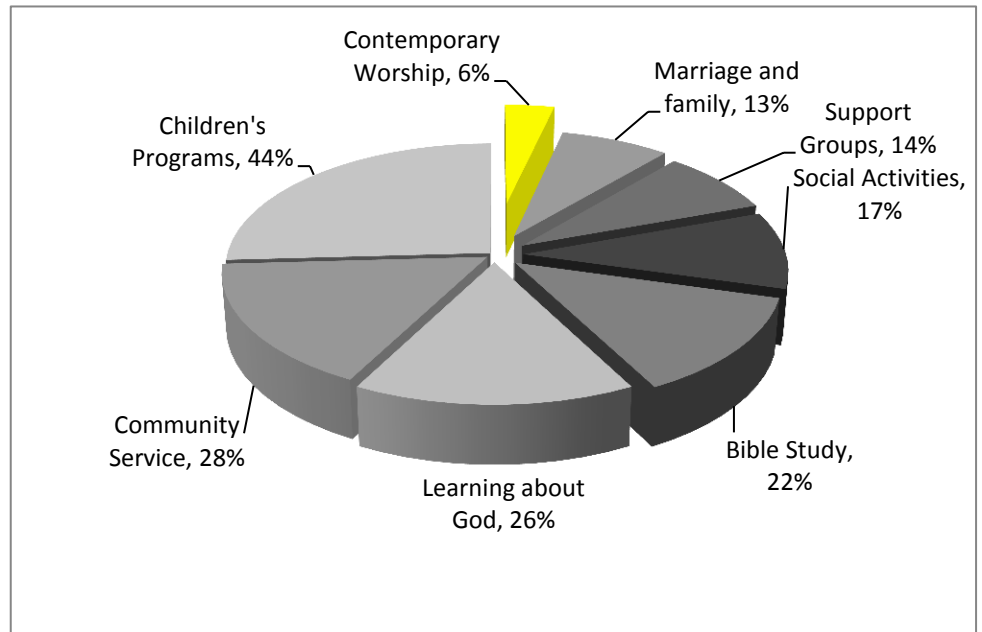


Figure 2 Barna Research Group, Braclin Baptist Research, Peachtree City, GA, 2002

A suggested strategy

Know it

Take the time necessary to understand the rich heritage we have in the Lutheran liturgy. Consider carefully the theological content that it conveys. Twenty centuries of Christian wisdom in worship have been passed down to you—make sure you understand it before you consider changing it.

Permit one example of pastoral perspective. I attended two Ascension services a few years ago; one service was liturgical, the other not. In the non-liturgical church the prayer came from the heart of the pastor and took the form of a *wejus'* prayer.⁶⁰ At the liturgical church, the pastor just read a prayer out of a book. Both of those prayers were fine and good. We

⁵⁹ James P. Tiefel. "Liturgical Preaching." *Worship the Lord*, July 2010.

⁶⁰ "Wejus' want to lift your name on high, Lord. Wejus' want to thank you for this moment, Lord. Wejus' praise your name for taking Jesus up..."

are free to choose whichever we'd like. But liturgical churches for centuries have used the prayer out of the book on the Festival of the Ascension of our Lord. Why?

Well, in England in the early 700s AD, there lived a churchman known to history as the Venerable Bede. He was the great teacher of the middle ages, the man who divided history into AD and BC,⁶¹ the first great historian of the English language and a devout man of God. On May 25, 735 AD, on the great Ascension Vigil, Bede finished his translation of the Gospel of St. John into Old English. Then, on that day of Ascension, he died. From his deathbed, Bede spoke the words that have become the Prayer of the Day on Ascension. For centuries and centuries, if you were in a liturgical church on Ascension, you would have heard them:

O King of Glory, LORD of Hosts, who did this day ascend in triumph far above all heavens: We beseech thee leave us not comfortless, but send to us the Spirit of Truth, promised of the Father, who lives and reigns...

Looking at the content of the prayer, one can easily see why centuries of Christian worshippers found this prayer to be nourishing for *corporate* worship in the days before Pentecost. Looking at the history of the Church, one can see why the Church on the day it sings, "A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing,"⁶² also chose to use this fine prayer.

You are free to write something better; I will defend your freedom to do it. And if you write something that generations of Christians around the world think is better, then we will all pray your prayer next Ascension Day. Many pastors have come before you; walking on their well-worn path is not traditionalism, it is wisdom. In liturgical worship we have the living faith of the dead who have gone before us. Thousands of ministers of light have found these forms of great value in bringing Christ to people lost in darkness. Since the Word of God did not originate with us, there is wisdom in acting like we remember that fact.

Adorn it

That does not mean, however, that our worship should be a testament to static sameness. Liturgical worship does not mean doing worship the old WELS way. Worship should be rich and varied and vibrant. Within the structure of the liturgy the Church has always made room for treasures new and old.

Use the proper Verse of the Day and accompany it with piano and guitar. Sing Zulu melodies accompanied by djembe.⁶³ Use Gathering Rites and new *Glorias*, motet choirs and cantors, Matins and Vespers. Turn down the lights and sit around the baptismal font for Compline. Practice canticle replacement and regular service variety. It is not the style or instrument that makes worship liturgical, but the pattern, the texts, and the theological content conveyed.⁶⁴

Liturgical worship fits well into a Lutheran paradigm for worship and outreach because it centers itself on the gospel message of Christ for us, and does so in rooted, but relevant forms. Know the heritage you have; adorn it and use it with great effort; balance freedom and wisdom. Liturgical worship is a powerful tool to build and plant faith. Christian love and wisdom, however, encourage us to make sure it is accessible to the unchurched or the first-time visitor.

⁶¹ While Dionysius Exiguus is credited with the first use of those terms, it was Bede who popularized it.

⁶² Written, also, by the Venerable Bede.

⁶³ *CWS* 732.

⁶⁴ Musical style is not necessarily neutral; certain musical associations are too strong to be ignored. However, style does not make worship liturgical or non-liturgical *per se*.

A Lutheran paradigm makes the worship experience accessible to the unchurched

Liturgical worship is not too difficult for a first time visitor to follow; the way we've done liturgical worship, however, may be too difficult for people to follow. Starting on page 26 in the front part of the hymnal and then going to hymn 150 in the no page number section back to page 27 then to Psalm 45 on page 83 and back to... That may be confusing to a first time worshiper without pedantic instructions at every point of the service.⁶⁵

Print out your services in their entirety. Any visitor can follow liturgical worship from page 1 to 2 to 3. Your prospects are unchurched; they are not illiterate. Printing out your service folder in its entirety also offers the chance to include service explanations that discuss the theme for worship, and footnotes regarding the texts or songs of the liturgy or the like. Tell them the story of the writing of the *Te Deum*. Teach some and remind some of the meaning of *Kyrie, paschal, Maundy, absolution*. Explain why we do what we do. Printing out the service folder also enables greater variety in worship without the confusion of multiple books or inserts.

Since worship plays a continual role in your outreach program, print out your service folder every week. Who knows when visitors might come? Yes, it takes more effort. Yes, it takes a little more time. Yes, it costs a little bit more money.⁶⁶ This, however, will be time and effort well spent; it is also time and effort well suited for church volunteers to do.

Be mindful of your hymn selection. Your visitors will not know many of your hymns, but they will know whether or not your people know them. Good congregational singing is a witness to visitors both with the words proclaimed and the attitude with which your members proclaim them. Consider using a smaller repertoire of hymns and adding to it by educating and training the congregation on new hymn tunes.⁶⁷

Be mindful that the way you speak includes the visitor in the worship experience rather than excludes him by using terms or phrases he doesn't understand. For example, in Georgia, no one knows what a synod is. They heard a completely different word, and for a while some people called me "Senator Schroeder." While I liked the sound of that, we now talk about "our national church body."

Look at your communication through the eyes of a first time visitor. What would they get out of this bulletin announcement:

The LWMS is collecting mite boxes; bring them in this week—that includes the LGP.

There are mysteries of God that happen in worship which the first time visitor will not be able to understand. LWMS announcements don't have to be one of those. Making your worship experience accessible to the first time visitor shows love for Christ and the prospect.

⁶⁵ Kudos to the designers of the new LCMS hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*. If you want to find Psalm 1, it is on page 1. If you want to find Psalm 115, it is on page 115. If you want to find hymn 449, it's on page 449. Orders of service are found right after Psalm 150, beginning on page 151.

⁶⁶ But let's be honest, for most WELS churches this would cost less than \$10 per week—outreach dollars well spent!

⁶⁷ *CW Supplement* is a gem. Buy it; introduce it a song at a time; use it often.

A Lutheran paradigm prioritizes preaching

The hard work of inviting and preparing and welcoming prospects all comes to a head when we get into the pulpit as the messenger of God. When it comes to outreach or inreach, good preaching covers a multitude of shortcomings.

The reasons to prioritize preaching are myriad; for the sake of outreach, the sermon plays a much bigger role than anything else that happens on Sunday morning. The prospects have come to hear the message; it means more than worship style; it means more than your building or your greeter program.⁶⁸ As the confessions say, “There is nothing that so attaches people to the church as good preaching.”⁶⁹

Sermons that bring Law and Gospel

The most important part of preaching for outreach consists in preaching law and gospel rightly divided and specifically applied. Here is the chance to preach them down to hell and then up to heaven. Confessional Lutherans preach law and gospel better than any other denomination. Here is one of the few times you will have the opportunity to take a prospect and have him listen to you without stop for twenty minutes. Make the most of it.

Sermons that are accessible to the visitor

Luther said, “I preach to the milkmaids and the doctors are edified.” Think about the prospects visiting church as the milkmaids God would have you teach. A Lutheran paradigm for outreach in worship ensures that our main Sunday message can be understood by everyone in the room. That means finding ways of saying “we are justified by faith,” without using those words. That means speaking in plain English, not in “sermon English.” That means assuming a general biblical illiteracy. Use illustrations from the Old Testament, but remember that your visitors will not know who David is—so tell them. They will not have heard of Abraham—so explain it. They will not know all the stories you were raised on in Sunday school—so share them. And by the way, it’s not just prospects that are biblically illiterate. Many cradle-to-grave WELSers couldn’t find 2 Kings with two hands and the lights on.⁷⁰

Sermons that are relevant

Sermons should be relevant. I don’t mean that they reference Justin Bieber or talk about how awesome your new iPad is. Prof. em. Daniel Deutschlander remarked at a preaching seminar that the preacher comes on Sunday morning to God’s people and says, “I have been to the heart of God this week; and from the treasure house of his grace, here is his message for you, his people on this day and in this place.” That is relevant. Sermons are not meant to be the generic messages you write during Junior and Middler year which are then trotted out across the Wisconsin countryside. They are meant to be God’s message from this part of God’s Word, for these people, in this place, at this time. That will be relevant—with or without Justin Bieber.

Sermons that are the product of a great deal of work

Some of the pastor’s most valuable outreach time are the many hours spent working on an excellent sermon. The sermon will often be the most important twenty minutes of outreach per week. Let me say that in a different way. If you want to

⁶⁸ I often say to my vicars that if we just could preach well and have friendly people, we could wear bunny suits for the first part of the service and visitors would put up with it. I am joking—mostly.

⁶⁹ Apology, XXIV, *Concordia*.

⁷⁰ I had a lifelong WELS member, a product of Lutheran grade school, explaining Paul’s thorn in the flesh to me in relation to Paul’s military service as a soldier and the fact that he was a big, strong man. [*sic!*]

give a boost to your outreach program, spend lots of time on your sermons. Excellent worship encourages your members to invite guests; excellent preaching does so even more.⁷¹

We work hard on our sermons, because although we know that the Word of God is efficacious, yet God has decided that it works psychologically.⁷² As Peter says, “you will do well to pay attention to it.”⁷³ God’s Word does not work magically; we do not preach in French to English speakers. The efficacious Word works psychologically, as it is understood, and also supernaturally, working faith and building faith in the hearers.

The efficient cause of salvation is God, and the instrumental cause is the Word. We have no business messing with those; in fact, we have no ability to change those at all. We do have control over the ministerial cause—the preacher. Will you speak the Word in a way that is understandable? Will you try to make your message interesting and relevant? Will you make your outline logical and your delivery as polished as you can? Will you make your message engaging and accessible to both the faithful and lost alike? Not because the Word doesn’t work; not because you are trying to help God’s Word be efficacious. Do it because you have been called to be a good steward of the means of grace who uses the efficacious Word in the best way you know how. That’s why you went to school...

In 1994 I was asked to serve as a student representative on the faculty committee evaluating the curriculum of Northwestern College, our former college for pastoral ministry training. In preparation for a meeting, members of the group were to summarize their thoughts on the purpose of the pastoral training system, from its liberal arts degree to its post-grad work at the Seminary. Many members, like this essayist, wrote much about what seemed like a pretty complicated issue. When his turn came up, Prof. Joel Fredrich presented his summary of the topic. It was three sentences; he showed brilliance with brevity by saying the purpose of our ministerial training system was to:

1. Know the Word
2. Know the Man
3. Know how to communicate the Word to the Man⁷⁴

Amen! Bring every gift to bear in service of the gospel; use all your knowledge of both Word and Man. You can’t make the efficient and instrumental cause work any differently. But you can affect the ministerial cause—that’s you, and how you serve as a herald of Christ. Be good stewards of the means of grace by using his efficacious Word in the best way you can. Your people and your prospects will thank you.

⁷¹ Essayist Pastor Adam Mueller wrote in an email of a conversation he overheard about sermon prep: “Do you know what the difference is between a good sermon and a great sermon?” “No. What?” “About five hours.”

⁷² Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 13. Theses 3ff. describe the working of the Word as psychological (heard and understood), not magically but supernaturally. Cf. Prof. John Brenner’s essay from the 2009 Synod Convention, “Christ’s Love.”

⁷³ 2 Pet 1:19

⁷⁴ I was next in line to present my thoughts; I quietly put my few pages away and passed when my turn came up.

A Lutheran paradigm is Sacramental⁷⁵

Does the celebration of Holy Communion at public worship help or hinder our outreach efforts? What impact does our practice of close⁷⁶ communion have on our ability to reach the unchurched?

These questions flow from the Church's love for the flock and for the lost; these questions linger because much of the answer falls in the area of balancing freedom and wisdom. Every pastor who practices close communion can share war stories of the offended visitor, the hurt family member, the angry church shopper who has come face to face with our practice. The more outreach a church does, the more visitors are going to be faced with it.

What then should the church do that wants to reach out to the lost but knows that the unchurched will come to our communion services? In our circles congregations have answered that question with some practices which vary quite widely. Should we remove the Sacrament from the main Sunday service so no visitor will be offended? Or should we celebrate it at any and every gathering and let the chips fall where they may? Or can the Church use a paradigm that allows worship and outreach to inform each other?

The power of the Sacraments

A Lutheran paradigm is inherently sacramental because Christ's Church is the church of Word and Sacrament—these are the marks by which the true Church is known and recognized. They are also the only tools God has given us to open the heart of man and claim it for Christ. The Word and Sacraments are the means God has chosen for us to plant faith and build faith.

Our churches teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but even more, to be signs and testimonies of God's will toward us. They were instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them.⁷⁷

To build faith and plant faith God instituted the office of the Holy Ministry to administer Word and Sacraments:

So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God in those who hear the gospel.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ In 2003, the Seminary held a Symposium on Holy Communion. I commend for your careful consideration the three essays on Holy Communion's institution, its place in the Lutheran Reformation and in current Lutheran practice. They can be found at <http://wlsce.net/symposium/2003-symposium-holy-communion>. The subject under consideration here is significantly narrower: What place does the Sacrament of Holy Communion occupy in a Lutheran paradigm of worship and outreach?

⁷⁶ Close or closed? I grew up in the modern WELS tradition of referring to our practice as "close." I suppose "closed" sounded too negative. However, the term "closed communion" has a track record in the church and tends to focus the explanation of the practice on the real presence (holy things for the holy ones). "Close communion," as a term, I fear, leads us rather too quickly to jump past the real presence to explain our practice in terms of fellowship (cf. the discussion of this in *A suggested strategy*). How else can you explain "close communion"? In this essay I will use the term "close" as I have throughout my life, but I wonder if we might give careful consideration to changing it.

⁷⁷ AC XIII, 1. *Concordia*.

⁷⁸ AC V,1. *Concordia*.

Since the goal of both worship and outreach is to create and sustain faith, any paradigm will be inherently sacramental—because Word and Sacrament are the tools God has given us to do that. The missionary call “Repent” is always followed with “and be baptized.” The faith planted through Baptism or the Word, Christ wants to strengthen through a lifetime of feeding at the Supper. Any paradigm that removes the Sacraments from worship for the sake of outreach loses one of its God-given tools to accomplish worship’s goal and purpose: the glory of God and the salvation of man.

The purpose of worship

A Lutheran paradigm is also sacramental because of the purpose of worship: worship primarily serves the found and secondarily serves the lost. We make worship accessible to the unchurched, but we don’t design worship for the unchurched. Regular, public worship certainly serves outreach because of its proclamation of the gospel; it cannot, however, replace the outreach ministry of a congregation. Worship remains the primary time for God’s people to be fed by God in Word and Sacrament—to be served by God at this *Gottesdienst*.

The primary purpose of worship leads the Church to offer frequently and publicly this Holy Supper that gives forgiveness of sins. Removal of the Sacrament from the main service might mean fewer offended visitors, but what will it mean for the people of God? Will removal from the main service mean that fewer members regularly commune? What of the weak brother who only comes to the main service? Will the placing of the Supper into the Bible study hour cause a dividing of the body of Christ rather than a uniting of it? If you find yourself walking this trail unblazed by your Lutheran fathers, be wary. Not all that is free is wise.⁷⁹

The proclamation of the act

A third reason for a sacramental paradigm lies in the fact that the celebration of the Sacrament is a proclamatory act. As Paul tells us: When you eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus you are building faith because every time you do it you preach the gospel to each other by the very act.⁸⁰ When we celebrate the Sacrament we proclaim the Lord’s death to each other and to the visitor.

The changing of the guard before the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery clearly communicates honor, loyalty and sacrifice to the crowd of spectators. They do not participate, but they witness acts that proclaim those virtues. Jesus did not institute the Lord’s Supper as an outreach event. However, the unchurched visitor, like the baptized member child, can hear the words and see the death of Jesus remembered even without participating: as Abraham Calov said, the Sacraments are the *verbum visibile*.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Rationale for removal of the Sacrament from the main service often reasons that the early Church had all the non-communicants leave the service after the service of the Word. While the early church had truly closed communion, the concept of recreating a single piece of ecclesiastical life and church practice from the early church seems like historical cherry picking. According to Origen, the same congregations that had a closed service of the Sacrament had a closed service of the Word as well. A man had to be instructed privately and demonstrate his trustworthiness and orderly life before he was admitted into the assembly of the hearers of the Service of the Word. These hearers along with the catechumens were excused and the doors were guarded by the deacons. Not many congregations are looking to reinstate the full panoply of practices in the early church; be careful in picking just one. (See Werner Elert’s discussion of Origen’s *Contra Celsum* III, 51, in *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, 75ff.)

⁸⁰ Cf. 1 Cor 11:24ff and Joel Fredrich, “The Lord Jesus Institutes Holy Communion,” 14.

⁸¹ Abraham Calov did not see a distinction in roles between *verba et sacramenta*. See Kenneth Appold, *Abraham Calov’s Doctrine of Vocatio in Its Systematic Context*, 131.

The practical results

There are practical, outreach-driven reasons to keep publicly celebrating the Sacrament as well. Public celebration facilitates the conversations necessary to move prospects from visiting to membership. In my ministry, the practice of close communion leads to more enrollments in adult instruction class than any of my witty sermon illustrations. The practice holds right before the prospect the concept that Christianity consists in more than Sunday dresses and hearty handshakes. It declares that there are mysteries involved here that are not readily comprehended. It shows there is a line of demarcation between the world and the body of Christ. And it makes them ask, “Why? How? When?”

I have served in the outreach ministry of an exploratory mission plant, a small mission church, and now a large and growing congregation.⁸² In each ministry context the practice of close communion in worship often provided the impetus for prospects to inquire about membership. The Spirit plants faith; the practice encourages that faith to inquire, “What does this mean? When can I partake?”

A conversation from a recent Sunday might give an example: Nick is a prospect who has been unchurched for years. On the Sunday we spoke, he had attended worship with us three times. The first two had been non-communion Sundays; the third was a communion Sunday. After service his first question was: “Pastor, what do we need to do to take communion?” I explained we have this Bible study we call Faith Builders, etc. and he signed up for the class.⁸³

The prayerful reality

I am convinced that frequent, public celebration of the Sacrament does not impede our ability to do outreach. Because of the power of the tools, the purpose of our worship, the proclamation of the act and the practical results, I am equally certain of the Sacrament’s place in any paradigm of worship and outreach. The congregation I serve will continue its history of aggressive outreach and frequent, public celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

But let me share a confessional moment with you. When I pray over my prospects, that God might bring them to church—why do I always find myself praying that they come on a non-communion Sunday?

The answer, I pray, is never timidity over proclaiming clear doctrine. The answer, I pray, is never that I doubt the efficacy of the gospel preached or its power to overcome any spiritual challenge. The answer, I pray, is never an unwillingness to trust that it is the Holy Spirit that works faith when and where he wills. So when I pray over my prospects, that God might bring them to church—why is it that I always find myself praying that they come on a non-communion Sunday?

The answer, hopefully, is a pastoral concern for the lost God brings into my care. My concern leads me to want them to have many opportunities to hear law and gospel, to hear of sin forgiven and heaven open, before they are confronted with a significant challenge to what might be a newborn faith.

⁸² All three, of course, were the same congregation.

⁸³ Lest anyone think that in Sharpsburg prospects fall out of the sky right into adult instruction, bear in mind that worship was not our only contact with Nick. The Holy Spirit had been working on him for some time. He had been receiving invitations to Easter and Christmas for five years. Then in the June of 2010 he was canvassed by one of our door-to-door teams. Vicar Keith Schleis made a canvass follow-up visit a week later. One week after that they attended worship, and our lay follow-up team made a face-to-face visit and delivered a thank you package to their door. Following their second visit to worship I made a pastoral call at their home. On their third visit to worship our communion practice gave them the impetus to ask about membership.

We don't remove the Sacrament from worship because there is an equally sincere pastoral concern for the people of God the Spirit has gathered into this congregation. Worship is primarily for the found and secondarily for the lost, but pastoral care and concern should encompass both of the groups listed on my call form: the flock and the lost in my community.

A suggested strategy

Scripture makes the primary reason for practicing close communion strikingly clear.⁸⁴ The public celebration of the Sacrament in a service open to the community necessitates a process of preventing reception in an unworthy manner.

In regard to the unchurched visitor in your service, the rationale for practicing close communion is primarily the Real Presence and only secondarily the doctrine of fellowship.⁸⁵ When explaining our close communion practice to prospects, don't try and get them to understand the doctrine of fellowship. Explain the practice on the basis of Christ's body and blood. Tell them that we believe this is a mystery of God—that in this Supper, God miraculously gives us the true body and blood of our Savior to eat and to drink. Admit to them honestly that if it were anything other than that, our practice would be as rude as having a table of coffee and doughnuts in the narthex with a sign warning: "For members only." But since Christ's body and blood are here for the forgiveness of sins, this is a Sacrament and a whole different set of rules apply compared to coffee and doughnuts.

Explaining the doctrine of fellowship will come later. Our first responsibility is to teach them what is happening in the Sacrament, what we receive in the Sacrament, and what God gives through the Sacrament. First things first: faith in Christ and an understanding of the Real Presence. Fellowship will follow.

Let this inform your practice of announcing close communion. Make your bulletin announcements short and to the point. The longer your announcements, the less the visitor reads them. The goal is to keep the visitor from partaking to their judgment, so pastoral care compels you to help them understand what we mean.

A half-page explanation of the confessional position of our church body and an exposition on the doctrine of fellowship is not necessary. A paragraph-long notice that members of "WELS, ELS, and other church bodies in fellowship with us are welcome to commune" is not the best answer. In the latter case, the only phrase the unchurched visitor understood was "with us are welcome." In the former, they probably didn't read past line two.

If the goal is to keep them from coming up to communion, perhaps your announcement should say just that:

Faith Lutheran Church practices close communion. We ask that only members partake of the Sacrament.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ 1 Cor 11:28-29: A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread or drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body and blood of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

⁸⁵ I refer here to unchurched people who do not know their Savior or who do not understand the Sacrament. Of course, fellowship plays the primary role when faith is present and the believer understands the Real Presence.

⁸⁶ We use a service folder with the entire service printed out in full; we place the announcement right before the Preface in the service folder so no one misses what we are talking about. Visiting WELS people understand the doctrine, and are generally not stopped by that kind of bulletin notice; they know that we mean members of our confessional group. This kind of announcement does, however, help inform ELCA church shoppers that there are differences between Lutherans. No matter how lengthy or detailed you make your explanation, ELCA visitors are hard to convince that the circle of fellowship doesn't include them.

While many people assume that they are in agreement with any Christian church, no one thinks they are members of our church. After worship, then, an explanation of our practice can be given.

My explanations of our close communion practice have gotten much easier since I've stopped apologizing for our practice and started just clearly declaring it. After describing what happens in the Sacrament, tell them that close communion is not only the practice of the Church throughout history, but is the current practice of 1.3 billion Christians worldwide. We are no fringe group. Tell them that the main reason other church bodies practice open communion is because they don't believe that Jesus' body and blood are present (more than coffee and doughnuts!). We believe what Jesus said that far more than bread and wine are here; and this Sacrament gives far more than symbols and memories. When they have questions, tell them, "We have a Bible study that covers that exact question and this issue. It's called Faith Builders, and we're starting a new class..."

They may not agree with you, but I have found that people at least respect conviction. We have every reason to speak with conviction on this issue!⁸⁷

Frequency of celebration—a pastoral decision

The history of the worshipping Church is a history of frequent celebration of the Sacrament. The New Testament clearly teaches frequent celebration.⁸⁸ And in fact, the earliest accounts of worship from the early Church demonstrate a weekly celebration. The *Didache* directed, "On the Lord's day you should assemble, break bread and celebrate the Eucharist."⁸⁹ Justin (c. 150) describes the weekly Sacramental service in detail.⁹⁰ In the Church of the Reformation and the Age of Orthodoxy, there is no question that the words of Melancthon reflected their practice:

We do not abolish the Mass, but religiously keep and defend it. Masses are celebrated among us every Lord's Day and on other festivals.⁹¹

There is equally no doubt that Pietism and Rationalism wreaked havoc on the sacramental piety of the Lutheran church. Hermann Sasse described the 18th century as the "dying of the Sacrament." As proof he cites parish statistics showing dramatic declines in attendance at the Lord's Supper—in Breslau weekly communicants fell from 700 per week to 180 per

⁸⁷ We have had hundreds of visitors at our communion services over the years. The people most "offended" by our practice are not the unchurched or unbelievers; most of them are ELCA church shoppers. May I ask...if ELCA church shoppers are not the target of our outreach, why do we spend so much time worrying about what offends them? Their current mess over sexuality has helped in close communion conversations with the tire-kickers; I ask them if they think their church made a mistake in its interpretation of the Bible in regard to homosexuality. When they answer in the affirmative I ask if it's possible that they might have made others? Then I invite them to BIC to find out for themselves. The true target of our outreach programs are the lost of this world, the people who don't know Jesus. If someone is an active member of a Christian church, they aren't the target of our outreach.

⁸⁸ Acts 2:42ff. It also might imply weekly celebration. See Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 11:17ff.

⁸⁹ The *Didache*, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, was discovered in Constantinople in 1875; its date is uncertain, though it seems to be first or early second century AD; its provenance unknown. This section that describes weekly worship comes from the third part on ministerial regulations. Quoted here from Herbert A. Musurillo, *The Fathers of the Primitive Church*, 61.

⁹⁰ Justin's *Apology*, I. lxxv-lxxvii. See Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 93.

⁹¹ Apology XXIV, 1. *Concordia*.

week in the course of one century.⁹² By the 19th century, communion was celebrated rarely in Protestant churches—in many parishes only twice per year.⁹³

In addition to the effects of Rationalism and Pietism the early American church also faced the challenge of the frontier experience. The paucity of colonial clergy helped cement the continental loss of sacramental piety. The resulting practice of infrequent celebration by our American Lutheran fathers calls into question the regard with which they held the Sacrament. Rightly, the Lutheran Church has tried to regain the practice of frequent communion.

In the WELS, our practice has moved in the right direction: nearly every church has at least monthly or bi-monthly communion. Do we need to move further?

There is no doubt that the history of the church is the history of weekly celebration. However, the history of weekly celebration has not consistently been the history of frequent *reception*. The point of the Sacrament is that it not only be offered, but received. There is no value *ex opere operato*. Every Sunday communion has never been a guarantor of frequent reception.⁹⁴ The rate of communion reception in Wittenberg in the 1520s was the same as at Trinity, St. Louis, when Walther was pastor—namely, an average of 6 receptions per year per communicant.⁹⁵ I would guess that our current WELS statistics trump those numbers significantly. If reception is the point, our current practice certainly seems to encourage it. When is the last time at a communion service you saw the need to use the rubric found in the old orders, “When there are no communicants...”?⁹⁶

Proponents of every Sunday communion maintain that while offering the Sacrament weekly doesn’t force people to take it, failure to offer the Sacrament weekly limits the ability of people to receive it. Who knows, they would say, when a member might need the certainty of forgiveness and Christ’s love in the Sacrament? This is a good, pastoral reason to provide for frequent reception. Of course, that rationale could also be used to not only advocate weekly communion, but also daily communion—or even hourly. Of course, at some point, a decision will need to be made about how often and at what gatherings of the congregation the Lord’s Supper will be offered.

This decision involves the liturgy, the confessions, and the Scriptures. But ultimately this is not a liturgical, confessional, or Scriptural question; it is a pastoral question. Since the Scriptures and the confessions in no way legalistically demand hourly, daily, or weekly communion, the pastoral question must be answered in freedom, wisdom, and love. Brothers may come to different decisions, and we must stand by the statement, “Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.”⁹⁷

At our congregation in Sharpsburg, we celebrate the Sacrament in the main Sunday service twice per month. In order that we do not withhold the Sacrament from people who desire it, we also teach our people that they can request the

⁹² Kenneth W. Wieting, *The Blessings of Weekly Communion*, 129.

⁹³ Ratke, 123.

⁹⁴ Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism*, 62.

⁹⁵ Wieting, 145.

⁹⁶ Cf. also the new ELS hymnal.

⁹⁷ Epitome, X, 7. *Concordia*.

Sacrament whenever they need it.⁹⁸ Most often this takes place after church on a non-communion Sunday; the Sacrament is celebrated at the altar and given to those desiring it.⁹⁹ We consider this in line with Dr. Luther's thoughts in his letter of 1522:

I wish, and it ought to be so, that no mass at all would be celebrated except at such times as the people were present who really desired the Sacrament and asked for it, and that this would be only once a week or once a month. For the Sacrament should never be celebrated except at the instigation and request of hungry souls, never because of duty, endowment, custom, ordinance, or habit. But it is still too early to begin this practice, because the consciences of the people will not follow me until it has been preached and understood better.¹⁰⁰

We do not offer the Sacrament at services that we have specifically invited the community to attend. Our outreach plan involves both "go" and "come" strategies. The "come" strategies always include an invitation to worship on a given Sunday, since worship does such a fine job of proclaiming the gospel. We plan those "come" events to fall on our non-communion Sundays. When the outreach event corresponds to a church festival, we try to balance love for the flock and love for the lost.

For example, our major outreach service at Christmas is Christmas Eve. We expect more than 100 visitors; we do not offer the Sacrament. We do, however, on Christmas Day. On Easter, we expect 150 visitors from the community; love for the lost leads us to celebrate the Sacrament in the Saturday evening service of Easter Vigil, and use the midmorning worship as preaching services for both the flock and the lost who we specifically had invited to attend.

We celebrate the Sacrament frequently and attempt to teach a sacramental piety; we also aggressively reach out to our community and welcome many visitors to our regular services. The fact that unchurched visitors could come to any of the regular services doesn't mean we have to pull communion from the service. A Lutheran paradigm for worship and outreach is sacramental. However, when you invite your community to a specific service, play the part of gracious host and caretaker of souls for the lost as well. Caring for the souls of both your people and your prospects means careful consideration of this pastoral question.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ With this practice we hope to address the good and pastoral rationale to make communion available frequently so that the children of God in need have it available. In our practice we have tried to address that issue in the manner mentioned above: teaching the people that they can have communion on days other than communion Sundays.

⁹⁹ Of the last 8 non-communion Sundays we have offered communion privately four times.

¹⁰⁰ LW 36:256.

¹⁰¹ Prof. James Tiefel offered this excellent summary in a letter to the essayist in June 2010. "It is part of a larger question that is pastoral: What will be the form of the liturgy at this place and at this time? There are hundreds of issues to consider as a congregation, worship committee, and pastor strive to answer that question. Because we minister in different situations, we may not answer the question or address the issues in the same way. Other pastors have had to ask the same question. Luther asked it, Walther asked it, Eggert asked it, and they answered it in different ways..."

"An important issue in this question concerns the Sacrament. The historic Christian rite contains a service of the Sacrament. The apostles had good reasons for doing this, and we agree with their reasons. But to say that we have decided not to use the service of the Sacrament on this particular day doesn't mean that we have ceased to agree with the apostolic reasons nor that we have abandoned the liturgy. It was our custom at Grace to include the Sacrament on Easter when Easter Sunday fell on the second or last Sunday of the month, the Sundays on which we regularly include the Sacrament. Last year we discussed this and decided that we would no longer offer the Sacrament in the main services on Easter Sunday but only in a 6:30 a.m. sunrise service. This was a pastoral decision made to

A Lutheran paradigm addresses the children

The ministry approach unchurched people said would most likely get them to church was Children's Activities.¹⁰² This surprises no one who has watched American culture elevate Junior and his activities and wants and needs to the top of every priority list. Your prospects are no different. In fact, for many unchurched prospects having kids leads them to question their spiritual priorities and to begin looking for spiritual answers.

Involving children in the main service is a boon for outreach because it shows prospects that the church values children. It's also a boon for children, because it shows them that worship is for them, too. Lutheran worship is child-friendly. The repetition of the Ordinary lets the very young children join in the worship of the body of Christ.

A children's sermon during the main service is guaranteed to create two reactions: worship purists howl; prospects and parents smile. I understand the rationale of the purists: it breaks up the flow of the liturgy; children have the capacity to take something sacred and make it seem silly; children are very unpredictable.¹⁰³ I get it; but I also need to guard my shepherd's heart that it never takes on the attitude of the disciples.¹⁰⁴

The children's sermon as part of the service can underscore that worship is meant for every age group. It does not have to be an object lesson about yummy brownies. Have the children face the altar to remind everyone whom this is about. Use it to teach the Sacraments, the theme of the service, the symbols in the sanctuary, the simple truths of Scripture—not moralizing stories, not as an opportunity for comic relief. Instead, show the children Jesus.

This serves outreach because it is the gospel, and because it makes prospects and parents smile. Their children are important to them; and their children are important to Jesus; shouldn't we let them know that they are important to the Church, too?

An added benefit of the children's sermon is its accessibility for the visitor. After beginning worship with an unfamiliar song, they hear people talking about sin and guilt. They hear a man in a white robe forgive their sins, and then they listen as the people sing another unfamiliar song. Finally one more prayer, and then the preacher invites up the little children. The prospect can see that formality in worship need not be cold, and dignity in worship need not seem loveless. They hear

protect the hundreds of guests who worship with us at the main services on that day. We have decided to retain the Sacrament on Christmas Day, however. Again, this was a pastoral decision, since most of our outreach efforts are aimed toward Christmas Eve when we do not offer the Sacrament. Such decisions do not make you more or less liturgical; rather they make you pastors. The question seems to be: How can we stay inside the parameters of Lutheran history and practice and still deal pastorally with both our members and our guests? If a man decides to completely eliminate the Sacrament from Sunday worship for the sake of visitors, I'm not going to ask him if he wants to remain liturgical or not. I would ask him how he serves weaker members who do not come to his Wednesday 'believers' service. This is a pastoral issue, not a liturgical issue. If a young man asks me to include the Sacrament in his wedding service, I will not encourage him to be less liturgical. I will ask him how this is respectful to the non-WELS relatives and friends he has specifically invited to his wedding. This is a pastoral issue, not a liturgical issue."

¹⁰² See *Figure 2 Barna Research Group, Braelin Baptist Research, Peachtree City, GA, 2002.*

¹⁰³ Breaks up the liturgy, makes the sacred sometimes silly, and are unpredictable...Perhaps we should apply the same logic to the offering, the ushers, and the elderly? Also, a children's sermon does not imply that the Holy Spirit works differently in children than in adults—any more than dividing Sunday School classes does. The word of God is efficacious; but its power is miraculous, not magical, and it is supernatural but also psychological. Ways of communicating the content of the divine message to a 3-year-old and 33-year-old will, in fact, be different.

¹⁰⁴ Mat 19:13

a message that they can't miss. This provides the unchurched a great bridge between the first and second parts of the service.

A suggested strategy

Involve children of every age in meaningful parts of the main service. Let them see that this is meant for them. Some examples from our congregation:

- The youngest children come forward for a children's sermon between the Prayer of the Day and the First Lesson. The children's sermon teaches the main point of the Sunday or teaches the children why we do what we do in worship (Sacraments, seasons, actions, etc.).
- Children between ages 5-7 are responsible for passing out the friendship registers during the offering. They get early involvement in the outreach program.¹⁰⁵
- Ages 7-13 are part of the acolyte program. The acolytes wear albs and participate every Sunday; they join the processions on festivals; they ring the bells.
- The teens do the worship video capture and editing. Each Sunday's sermon is captured in HD by the teens, edited into properly formatted video and posted to our webpage.

Will regular involvement in liturgical worship solve the problem of youth leaving the Church? Not likely. But alternative worship styles do no better. In Evangelical churches which are nearly all non-liturgical, they estimate 80% of the youth who grow up in the evangelical churches drop out by their sophomore year of college.¹⁰⁶ There are no silver bullets.

A Lutheran paradigm uses the marks of the Christian to lead to the marks of the Church

The marks of the Church are Word and Sacrament. Where you find them, you find the Church.¹⁰⁷ As Melancthon noted: "[The Church] has outward marks so that it can be recognized. These marks are the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ."¹⁰⁸

The Church has secondary marks, too. Some of the old dogmaticians called them the marks of the Christian:¹⁰⁹ "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control."¹¹⁰ When a church is friendly, welcoming to visitors, patient with prospects and kind to their neighbors, the church gives evidence of the Christians who comprise it. The marks of the Christian can be used to bring the unchurched into contact with the marks of the Church.

¹⁰⁵ They also seem far less threatening than a phalanx of ushers collecting information sheets: *Ihre Papieren, Bitte!*

¹⁰⁶ Michael Horton, "All Crossed Up," *Touchstone*, March 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Jesus said, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:20. That which creates the Church also marks its presence, "Faith comes from hearing the message." Rom 10:17; They are the marks of the Church because they are what God uses to build and sustain his Church. "My Word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Is 55:11

¹⁰⁸ Apology, VII and VIII, 5. *Concordia*.

¹⁰⁹ "These are the marks of the true members of the invisible Church of Christ." From the essayist's translation of Christian Löber, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Dogmatik*, III, 2, Chapter X, point 3: *signa singulorum verorum membrorum ecclesiae invisibilis*.

¹¹⁰ Gal 5:22-23

Jesus said, “Let your light shine among men, that they may see your deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”¹¹¹ While we are centered on the marks of the Church, the marks of the Christian can play an important role in a Lutheran paradigm.¹¹² We can’t control the Holy Spirit’s work of conversion; but if by our friendliness, kindness, patience and the like, a person comes to church or comes back to church, we should by all means do our best to display those Christian marks—that shining light.¹¹³

This is why a Lutheran paradigm doesn’t ignore the axiom that prospects are most likely to return to a church that they perceive as friendly. Worship is a great place for prospects because it gets them into contact with people whose lives have been transformed and fulfilled by the Spirit’s power. At the assembly of believers the marks of the Christians are on display for the world. Consider the church of Acts 2: they held things in common, gave to those in need, and enjoyed the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Put prospects and God’s people together in a purposeful way. Plan for space so that people can talk to one another; provide food after worship to keep people hanging around to talk; teach your people again and again to talk to the new folks. Introduce each visiting family to someone that has a similar background; give them something to talk about.

Model it for them. If the ten minutes before and after worship are the pastor’s time to buttonhole people to talk about church work, consider the example you are setting. If your last minute rushed preparations require you to quickly walk past visiting families, why are you surprised when your members do the same? Don’t complain that your people aren’t friendly and welcoming to new visitors. Show them how to do it.

Food, facility, parking, signage—these are ways that we can demonstrate our love and kindness and patience for the unchurched prospects who visit us. Just as the Roman Catholics don’t get a stranglehold on catholicity, neither do the Evangelicals get to corner the market on common sense. Discussing excellence in these areas does not deny the efficacy of the Word; rather it seeks to be the best stewards of the means of grace that we can be.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Mt 5:16

¹¹² The marks of the Christian can lead people to praise the Father who gives us the strength to do those works. The love, joy, and kindness of the Christian can be the reason that an unchurched person comes to worship or returns to worship. I am not saying that the marks of the Christian can create faith—only the marks of the Church can do that. St. Francis of Assisi overstates in his well-known words, “Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.” A great saying, but it misses the point that my kindness, peace, and love can show the effects of faith, but it cannot show the cause. That only comes through the Word and Sacrament.

¹¹³ “It’s similar to when I buy a used car. I know the most important thing is that the engine is in good shape. Unfortunately I have no clue what to look for under the hood. And so, I look at secondary things. Is it rusty? How did it run in the test drive...It’s all I have to go on. So also, for many, when assessing a church, they don’t know what to look for ‘under the hood.’ They settle for kicking the tires a little...Consequently, let it never be enough for us to say, ‘We have the Gospel in its truth and purity! That should be all that people care about.’ Sure. If they were spiritually mature. Since not all are, recognize the weight of Jesus’ words.” Jonathan R. Hein, “The Church and Her Members,” 13.

¹¹⁴ “The efficacy of the gospel is not dependent on the friendliness of a congregation, the upkeep of the property, the availability of parking, a church nursery, or other such externals. It is true, however, that congregations demonstrate concern and love for visitors not only in the message they offer, but in the way they offer the message. First impressions count. Negative impressions discourage visitors from returning. Positive impressions do not guarantee that a visitor will be won for Christ, of course, but they may bring a person back to hear the Gospel a second time. Who can know on which visit the Holy Spirit will work his great work of conversion?” David J. Valleskey, *We Believe. Therefore We Speak*, 95.

A Lutheran paradigm features faithful follow-up

One of the most important parts of worship happens after the Benediction: follow-up.

An unchurched family was found, contacted, and invited to come and see their Savior. God kept his promise that his Church would be his witness to the world. They walked through your church doors and heard the gospel preached; they sat in your sanctuary and saw a foretaste of heaven; they met the people of God and came face-to-face with the body of Christ. What a huge victory over sin and Satan won by God! How will the Church celebrate this victory?

Will we drop a form letter in the mail, if the visitors happened to sign the guestbook? Will we wait and see if they come back again a few times—so that we know they are serious? Will we hope and pray that they come back, because with the schedule of meetings we have this week, there is little hope of the pastor going to see them?

Why is follow-up so difficult to accomplish? Why is personal, face-to-face, follow-up not ubiquitous among us? The problem is wider than WELS: the magazine *Outreach* recently printed the statistic that of the evangelical pastors surveyed who self-identified as serving a contracting congregation, 80% of them did not make personal follow-up calls on worship visitors.¹¹⁵

If we are serious about reaching the lost, how can we fail to have a robust plan of personal visits in place? It is a crucial component of a Lutheran paradigm of worship and outreach, because Lutherans know that God works through means. For the lost to be found, they must be in contact with the means of grace. That means there must be a ministerial cause who brings the instrumental cause to them. God doesn't tell us when he will do the great work of converting the lost. He tells us to simply sow the seed and wait for him to make it grow. Here in the worship visitor lies a fallow field waiting for us to sow many seeds.

Brothers, I would humbly suggest that simply sending a thank you postcard to worship visitors is not a sufficient follow-up program. I would humbly suggest that waiting for prospects to visit worship a few times to “find out if they are serious,” fails to demonstrate good stewardship of the means of grace. I would humbly suggest that a schedule packed with meetings should not negate our call to be proclaimers of Christ to the lost.

If we consider the invitation of Christ to go to the world to be one of great dignity and importance, how can we possibly consider our witness faithful if we fail to go even to the homes of the lost who God brought into our service? Faithful follow-up on the worship visitor is the grateful response Christ's Church gives to its Lord who brought this new visitor into worship. Good stewardship of the means of grace drives us to look for more chances to share the gospel with the people who have visited. Assign worship visitors the highest priority in your outreach time planning, because these people have left an open door for subsequent contact simply by coming to your church. They are ready to hear what you have to say.

Follow-up takes time, effort and energy; thankfully, however, it is not complicated. Simply put, a follow-up program seeks to find more opportunities to share the gospel with the unchurched visitor by clearly communicating how the Church feels about the visitor, and by seeking more avenues for contact with the visitor.

¹¹⁵ Bear in mind Mark Twain's description of statistics. The point, however, is that outside our circles, too, visitor follow-up needs improvement.

A suggested strategy

Due to the importance of the subject permit me to offer a detailed suggested strategy for follow-up in the Appendix. This strategy emphasizes personal visits at the prospects' homes. Such face-to-face visits by laity and clergy provide the visitor with more interactions with the body of Christ, give more examples of the secondary marks of the Church, and build relationships with the prospect—all for one goal: more opportunities to share the Word of Christ that has the power to convert.

Permit me a moment to highlight one aspect of this strategy: the pastoral follow-up call. Brothers, these visits are the most important outreach calls you will make and represent the culmination of a Lutheran paradigm of worship and outreach. The Holy Spirit has brought these people into your life and into your ministry and has left you an open door. Being good stewards of the means of grace means taking advantage of these opportunities before you.

The pastoral follow-up call simply sends the shepherd out to the lost sheep with the intent of bringing them into the fold. God has given us only one means to do that: the gospel. The point of the pastoral call is to share the gospel message or invite them to come back to worship again where they will certainly hear the gospel proclaimed.

These are the kind of calls you just make. Make them the first week prospects visit church. Don't phone ahead. Just go to their homes. If you call ahead to try and schedule a time, both you and they will find all sorts of conflicts; days will turn into weeks. Just go to their homes, knock on their doors, and thank them for being with you at worship and invite them back. Find out their spiritual background and look for an opportunity to share law and gospel. If they're not home, leave a note.

This is not complicated, but it is hard. You will have many reasons why you can't prioritize these calls. Your ministry will eat up as much time as you throw at it; the members of God's flock need to be fed and led; you have a whole schedule of meetings most nights of the week and you're still called to be a husband and father. You will have a host of reasons. Will they be valid reasons or simply rationalizations we hide behind because we don't want to acknowledge the real reason we fail to do outreach calls: they are hard; you might be rejected; no one will really notice if you don't do them; it's easier to go to a meeting than be an ambassador of Christ to the lost.

Pastoral schedules may be full, but wouldn't the Ladies Aid give you a pass once in a while if you said you were going to tell the lost about Christ? Wouldn't the Property Board let you miss the lawnmower discussion to follow up on worship visitors? Wouldn't the Evangelism Committee be willing to cut back on meeting time so that you can evangelize? You may be rejected; but so was your Master, the prophets and the apostles. The calls may be hard, but God has promised his strength is made perfect in your weakness. The question isn't whether or not you have time, but whether or not you will prioritize the time to be an ambassador of Christ carrying the appeal of the Father: "Be reconciled to God."

Brothers in training and brothers in ministry, God has and will appoint you to be his shepherds and his heralds. Though we are not of this world, the Church is very much in it. And that's right where Jesus wants us to be.

אָז הוֹחֵל לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה:

He put into our hands his Word and Sacraments—tools he promised have a power all their own. He comforts us by saying that the means of grace are efficacious; he dignifies us by inviting us to share in the calling of the elect; he encourages us to be good stewards of the means he put in our hands and use them in the best way that we can. Then, finally, he tells us to trust that the Lord of the Church will do his work and will keep his promises and will call his children home.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty
Zechariah 4:6

Rev. Jonathan E. Schroeder

On the Feast of St. Matthew, 2010
Sharpsburg, Georgia



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Appendix A:

Suggested Strategy for Follow-up

Large portions of this strategy come from the Faithful Follow-up section of “Welcoming Worship”, from the WELS Commission on Evangelism, by Jonathan E. Schroeder. Available from the Commission, other topics covered are:

- Who is worship for?
- First impressions
- The worship experience
- Rite worship for outreach

Everything in your outreach program worked: the unchurched family was found, contacted, and invited to come and see their Savior. Then, an unbelievable thing happened: an unchurched person came through your church doors. He heard the gospel preached; he met the people of God gathered there; he saw a foretaste of heaven. What a huge victory over sin and Satan that God just won! How will we celebrate that victory? Will we let that fertile field lie fallow?

Faithful follow-up on the worship visitor is the grateful response that Christ’s Church gives to its Lord who brought this new visitor into your house of worship. Our response will seek to continue to cast the seeds of God’s Word into that fertile field God placed before us.

**GOAL: FIND MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL
WITH THE UNCHURCHED VISITOR**

- Clearly communicate how Christ’s Church feels about the visitor
- Look for opportunities for the congregation to have further contact with the visitor
- Schedule a pastoral call, or a second-level follow-up call

Getting visitor information

A new family comes into your church for the first time. A few of your families greet them and show them around. The visitors’ names are Bill and Melinda; no one heard their last name. After church, the pastor thanks them for coming and invites them back. They walk out the door and are gone. Google is not going to find them. The phonebook isn’t going to help. Follow-up can’t be done if the visitors can’t be found.

The most popular method among us for collecting visitor information largely fails to serve its purpose.

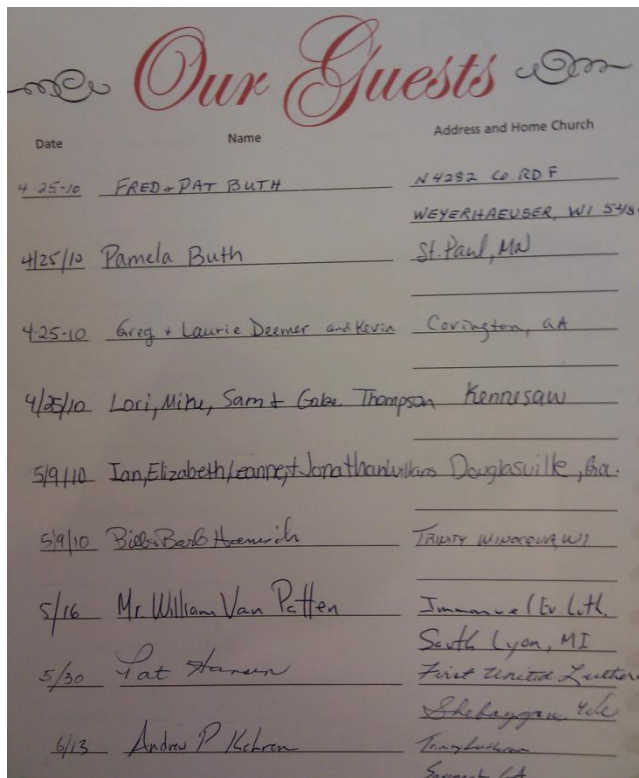
We’ve all grown up seeing the WELS standard: over in a corner of the narthex on a prominent shelf sits the big guestbook with the fancy pen holder from the local funeral home. Nearly every WELS church has one of these; for many it is the primary collection tool for visitor information.

I want to share a secret with you: unchurched people don't sign guestbooks.¹¹⁶ Take a look at this page out of our guestbook. Do you see the point? How many locals signed it? How many of these people seem unchurched to you? In the same time period we had many unchurched visitors—they just didn't sign the book. Let me share another secret: I only put out a guestbook because I have tired of explaining its absence to WELS guests.¹¹⁷

Numerous factors contribute to the guestbook's inadequacy. First, there is but one. If ten families visit on Christmas Eve the likelihood of them standing in line to leave their personal information is very low. Second, most unchurched visitors need to be directed to the guestbook; if they exit church by a side door, they will not fill it out. Third, this asks them to do something no one else is doing, lowering the likelihood of them putting down their information.

To increase the likelihood of collection visitor information, consider using a method that puts the collection tool in the hands of every worshiper. Visitor cards in the pews still require that visitors pick up the card and fill it out—an action no one else around them is doing.

At Faith, Sharpsburg, we have children pass out friendship registers during the offering. A register is placed into the hands of the first person in each pew; we had tried putting them in the hymnal rack or at the end of the pew, but we found that often the person sitting there didn't start it out, and so we missed a whole pew's information. We train our members to fill out their information fully; not because we need it from our members but because the visitor in their pew will do exactly what they do.



The Thank You Package

Making a follow-up call soon after a visitor's first worship with you clearly communicates that the Church not only noticed them, but rejoiced at their presence and wants them to come back. These are perfect visits for lay people to make. Having members making the initial visits makes a significant impression on the prospect: these people took time out of their busy lives to see me.

Don't make this overly complicated. Our initial visits are simple: a lay member takes a thank-you package to the home of the prospect within a day or two of their first worship. The thank you package consists of a branded bag with a gift, some congregational pamphlets, and a personal note from the lay person that thanks the prospect for joining us at church. The content of the thank you package really doesn't matter; what matters is that you did it.

¹¹⁶ This is obviously a gross generalization, but hopefully helps make the point that our primary collection tool isn't really meeting its objective. If we are to be good stewards of the means of grace, poor practices should be evaluated for replacement.

¹¹⁷ This ranks right up there with church mailboxes. We don't have any, and this causes no end of consternation to WELSers who visit from Wisconsin. My response that we hand bulletins directly to people and make use of email is usually met with, "So you don't have church mailboxes at all?" I guess the guestbook will have to suffice to give them a feeling of home.

The Follow-up Team

Follow-up Coordinator

This person may be your Evangelism Coordinator, or a Council member, or any member with the talents and interest. Their job is to coordinate four things:

1. The gathering of visitor information. They would gather the sheets after each service and pull out the sheets that are pertinent.
2. The preparation of thank you packages. The coordinator wouldn't put the packages together but would ensure that there are enough packages for the calling team.
3. Distributing calls among the calling team.
4. Recording the information. The coordinator would ensure that someone enters the visitor information and records the thank you calls that have been made.

Package person

This position would be great for someone who can't go on outreach calls but wants to be active in the outreach work of the church. This person assembles the thank you packages and ensures that there are always enough on hand for the next week's work. This person also notes when thank you package materials need to be ordered.

The Calling Team

This shouldn't be the pastor. Thank you visits are perfect calls for a team of lay members to make. Consider the impression that a member call makes on the unchurched visitor. How is it different from the impression if the pastor makes it?

Recruiting the Calling Team

1. ***Explain the process.*** "We are looking for people to drop off a thank you package to people who have visited with us. The packages will be prepared for you. We'd like you to fill out a thank you card for them, and put it into the thank you package. We need these packages dropped off at their homes within two days of their visit. You can leave the package on their door if they're not home."
2. ***Give them permission not to go inside the door.*** This is a boon for recruiting follow-up callers. Tell them that they are not permitted to go inside the home, even if invited. They are to say, "Thanks, but you weren't expecting me. I just wanted to drop this off. But my pastor would like to stop by and visit with you." If people know that they aren't expected to do anything more than drop off a package, it is much easier to recruit members to make these calls.
3. ***Recruit teams from different geographic areas.*** If the calling team lives near the calls they are to make, it's much easier for them to get the calls done. This leads to timely follow-up and long term service by the callers. Divide your target area into quadrants. Try and recruit a team of callers from each quadrant. The Follow-up Coordinator each Sunday assigns calls to the teams based on where the visitor lives. Each team keeps several packages at their homes. The callers can make the visit easily and quickly since they already have the materials and the visits are close to home.

The Follow-up Call

The visitor came to church; they wrote down their contact information and marked "No church home." The package is ready. The follow-up team is recruited. Now what?

- **Timing:** Make the call *within two days* of their visit. This helps achieve the objective of clearly communicating how Christ’s church feels about their visit. Let them know that we noticed they were there. Go at a time when you would expect them to be home.
- **Dress:** Remember that the callers represent the church. But also remember what people think when they see two men wearing ties at their front door.
- **Not home:** If no one is home, just leave the bag at the door. Yes, a face-to-face is better, but there is a personal note in the thank you package. Leaving the bag will ensure timely delivery; it also prevents caller burn-out.
- **Say:** Just say, “Thank you.” That’s the purpose of the call. Thank them and give them a verbal or written invitation to come back again. Some churches use this as an opportunity to get feedback on the worship experience—just make sure that it doesn’t come across as the main purpose of the visit.
- **Respond:** They might have questions. Answer them if you can. Perhaps an even better idea is to use their questions as an opportunity for a follow-up call from the pastor. “You know, I’m not sure of the answer to that, but I know that my pastor would. He said he’d like to visit with you. Should I tell him to give you a call?” The goal of follow-up is to find more opportunities to share the gospel. Here’s an excellent opportunity!
- **Record:** Track the calls in detail so that the future follow-up visitors are aware of what happened. Keep track of who made the call, when, what was left, and any pertinent conversations. Then put this person on the pastoral follow-up list.

The Next Step—Pastoral Follow-up

The Next Step—Pastoral Follow-up is crucially important. Here is where the goal is realized. Here is the opportunity to share the gospel with a family that has attended, indicated interest, and has received a lay thank you call. Talk about a prime visit for pastors to make!

- **Timing:** This call should be made either the week of the lay visit or the week immediately thereafter. Do you see advantages to one or the other?
- **Scheduling:** Should this call be scheduled with the people in advance or should the pastor just drop in?
- **Say:** Thank them for coming. Question them about their experience. Invite them to come to other opportunities. Find an opening to share the message of salvation. Seek the chance to do a law/Gospel presentation.
- **Record:** Put the calling information into the tracking database. These families are top priorities for continued outreach calls.

Working the Plan

An example

Sunday, 10:30 AM

On the first Sunday in Advent, there are three new families in worship. During the offering, while the ushers are passing the plate, two children go down the center aisle and pass out a friendship register to each pew. Everyone signs the friendship register, both members and guests. The three new families each fill out their information in turn and leave the friendship register in the pew.

Sunday, 11:45 AM

Scott, the outreach coordinator, collects the sheets from the friendship register. He brings them to the pastor and confirms that the three families he didn't recognize were new visitors. He then sits down and enters the three families' contact information into Prospect Management.

Sunday, 3:00 PM

Scott notices that one of new families is in Sharpsburg and two are from Peachtree City. He checks his Follow-up Team list of Callers, and sees that Mary Beth is in Peachtree City, and the Picketts live close to Sharpsburg. He calls them, "Would you drop off a thank you package to Bill and Melinda, who live at..."

Monday, 6:00 PM

The Picketts grab one of the thank you packages that they keep on hand. There's no need to run back to church to grab one. They take two minutes to write out the Thank You card.

*Dear Bill and Melinda,
Thanks so much for joining us at worship this past week. We hope you enjoyed our service and meeting some of our church family. Please join us again soon.
Jim and Lorene*

Monday, 6:15 PM

It's a short trip to the home; Scott always makes sure to give them calls close by. They knock on the door. Melinda opens it, and Jim and Lorene thank her for being at church on Sunday. "We just wanted to drop off this package to thank you for being with us." Melinda asks, "Would you like to come in?" "No," they say, "you weren't expecting us. But our pastor was hoping to visit with you..."

Tuesday, 6:00 PM

Scott entered the call information into Prospect Management. He notes that the Picketts talked to Melinda, who really wants to ask Pastor some questions. He emails a copy of the notes to the pastor. Dawn noticed that she needed to make up some more thank you packages. They'll be ready by Sunday so the callers can pick up more.

Wednesday, 7:00 PM

The pastor pulls into the driveway for a great meeting with those new visitors. The objectives were accomplished. Now he's about to get a chance to fulfill the goal: Share the gospel.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Symposium
Mequon, Wisconsin
September 21, 2010

A Reaction to the Essay of Jonathan E. Schroeder:

WORSHIP AND OUTREACH: A LUTHERAN PARADIGM

As the third in a series of essays on worship and outreach, Pastor Schroeder's essay was intended to be the practical, where the rubber hits the road offering. It was just that. But it was by no means a shallow contribution to the subject. As I worked my way through this essay, two words came to my mind: scholarly and pastoral. The essay is a scholarly piece of work, emanating from a pastoral heart. That is a good combination.

I appreciated the first section of the essay in which the essayist took us back to the beginning of time to demonstrate that worship and outreach have never been mutually exclusive. They have always gone together.

We do well, therefore, as the author brings out, not to pit the one against the other. I'm happy to say that during my years at the Seminary there was a good working relationship between the professor of evangelism and the professor of worship. We saw eye-to-eye. In fact, at my invitation Prof. Tiefel contributed heavily to the section on worship and evangelism in the textbook used in the senior year, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak: the Theology and Practice of Evangelism*. It should also be noted that this same close working relationship at the Seminary between worship and evangelism has continued after my retirement.

The essayist did a good job of balancing the efficacy of the Word and stewardship of the means of grace. He brought out well how both statements are true: "God's Word works: it is efficacious by itself because it is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to call people to faith. Nothing we do makes the Word work better"; and "God commands us to be faithful stewards of the means of grace. We seek to use them in the best possible way."

I am happy that Pastor Schroeder called our attention to the dogmatists' *causa efficiens*, *causa instrumentalis*, and *causa ministerialis*; for this helps to illustrate the connection between the two statements I quoted above. Distinguishing the various "causes" of salvation also helps us to understand such biblical passages as

- the message of the risen Christ to Saul on the Damascus Road: "I am sending you to open their [the Gentiles'] eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Ac 26:17-18); and
- Paul's description of himself and his missionary companions as "God's fellow workers" (2 Cor 6:1).¹

In such passages the gospel spokesman is the *causa ministerialis* of salvation.

The essayist puts it simply and succinctly, "God says his Word works; then he turns right around and tells you to work like crazy....The efficacy of the Word [*causa instrumentalis*] gives us the comfort of knowing that God [*causa efficiens*] is working; it never comforts us [*causa ministerialis*] to be lax in our gospel preaching work." Well said!

I agree with the writer's contention that "our public worship is *primarily* for the people of God," and that it is "*secondarily* a witness for the lost." But at the same time, as our essayist brings out well, "Worship can be a powerful tool for outreach." During my twenty plus years in the parish, along with the essayist, I found that an unchurched prospect will not be inclined to attend a Bible information class before he has begun to attend church. The Sunday worship service is likely to be the first contact the unchurched person has with the church. And what better place to begin? "Lutheran liturgical worship,

¹ Συνεργοῦντες ("We see Paul as laboring jointly with God," J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, NPH, 1963, p. 123)

because it is full of the gospel, offers what people need, not just to grow as Christians, but to become Christians.”² How important it is, then, to keep the unchurched inquirer in mind when planning and officiating at public worship!

That is what the essayist does, as under the heading, “Characteristics of a Lutheran Paradigm of Worship and Outreach,” he provides us with an excellent eight-fold paradigm. Permit me a few brief comments about each of them.

1. *A Lutheran paradigm is invitational in character.* If faith comes by hearing the message, it is only logical that we put a priority on inviting people to worship, where “the message” is proclaimed. Setting aside several “invitational services” each year, e.g., Christmas Eve, Easter, Mother’s Day, as the author suggests, helps to focus our members’ attention on the importance of “come and see” invitations. It might be noted that to get the maximum benefit out of such invitational services, it is beneficial to prepare the congregation in advance rather than simply announcing on the preceding Sunday, “Invite your friends to our special church service next Sunday.”
2. *A Lutheran paradigm is centered in the gospel.* That is key, of course. And that is the great blessing of our Lutheran liturgical worship, which is gospel-saturated. It is interesting that, though twenty-five years separate my service in the parish ministry and Pastor Schroeder’s, my experience also was that Lutheran liturgical worship did not keep people from coming to church or returning a second time.³ The essayist writes, “You may be free in making changes to worship practices; we will fight for your freedom to do just that. Do not, however, demand that we always call it wise.” To that I would add: “or necessary.”
3. *A Lutheran paradigm makes the worship experience accessible to the unchurched.* Printing out the entire service, providing some of the more familiar hymns,⁴ explaining terms, giving oral instructions as needed—all of this can help a first-time visitor feel more at ease. This is not all that difficult to do. It just means that as the pastor prepares for and conducts the service, he does so not only with the life-long church member in mind, but also the first-time visitor.
4. *A Lutheran paradigm prioritizes preaching.* When the preacher, a minister of the gospel, remembers that he is the *causa ministerialis* of salvation, the very mouthpiece of God, he is not going to skimp sermon preparation. Confession time: when I began my ministry at a new mission in San Jose, California, with new homes by the hundreds, yes, by the thousands, being built all around us, I did not spend the time on my sermons that I should have. I was out on the streets day and night. Then I came to realize that while I was spending all this time inviting people to come to church, I wasn’t giving them my best when they came. So I went back to the rule of thumb that I had learned at the Seminary: one hour of preparation for every minute preached. Preaching is the voice of God, for preaching connects people with the gospel. It demands our best. I fully agree with the essayist when he says, “If you want to give a boost to your outreach program, spend lots of time on your sermons.”
5. *A Lutheran paradigm is sacramental.* I appreciated the essayist’s reminder that the primary purpose of close(d) communion is protection: to prevent people who don’t recognize the Real Presence of the body and blood of Jesus from eating and drinking judgment on themselves. A pastor therefore doesn’t have to be apologetic about making it clear that we don’t practice open

² David J. Valleskey, *We Believe, Therefore We Speak*, NPH, 1995, p. 187.

³ “Lutheran liturgical worship

- when its strengths are emphasized and its balances maintained,
- when it is carefully planned and artfully executed by the congregation’s leaders and enthusiastically entered upon by the congregation’s members,
- when it is accompanied by a congregational mindset that opens wide its arms to the visitor to its services, has served and can continue to serve as a good tool for congregational outreach with the gospel” (*We Believe—Therefore We Speak*, p. 197).

⁴ In my ministry I tried to make sure that the first and last hymns of the day were of the more familiar variety. Members of the congregation appreciated this also.

communion. Although I agree that a short service folder announcement about the church's communion practices is better than a long explanation, I do feel, however, that the announcement the author suggests, "Faith Lutheran Church practices close communion. We ask that only members partake of the Sacrament," is too restrictive. It might prohibit an eligible child of God from partaking of the Sacrament. In my opinion, it would be better to word the announcement somewhat as follows: "Faith Lutheran Church practices close communion. We ask, therefore, that only those who are members of Faith or another WELS/ELS congregation partake of the sacrament."

We were given a glimpse into the writer's pastoral heart when he coupled a proper desire for providing frequent communion opportunities with care for visitors to the service, a pastoral care that has led his congregation to forgo communion on days when a special effort is made to invite visitors to the service, e.g., Easter Sunday. We did the same in my ministry.

6. *A Lutheran paradigm addresses the children.* I just recently finished a long-term eighteen-month vacancy. When I arrived on the scene, the young children were used to being dismissed during the hymn before the sermon for their own "children's church." They would rejoin their parents at the end of the service. For a number of reasons I did not consider that to be the wisest of practices. I discussed the matter with the elders. My suggestion was that we replace this practice with a children's message prior to the hymn of the day. Frankly, I didn't know how it would work. This had not been my practice during my years in the parish prior to coming to the Seminary. I need not have worried. It proved to be a marvelous opportunity to put the spotlight on the main gospel message of the day, only garbed in children's clothing. Even adults appreciated these messages. More than one member told me that they looked forward to the children's message every Sunday. I wish I had done this throughout the years of my ministry. It's not all that difficult or time-consuming; and, if you stick with the simple gospel, you have one more faith-creating, faith-strengthening element in the service.
7. *A Lutheran paradigm uses the marks of the Christian to lead to the marks of the church.* The essayist writes, "A Lutheran paradigm doesn't ignore the axiom that prospects are more likely to return to a church that they perceive as friendly." I agree. In my experience, the two things that bring a visitor back to church a second time are the sermon and the friendliness of the people. A friendly church is a church where the fruit of the Spirit (the "marks of a Christian") is being displayed. Making sure that a visitor is greeted and welcomed, offering some refreshments following the service to help keep the visitor around for a while, etc., things like that don't contribute to a person's salvation; of course, but they just might mean that the person will come back again to continue to be exposed to the "marks of the church" through which the Holy Spirit can carry out his great work of leading the individual out of darkness into light.
8. *A Lutheran paradigm features a faithful follow-up.* The essayist reminds us, "For the lost to be found, they must be in contact with the means of grace." Enough said! It should never be said of any pastor or any congregation that they don't follow-up on "prospects," especially visitors to the service, which are the easiest kind of follow-up calls to make. As the essayist well said, "Follow up takes time and effort and energy; thankfully, however, it is not complicated." But it is a matter of prioritizing one's time.

Thank you, Pastor Schroeder, for an excellent piece of work!

David J. Valleskey