CONTINUED GROWTH IN PREACHING: A PEER SERMON REVIEW TOOL FOR

PASTORS OF THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

by

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A Senior Project Submitted to

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Master of Divinity degree

Professor Bill J. Tackmier, Advisor

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Abstract

In an effort to aid the pastors of our Wisconsin Synod in their continued growth in preaching, I have sought to create an online peer sermon review tool that WELS pastors can use to sharpen both their sermon content and delivery. The following paper assesses the feasibility and usefulness of such a tool for the busy parish pastor. The paper will focus on growth in preaching facilitated and driven by peers in the ministry through sermon evaluation. It will examine biblical support and contemporary encouragement for continuing education, growth in preaching for pastors, as well as the concept of peer review. Previous work done in the WELS in the area of peer sermon review and new quantitative research from WELS parish pastors will also be examined in this paper. A tool meant to promote positive peer preaching critiques will need to be practical, useable, and accessible in order for it be of benefit to WELS pastors. To this end the research I conducted sought the input of WELS pastors with a wide range of experience who shared their views on how feasible and useful this type of growth-in-preaching tool might be. Included in this paper is a proposal for using an online sermon review tool which has been put online for testing and refining purposes on Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's *Seminary Online* continuing education website.

Introduction

The centrality of preaching in the work of a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) parish pastor cannot be overstated. WELS pastors are trained for years in the original languages of the Bible. They are required to take creative writing, speech, and homiletics courses. Our training system invests a tremendous amount of time and money into ministerial candidates so that they can proclaim the Word of truth in a way that cuts and heals hearts while, at the same time, using that Word to intersect in a meaningful way with the lives of God's people.

Once in the parish WELS pastors find many demands on their schedule. Preparing, coordinating, assisting and running various ministries in the congregation take a great deal of time and effort. Visiting members, counseling, calling on prospects, preparing and teaching Bible classes, Sunday school, and perhaps Lutheran elementary school, planning worship, meetings and administrative work – all these duties and more demand the time of pastors and jockey for importance. And on top of all this work many WELS pastors need to prepare at least one sermon each week.

Yet despite all of the pressing demands of parish ministry most WELS pastors still see the Sunday morning sermon as the most important work a parish pastor does in a typical week.[1] The hours used in preparation for the sermon – spent in prayer, text study, careful exegesis, sermon writing, and practice – are all worthwhile because in a typical week the Sunday sermon is where most pastors will reach most of their congregation with the Word of God. This fact does not suggest that we neglect our members or other ministries to focus solely on sermon preparation and delivery. Nor does it mean to pit the sermon against the other ministries of the congregation. However it does demonstrate that WELS pastors recognize the significance of preaching in the lives of the people they serve.

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[1] A survey conducted in connection with this project found over 90% of WELS pastors polled agreed that preaching was the most important work a parish pastor does in a typical week (see Appendix A).

In view of the great importance of preaching in our midst, it would only seem fitting that pastors of our fellowship would look for ways to improve their preaching, both in content and delivery, throughout their ministry. While there can be no singular way to accomplish this, there are a variety of options that faithful pastors will make use of as they seek fresh and varied ways to lay the unchanging Scriptures upon the hearts of God's people.

There are already many good things happening among WELS pastors when it comes to continued growth in preaching. At the congregational level pastors can spend time in self directed study to improve their preaching. Congregation members in general or the board of Elders in particular can offer sermon feedback. This can be done informally or can be requested by the pastor or leadership of the congregation.

Studies at the circuit and conference level offer many pastors regular opportunities to discuss books on homiletics, preaching obstacles, and alternate styles of preaching. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) offers courses in homiletics for parish pastors during its Summer Quarter. The monthly newsletter *Preach the Word* and its accompanying *Proclaim Grace* website offer pastors insight and encouragement in the area of preaching. Many associate pastors work together weekly to build one another up in their homiletics skills. Winkles are still used in many circles to provide valuable sermon feed-in.

The peer sermon review tool discussed and proposed in the following paper is not meant to supplant the tools mentioned above but rather to supplement them. Pastors who serve as the only pastor at a congregation have very little opportunity to have their sermons reviewed by fellow pastors. And even those in a setting with one or more associates can find the feedback to become predictable at times. Because of these things objective peer review is often a missing or broken piece of the growth-in-preaching puzzle.

In an effort to aid the pastors of our Wisconsin Synod in their continued growth in preaching I have created a peer sermon review tool that WELS pastors can use to sharpen both their sermon content and delivery. The following paper assesses the feasibility and usefulness of such a tool for the busy parish pastor. The paper will focus on growth in preaching facilitated and

driven by peers in the ministry through sermon evaluation. It will examine biblical support and contemporary encouragement for continuing education, growth in preaching for pastors, as well as the concept of peer review. Previous work done in the WELS in the area of peer sermon review and new quantitative research from WELS parish pastors will also be examined in this paper. A tool meant to promote positive peer preaching critiques will need to be practical, useable, and accessible in order for it to be of benefit to WELS pastors. To this end the research I conducted sought the input of WELS pastors with a wide range of experience who shared their views on how feasible and useful this type of growth-in-preaching tool might be. Included in this paper is a proposal for using an objective, practical, and easy to use online sermon review tool.

Chapter 1 – The centrality of preaching in the ministry of WELS pastors

The biblical basis for the centrality of preaching

The power of God's Word

There is no doubt that God's Word carries with it an intrinsic power and purpose which come from God himself. This inherent power is clearly pointed to in God's Word: "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12)." [2] Its purpose is equally demonstrated: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11)."

It is the omnipotent God who makes his Word powerful. It is the omniscient God who gives his Word purpose. No mere human message or opinion could work like the Word of God because the Word of God has a supernatural power behind it that comes from God himself:

> 1 Thessalonians 1:5,6   Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. [6] You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.
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> 1 Thessalonians 2:13   We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

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[2] All Bible quotations are taken from NIV 1984 unless noted otherwise.

The power of God's Word serves its purposes. Simply put, the Word works. God's will is that all people be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and he has given his Word to bring that salvation:

> John 20:31   These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

But even when a person is not brought to faith by the Word, God's purpose is still accomplished. Whether it is the crushing blow of the law or the sweet salve of the gospel God's Word will always accomplish God's purposes.

> Jeremiah 23:29   "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

> Romans 1:16   I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Christians use the Word for one purpose alone: to win the lost. The lost are won when God's Spirit removes the blinders covering the eyes of the person who does not have faith.

> John 6:63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

> 1 Corinthians 2:4, 5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, [5] so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

> 1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

The lost are also won as the faith of the newly reborn Christian is fed and strengthened. This will happen alone through the means of grace, through God's Word and Sacraments. This defies human logic and can only be accomplished by the mercy and grace of God.

1 Corinthians 1:21 Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

The importance of public ministers proclaiming the Word of God

It is clear from the above passages that God's powerful and purposeful Word is what alone creates and strengthens faith in people. But this does not dismiss the use or importance of public ministers to proclaim and teach God's saving Word. Certainly the Bible is filled with passages which point to the power of God's Word to give faith and teach those who believe.

Psalm 94:12   Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law.

Luke 16:29,31   Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." [31] He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Romans 15:4   Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

2 Timothy 3:16   All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

1 Peter 1:23   You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

But we also see in the Bible the importance of Christians assisting people to better understand their Savior God. God certainly could have chosen any number of ways to communicate his message to others, but he has chosen to do it, primarily, through his people.

Acts 8:30-31   Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. [31] "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?"

2 Peter 3:16   He (Paul) writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

What is true of all Christians is especially true of those called to publicly teach and preach his God's Word.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

1 Corinthians 1:21 Since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

In article II, paragraphs 50-51 of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord the Confessors make the clear point that God has chosen to use the office of the public ministry to bring his message to the hearts of his people.

50] Therefore God, out of His immense goodness and mercy, has His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan concerning our redemption, namely, the holy, alone-saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, publicly preached; and by this [preaching] collects an eternal Church for Himself from the human race, and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of sins, and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And by this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy Sacraments when they are used according to His Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, draw them to Himself, and

convert, regenerate, and sanctify them. **51]** 1 Cor. 1, 21: *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* Acts 10, 5. 6: Peter *shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.* Rom. 10, 17: *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.* John 17, 17. 20: *Sanctify them by Thy truth; Thy Word is truth*, etc. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their Word.* Therefore the eternal Father calls down from heaven concerning His dear Son and concerning all who preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name: *Hear ye Him*, Matt. 17, 5.[3]

The powerful and life giving Word is only conveyed through normal means of human communication. This makes it important for us to be able to communicate it well so that we are not confusing people but instead are helping them to see the clear truth that is interwoven throughout the Bible: We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

It is important to remember that when a called public minister is preaching from the pulpit, he is in fact preaching the very Word of God. After all, the Word of God is not only the Word of God when the exact sounds and syllables we find in the Bible are used, but rather when the truth of God's message is conveyed to people in the normal way messages are conveyed to people: appealing to the intellect, emotions and will. The Bible points to the human intellect being touched by the proclaimed Word:

Luke 24:45   Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

Colossians 1:9   For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 3:18,19   [I pray that you] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19]and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

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[3] *Concordia Triglotta - English : The symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (electronic ed.) (901). Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House.

Matthew 13:19   When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The Word of God appeals also to human emotions:

Psalm 119:32   I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

Romans 10:9,10   If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Psalm 119:72,103,120 The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. [103] How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! [120] My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.

God's Word also seeks to touch the will of man:

2 Corinthians 5:20   We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Romans 12:1   Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Ephesians 4:1   As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

1 Thessalonians 4:10   And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

Since it is true that God's written Word found in the Holy Scriptures appeals to people not only supernaturally but also psychologically, it would only follow that God's Word, spoken through the mouths of his pastors, would seek to do the same. Donald Bloesch makes this point well:

Revelation must be proclaimed, but in an intelligent way. One must understand the words of the preacher before believing the message. The gospel should be related to the cultural situation in which people find themselves, for in this way it takes on specificity and concreteness. It must be put in the language of the people. Our presentation must be as logically coherent as possible if our hearers are to understand. Yet communication means more than making it knowable. But only the Holy Spirit can do that; therefore the success of our preaching rests on the One whom we proclaim and not basically on the way in which we proclaim.[4]

God's Word is powerful and he has ordained that his pastors publically proclaim his message faithfully. God's Word works supernaturally because it has the power of God himself behind it. But God's Word also works psychologically, touching the human intellect, emotions and will. The proclamation of the Word is the most important work that any pastor will do. And the place where he reaches most of his people the most often will almost always be in the weekly sermon.

The biblical evidence which supports the need for pastors to work on growth in preaching

God certainly encourages all of his people to continue to grow in their knowledge of his Word.

2 Peter 3:18 [G]row in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The purpose for this is clear in the lives of all Christians. The more we know of God's Word the better prepared we are to face issues in our own lives and others'.

2 Timothy 3:16, 17 [16] All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God also calls on his pastors in particular to grow not only in their own faith, but also in their roles as pastors. The work he has committed to those in the public ministry deserves the

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[4] Bloesch, Donald. *A Theology of Word and Spirit.* Inter Varsity Press, 1992. pp. 222-223

very best effort. Part of this effort is working on continued growth in various areas of ministry, but especially preaching because of its centrality in the work of the parish pastor. A number of passages from Paul's Pastoral Epistles demonstrate this God given encouragement for pastors to pay attention to their own spiritual and professional growth.

> [13] Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. [14] Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. [15] Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. [16] Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

In the verses above Paul encourages Timothy to be devoted to reading the Word and to preaching and teaching the Word in public. Paul does not simply mean for Timothy to put in his weekly allotment of hours to the sermon and Bible class. No, he tells Timothy to give himself "wholly" to these matters. Paul wants Timothy to progress in his ministry and not let the gifts he has become stagnant.

In his second letter to Timothy Paul adds some additional encouragements for the young pastor to grow in his ability to proclaim God's Word.

> 2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

> 2 Timothy 4:2, 5 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction… [5] keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

We also see Paul encouraging another pastor, Titus, to speak confidently and with authority. This can only come from growth in faith, in the knowledge of God's Word, and in the ability to articulate this with conviction.

> Titus 2:15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Titus 3:8 And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

Paul certainly did not expect that these young pastors were already perfectly equipped to handle these charges he gave them. But he did expect that they would continue to work on these areas of their lives and ministries on a regular basis. To preach the Word of God well is difficult and requires hard work on the part of the preacher. A desire to grow in one's preaching skills is not only God pleasing but is in fact commanded by God who desires workers who will faithfully put their talents to work for him.

The biblical evidence that God's ministers need to support one another and build up each other's gifts in the ministry

Some general encouragements from the Word

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17)." While it is true that God wants his people, especially his pastors, to study his Word and to "fan into flame" (2 Timothy 1:6) the gifts he has given them, it is also true that he does not expect them to do this alone. Working hard in self directed study of God's Word or in areas which might be improved in one's ministry is a valuable part of spiritual and professional growth. But God never created Christians, or their pastors, to be islands. In fact we find encouragement to the contrary throughout Scripture:

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Philippians 2:3, 4 [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Colossians 3:16a Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

When a pastor's continuing education is done alone the danger is there that he may focus on areas that need not be focused on while neglecting areas which would benefit from growth. Working with another pastor or pastors can bring new perspectives and offer strength to areas that are weak.

Solomon offers similar advice in Ecclesiastes that can apply to many walks of life but would certainly find application in the professional growth of preachers.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 [9] Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: [10] If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! [11] Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? [12] Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

To ask for guidance, support and encouragement can be viewed by many as a sign of weakness. But our God points to it as a means to strengthen one another. Criticism, especially from those who are not one's friends or peers is often unwelcome. But pastors would do well to seek out peers whose words can be trusted.

Proverbs 27:5, 6 [5] Better is open rebuke than hidden love. [6] Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Examples of peer encouragement in the public ministry

Moses and Aaron certainly knew the value of having a fellow called worker to lean on in the public ministry. From the beginning of Moses' ministry as Israel's leader Aaron was right by his side. When Moses was afraid to speak, God provided him with a capable speaker in his brother Aaron.

Exodus 4:10-16 [10] Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." [11] The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? [12] Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." [13] But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." [14] Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. [15] You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. [16] He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.

When Moses stood as a returning outcast and murderer before the elders of Israel, it was Aaron who spoke to them and persuaded them to accept what Moses was there to do at God's command.

Exodus 4:29-31 [29] Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, [30] and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, [31] and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

Moses also had Aaron by his side as he faced Pharaoh. His older brother gave Moses the needed confidence to approach the King and also took the role of spokesman. Aaron would also quite literally support his brother as he, along with Hur, held up Moses' hands during the battle with the Amalekites at Rephidim (Exodus 17:9ff).

But this was not a one sided relationship. Moses has to restore order and chastise Aaron along with the people of Israel after the incident with the golden calf (Exodus 32). Moses also pleads to God for mercy after the sin of Aaron and Miriam left their sister with leprosy (Numbers 12). Moses and Aaron both had their own strengths and they were able to help each other in their times of need because of them.

In the New Testament another fine example of peers in the ministry supporting and encouraging one another is Paul and Barnabas. These two men had a relationship that grew and

changed over time, but they were of mutual benefit to one another. It seems that their relationship began with Barnabas playing the role of mentor as he presents Paul to the apostles and defends his reputation.

> Acts 9:26, 27 [26] When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. [27] But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

Barnabas was also the one who challenged Paul over the episode with John Mark (Acts 15: 36-38) who had deserted them during their first missionary journey together. Barnabas was not afraid to critique his fellow worker Paul. One can imagine that the one known as the "Son of Encouragement" took issue with Paul refusing to give John Mark a second chance, especially considering Paul's own history. Just as with Paul, it seems Barnabas was able to put John Mark back on the right path, for Paul gives instructions to the Colossians to welcome Mark later in his life (Colossians 4:10).

Having a brother in the ministry to defend you and challenge you is a blessing for any parish pastor. Certainly there may be times that strain the relationships pastors have with one another due to the fact that they are still sinful people. However the benefits of mutual encouragement and edification are worth the difficulties that come along with working with sinful peers, because they are also Christian peers.

Review of survey taken by WELS parish pastors on the growth-in-preaching project

As has been demonstrated above, the Scriptures point to the central place of the Word in the lives of Christians, and also the centrality of preaching in the work of pastors. Because of the great importance of this work of preaching and the tremendous amount of work that goes into good preaching for one's entire ministry, a survey was conducted to gauge the point of view of parish pastors regarding the usefulness and feasibility of a peer-sermon-review tool. The entire survey can be found in the Appendix A, but there are a few key points of consensus that would be appropriate to mention here.

Over 90% of the pastors who responded agreed that preaching is the most important work a parish pastor does in a *typical* week. There are certainly some parish ministries in which this may not be the case (a pastor could be in a setting where there are multiple associates and he only preaches occasionally), but it is clear that WELS pastors recognize the centrality of preaching in their role as pastor.

Over 70% of the pastors who responded agreed that objective peer sermon review is essential for growth in preaching. And yet, when asked how often they asked for peers to review their sermons over 28% said they never asked for peer review, while over 35% said they ask a brother to review a sermon once a year or less on average. It seems clear that the need for peer encouragement is recognized but the desire to initiate this type of "iron-sharpening" is not abundant (especially in parishes where there are no associate pastors).

Interestingly about 70% of the pastors who responded also said they would be willing to spend time every month reviewing another pastor's sermons. And about 90% of the respondents said they would be comfortable receiving objective criticism of their own sermons.

While this survey is by no means an exhaustive study of this issue among WELS pastors, it does seem that there are some areas of agreement which deserve to be explored further. The use of a peer-sermon-review tool could help to aid pastors who would like to pursue peer encouragement in the area of preaching but are not sure how to go about doing it. Putting the tool online would also allow for pastors who are in parishes without associates to have brothers in the ministry regularly review the content and delivery of their preaching.

Chapter 2 – Possible methods to improve the preaching of WELS parish pastors

This paper is not intended to propose a singular means to achieve growth in preaching, and thus a brief mention should be made of the various opportunities WELS pastors already have to improve their preaching during their years in the ministry.

Sermon feed-in tools

While this paper focuses only on a sermon feed-back tool, pastors dare not neglect some of the very helpful sermon feed-in opportunities currently available. Professor Richard Gurgel stated this truth well in a recent *Preach the Word* article when he wrote: "Mid and post-sermon *feedback* identifies when sermons hit home. Pre-sermon *feed-in* helps sermons start with better aim."[5] Most pastors likely have used one or more of the following tools to aid them in their ministry. Listed below are a number of options a WELS pastor could choose from, along with a brief examination of the pros and cons of each approach.

Peer sermon study groups (winkles)

WELS pastors have made use of study groups[6], often referred to as "winkles", for generations. These groups are excellent opportunities for pastors to study a variety of subjects together. While these meetings ought not to be limited to a study of the next week's sermon texts or the art of preaching, they certainly would do well to include those topics from time to time. It has been said that there are 1,000 sermons in every text. As you study the sermon text for the upcoming week with a handful of brothers, you may discover insights that you would not have considered before.

Another benefit that might seem counterintuitive is that these winkles can often save you a great deal of time in your sermon preparation. The precious hours you give up to meet with fellow pastors might seem like a difficult addition to an already busy schedule. However, many

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[5] Gurgel, Richard. "Homilia et Homiliae: Using Pre-Sermon Feed-in." *Preach the Word* 14 (July/August 2011): 3.
[6] See "Preach the Word" Volume 15, Number 1 (September/October 2011): 1-4 for a variety of options when it comes to the makeup and purpose of such study groups.

pastors find that studying a sermon text with others gives them a jump start on their sermon text study and can often save them time in the long run.

Certainly there are cautions that should be urged regarding these meetings. The danger for some could be to turn these meetings into purely a social hour together instead of an intense and focused study of God's Word. Also while an informal gathering can offer busy pastors a reprieve from a rigorous schedule, it could also lead to these meetings becoming unstructured blocks of time that have no goal or direction. Perhaps a different pastor could take the lead each week (or how ever often you meet) in setting the agenda and doing some work with the text before meeting together.

Congregational sermon feed-in

Sermon feed-in is done nearly every week whether a pastor is seeking it actively or not. As a pastor visits his members and prospects, teaches classes, leads meetings, speaks with his colleagues, works with the youth group, etc… he is gaining information for the Sunday sermon. What are the joys and sorrows of my members? What challenges are they facing this week? What encouragement from God's Word do they need to hear? Much of the hearer specific, as opposed to text specific (a good sermon should include both), appropriations and applications in the Sunday sermon will be gleaned from the pastor's regular interactions with his members during the week.

But what if those regular interactions were used to glean specific reactions to the upcoming week's sermon text? In the same *Preach the Word* article mentioned above a number of opportunities are highlighted that could be used to gain text study help from our partners in the pew. A pastor could begin his meetings that week with a look at the upcoming sermon text. Or he could ask his Catechism or teen Bible class to react to the text. He could use the text as the basis for devotions with shut-ins and the sick. By intentionally intersecting the text with his members a pastor will gain a sharper vision of how to apply the text to his people's lives.

The argument certainly could be made that your people don't fully understand the text and are finding in it things which are not really there. This might be true, but that fact too gives the preacher direction in his writing. Now he knows some of the misconceptions that need to be cleared away so his flock can see the text clearly.

Personal study

While a pastor is not meant to only study alone, that does not mean there is no benefit to self-directed study and research in the area of preaching. A regular diet of books and journals on the subject of homiletics can help a pastor keep his homiletical sword sharp for battle with the sinful nature in him and his hearers each week. A great resource in our own synod is the bimonthly publication *Preach the Word* which offers advice to preachers and also provides additional online resources including book reviews. This publication is a valuable tool for WELS pastors looking for a place to start their self-study of preaching.

The obvious caution with self-study would be that a pastor remembers this should not be his only source of growth. He is a member of the body of Christ who can benefit greatly from all the members of the body.

Sermon feed-back tools

The same resources mentioned in connection with sermon feed-in work are also rich resources for sermon feedback. If sermon feed-in is meant to sharpen your aim, then sermon feedback should seek to evaluate whether or not you hit your target. Again, the pros and cons of various approaches are listed below.

Peer Review

Pastors who find themselves in a parish with one or more associate pastors have a tremendous resource available to them every time they preach. Despite differences in age, ministry experience, and sermon delivery style associate pastors still offer one another a peer

review opportunity that cannot be duplicated. If you have an associate you get to see and hear him preach nearly every time he preaches. You can pick up on good habits of his and point out areas which need improvement because you can notice patterns develop over the course of time.

This type of peer review is often done informally through a comment after church on Sunday or in a staff meeting on Monday morning. While the casual comment can certainly be helpful perhaps this type of peer review could be of even greater benefit if it were done in a more intentional manner. If associates could offer one specific critique on sermon content and sermon delivery each week they could help one another grow in their strengths and shore up their weaknesses on a regular basis.

Like most approaches to sermon growth, associate peer review can turn into a weakness if it is used exclusively or used haphazardly. If the only opinion a pastor ever hears is his associate's opinion, for good or bad this will shape his preaching. In addition it is possible that the feedback of an associate could become predictable, either harping on the same perceived flaws or giving the usually pat on the back. For these reasons it would be prudent for pastors who are blessed with an associate to still pursue sermon feedback from other pastors.

A common way to receive feedback from other pastors has traditionally been at the circuit or conference level. Pastors can ask for feedback from some of the brothers after preaching for a pastor's conference. Some circuits make peer sermon review a regular part of their yearly study. There is the risk of course that this kind of feedback can be superficial or totally subjective. And even when it is given special attention at the circuit level it will only be as beneficial as the pastors want it to be. If some pastors find peer sermon review to be tedious or ineffectual it is unlikely they will offer meaningful objective feedback.

Perhaps "forcing" peer sermon review on an entire circuit is not the best approach. If pastors are willing and eager to work together on peer review the process will be much more positive and useful to those involved. This is one of the benefits an online peer review group could offer. Pastors could partner with other pastors who have the time and inclination to offer

brotherly critiques using objective guidelines in addition to their own opinions gained through their own unique ministry experience.

Congregational sermon feedback

Whether a pastor wants it or not he will likely get congregational sermon feedback nearly every week. When God's Word is proclaimed God's people will always have a reaction to it. Sometimes this reaction is voiced to their pastor in the form of a compliment, and at other times in the form of a critique. Generally speaking however, it does seem that people usually hold back on offering critiques to their pastors after the Sunday sermon. No matter what the reason is behind this, it does make it difficult at times for a pastor to get a full picture of how his message is being received and understood by his flock. Perhaps a pastor would do well to solicit congregational feedback in a more formal manner.

In order to do this in a meaningful way though, it is probably good to give the congregation some guidelines with which to critique the sermon.[7] Additionally a pastor may want to approach congregational feedback in different ways based on his own specific congregation and setting. He could seek feedback by way of a sermon feedback survey handed out periodically to the congregation. Sermon comment cards could be made available for regular anonymous feedback. A specific group in the congregation, such as the board of elders, could also provide some balanced feedback on a more regular basis. A pastor might even consider doing a careful study of his preaching by leading his members through a class on what Lutheran preaching ought to be. This would both give the congregation the ability to objectively critique their pastor and also the ability to gain more from the typical Sunday sermon themselves.

Personal study

In the end a pastor will also always want to be honestly evaluating his own preaching on a regular basis. He knows better than anyone how much time and effort (or lack thereof) he has been putting into his sermons. He knows the goals he was aiming to hit in each sermon and can

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[7] A number of suggestions can be found in Appendix B.

watch or listen to his sermon on Monday morning and objectively evaluate whether or not he succeeded. Certainly if a pastor is his only evaluator this is not healthy for his growth in preaching. But honest self-evaluation will always have its role to play.

Chapter 3 – Contemporary encouragements to pursue growth in preaching

A current emphasis on continuing education

Stephen Carter, former director of continuing education at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, pointed especially to the stressful nature of the work of a pastor as a driving reason to pursue continuing education in his book *Pastors on the Grow*.[8] There is stress associated with the pastoral ministry for a number of reasons, one of which is that pastors are expected to be knowledgeable in a number of theological fields.

> Great demands are placed on the minister in today's world. As western society has become increasingly complex and specialized, the requirements for effective pastoral ministry have also increased. Just as in medicine and law, the ministry has become divided into a number of specialized areas. Preaching, teaching, and pastoral care (traditional areas of ministry) have developed as special disciplines requiring academic knowledge and skill development. Additional areas receiving attention include counseling, marriage and family enrichment, administration, evangelism, stewardship, liturgics, and hymnology, youth work, and a host of subdisciplines such as conflict management and time management. While less specialization is demanded of the rural or small-town pastor than the pastor of a large urban church, the strain of being a general practitioner in a specialized world clearly affects the practice of ministry everywhere.[9]

If those words were true in the mid-1980s when Stephen Carter first wrote them, then they are certainly just as applicable if not more so today. Our society has grown more specialized, not less, in the last 25 years. In addition, even the "small-town rural pastor" is expected to be able do more than perhaps he was expected to a generation ago. People today are expected to continue to sharpen their job skills throughout their careers. Why should WELS pastors expect anything different? Why should WELS parishioners expect anything less of their pastors? Clearly they should not.

This does not mean that no real efforts have been made by WELS pastors in the past to grow professionally. But efforts to encourage regular continuing education and to offer

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[8] Carter, Stephen J. *Pastors on the Grow.* Concordia Publishing House, 1986. p. 22
[9] Ibid p. 11

opportunities to grow have not always been done on a large scale in the WELS. However there has been a recent emphasis on offering more varied opportunities for pastors to grow professionally on a synod wide scale by means of the recently created *Grow in Grace Institute*. The Institute, launched in 2010, seeks to both offer new opportunities for personal and professional growth to WELS pastors, as well as to empower and support the rich variety of grassroots programs already being used by WELS pastors in their own backyards.

This increased link between seminary and parish in the WELS offers many new ways for parish pastors to maintain and sharpen the skills they gained while at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In fact this bond between seminary and parish is essential as Stephen Carter wrote 25 years ago.

> You have much to learn from seminary professors and programs, and they have much to learn from you. If we bridge the gap more effectively between seminary and parish, the ministry and mission of the church will be greatly enriched.[10]

Carter also points to other prominent driving factors in a pastor's pursuit of professional growth including: partnering with those in your own parish, developing a personal learning plan, and building a support system of peers and mentors. These factors will all support the pursuit of excellence in the pastoral ministry that is due this high calling.

Daniel Biles echoes these thoughts in his book *Pursuing Excellence in Ministry.* There is infinite value for a pastor in drawing together the support of his members, his peers, and his seminary as he pursues excellence in his work. The argument could be made that these types of academic or professional pursuits are not really necessary for a WELS parish pastor. After all our training system emphasizes the efficacy of the gospel and does not demand that men have every gift of the Spirit, but rather to faithfully use the gifts they have been given in service to the gospel. But as Biles points out in his book, "being faithful means pursuing excellence in parish ministry."[11]

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[10] Ibid p. 75
[11] Biles, Daniel V. *Pursuing Excellence in Ministry.* Alban Institute Publishing, 1988. p. 86

Mark Rouch, who was not a pastor, but who worked in the field of continuing education made a similar observation about the connection between faithfulness and pursuit of excellence in continuing education.

> [The purpose of continuing education] is to enable us to engage faithfully in authentic ministry and to do so with effectiveness and satisfaction. This, of course, is not to say that continuing education is all that authentic ministry requires… Nevertheless learning is a powerful determinant of authentic ministry… when we have the skills required of our particular type of ministry and acquire new ones; then the competence grows which faithfulness in ministry requires. Otherwise it erodes in unfaithfulness.[12]

This statement by Rouch is not meant to shame busy parish pastors into leaving behind their duties in order to attend regular classes that are offered by colleges and seminaries. Rouch is simply trying to express the truth that learning does not end for pastors when they receive their diploma.

> Continuing education is an individual's personally designed learning program (developed with the help of colleagues [laity and fellow clergy]) which begins when formal education ends and continues throughout one's career and beyond. An unfolding process, it links together personal study and reflection and participation in organized group events.[13]

Continuing education is nothing new. However, the way in which it is being currently carried out and emphasized has changed. No longer is professional growth something a pastor must facilitate on his own or at the local circuit level alone. There are options available for WELS pastors today that provide no excuses for a pastor who would claim he simply does not have time for continuing education.

A renewed focus on growth in preaching

In 2010 the WELS bimonthly preaching publication, *Preach the Word,* introduced a comprehensive two-year program for growth in preaching for WELS pastors entitled *Proclaim*

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[12] Kadel, Thomas ed. *Growth in Ministry.* Fortress Press, 1980. p. 124
[13] Rouch, Mark. *Competent Ministry :A Guide to Effective Continuing Education.* Abingdon Press, 1974. pp.16-17

Grace![14] During the past two years Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor, and Director of Continuing Education, Richard Gurgel has written articles on key issues facing WELS pastors. These key issues have focused on improvement in both in sermon content and sermon delivery.

Alton Wedel summarized well what the content of Lutheran preaching ought to be in *The Mighty Word: Power and Purpose of Preaching*:

> The preaching of the Mighty Word is preaching to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people. It is Jesus Christ, the Living Word, whose impelling "Follow Me!" calls us to faith and gathers us as His own holy people. It's His promise "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven" that snaps the chains of bondage. It is Christ's summons "Come forth" that breaks the power of death. The church is gathered by the Holy Spirit through the power of the Mighty Word. "I cannot by my own understanding or any power in me believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel." The Gospel, Luther said! Not a summary of news events gleaned from the morning headlines, not a series of short stories to illustrate the power of positive thinking, not a doctrinal dissertation against the devilish prophets, *but the Gospel.* Through the Gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes the miracle of faith and the miracle of a gathered people. God works, God acts, God moves, God changes human hearts by the foolishness of preaching.[15]

But the truth that only the powerful Word of God produces results does not give pastors an excuse to proclaim God's message in the same predictable way week after week. It is incumbent on pastors to speak the truth of God's Word in as many varied ways as Scripture itself does. The way a pastor crafts his words and phrases does not add power to the Word of God. But it can put unnecessary roadblocks in the way for people when a pastor's sermon content is poorly written, difficult to follow, or predictable in its patterns each Sunday.

An emphasis on growth in preaching is not meant to inject the Word with more power, but rather to remove the obstacles preachers often put in front of the people by a hasty or predictably written sermon that does not do justice to the flavor of the text and the rich variety the Holy Spirit himself uses in conveying his truth. Pastors should not seek to change the content of the gospel, but how they write and deliver their sermons should always seek to clearly

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[14] Please see "Preach the Word" Volume 14, Number 1 (September/October 2010): 1for more details.
[15] Wedel, Alton. *The Mighty Word: Power and Purpose of Preaching.* Concordia Publishing House, 1977. p. 23

communicate the gospel. Francis Rossow says it well in his book *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively.*

> The foolishness of preaching consists in its content, not style. What is foolish is our message, not the manner of communicating the message. The foolishness of preaching does not necessitate foolish preaching."[16]

In Jeffery Arthurs' book *Preaching with Variety* he reminds pastors of the balance that must be struck when pastors seek to bring freshness and variety to their preaching. While variety must always be used to not as a gimmick but in order to truly preach the text, variety also serves to draw in parishioners and provide renewal for the pastor.

> We use variety because the text does. The form of the sermon should reproduce some impact of the form of the text. You fill your quiver with different kinds of arrows to hit different kinds of targets, not to display your prowess as an archer… At times… "listening to an exposition of Scripture is about as exciting as watching house paint dry." Our listeners deserve better. As they gather to feed on the Word, let us serve our best recipes. Variety can add some zip, spice, and zing to our preaching… As we crank out sermons week after week, year after year, each sermon sounding just like the others, we begin to feel that nothing different ever happens. Once that attitude forms in our hearts (remember Jesus said we speak out of the fullness of our hearts), dullness creeps into our words. The mode and mood of our speaking becomes dry. A self-perpetuating cycle forms: our preaching is monotonous, monotonous preaching sours our attitude, a sour attitude leads to monotonous preaching, and the cycle continues. Get off the treadmill! It's time to preach with variety. It could revolutionize your attitude toward your own preaching.[17]

Creating fresh and varied sermons each week takes a lot of work. It takes a commitment to personal growth in preaching on the part of the pastor, as well as support of that growth by his congregation and his peers in the ministry. A pastor simply cannot do all that is needed to grow professionally or grow in his preaching skills by himself. Lowell Erdahl puts it well in his book *Better Preaching: Evaluating the Sermon.*

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[16] Rossow, Francis. *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively St. Louis.* Concordia Publishing House, 1983. p. 14
[17] Arthurs, Jeffery. *Preaching With Variety.* Kregel Press, 2007. p. 18

The preacher who isolates himself in the study or whose attitudes or actions toward people prevent the development of in-depth relationships lives out of touch with the persons to whom he is to minister.[18]

A pastor can fall into the trap Erdahl describes in many areas of his ministry, including preaching. If a pastor fails to make use of the Christians in his congregation and his brothers in the ministry as he seeks to improve his preaching he may betray a deeper problem. St. Paul's reminder that we all need every other member of the body of Christ is timely. No pastor should be an island when it comes to ministry or to professional growth. The argument that there is no time in a busy parish pastor's schedule to sharpen preaching skills is untenable. It is not time lost, or ministry lost, when a pastor and his congregation invests time, effort, and yes, money, into his pursuit of professional growth. The dividends will be evident.

A recent effort in the WELS to pursue growth in preaching

In the late 1990s an effort was made in the WELS to facilitate and encourage peer sermon evaluation on a large scale.[19] Pastor Bryan Gerlach briefly described the effort in this way:

The approach, designed largely by now retired Pastor Silas Krueger, was meant to be quite in depth – not just a single sermon critique. It was to be a meaningful professional growth opportunity… We trained consultants from each district (sometimes more than one). Some good work was done, but the effort never caught on in a big way. Not sure why. Those who got involved reported appreciation and spoke well of the effort. It may be that professional growth for preachers in their most public and personal aspect of ministry is an ongoing challenge, requiring to some degree a cultural shift that will come more with your generation than with mine.[20]

As Gerlach suggests, the effort to engage WELS pastors in meaningful peer review seems to find one of its greatest obstacles in the pastors themselves. Any time something in a pastor's ministry is evaluated or critiqued by another pastor the door is always open for emotions to be stirred and feelings to be wounded. A current WELS pastor made this same observation.

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[18] Erdahl, Lowell. *Better Preaching: Evaluating the Sermon.* Concordia Publishing House, 1977. p. 42
[19] See appendix C for some of the materials used in this initiative.
[20] Personal email correspondence with Rev. Bryan Gerlach.

The problem with all this in (sic) finding peers with not only the wisdom to advise you, but also the grace to encourage you. I find that we are very good at being critical and not so good at being encouraging. Can't tell you how many conferences I have been too where the poor young man speaking was ripped to pieces and humiliated. Too many of us have become master apologists and terrible Barnabas'.[21]

Clearly peer sermon review is a practice that can greatly benefit the growth of a pastor's preaching. However, due to the personal and subjective nature of critiques, peer review can be a difficult tool for a pastor to use at times. As brothers in faith and in ministry WELS pastors need to seek out ways to use their brothers to sharpen their preaching in ways that encourage and support one another while at the same time being honest in their evaluation.

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[21] Personal email correspondence with an anonymous WELS pastor.

Chapter 4 – Project proposal

One possible way to do peer review that has not been previously attempted in the WELS would be to create a website on which WELS pastors could upload and view each other's sermons and offer feedback to one another. There are certainly cons to this approach. Pastors could find a web based feedback forum to be a bit impersonal. Difficulties could also arise if the technology is difficult to use or cost prohibitive for a congregation to support.

However there are some advantages this type of sermon review forum would offer. Pastors could choose to take part in this with other pastors who are eager to offer each other honest and constructive critiques. Pastors could partner in groups with men who are outside their geographical area, thus giving perhaps a more unbiased critique than a brother in the circuit who knows all your strengths and weaknesses already. Additionally this method would provide pastors who are not able to otherwise make use of peer review regularly with an opportunity to sharpen their preaching skills with their brothers in ministry.

A beta site has been set up on Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's *Seminary Online* website to show how this type of online forum might work. It is currently constructed to group three pastors in a group who will share three recent sermon videos with the other two men in the group. After each pastor views the other two pastor's sermons he would be able to offer some feedback by way of a questionnaire on the site. This questionnaire could make use of many of the standard objective measures for sermon evaluation used in the WELS as found in some of the samples in Appendix B.[22]

The cost for the current site is minimal to the Seminary and free to the pastors involved. There are instructions, found in Appendix E, and located on the website, which show a pastor how to set up a free account with a file storing site called "SugarSync" where he can upload his three sermons. While there are other avenues for hosting video, this is one that offers the least expense to the congregation.

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[22] The questionnaire that is currently on the website can be found in Appendix D.

Practically speaking, SugarSync is not a viable option due to the length of time it takes to upload and download video files. While it works in a beta test, SugarSync fails to offer a long term solution for the video hosting needs of this website. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's *Continuing Education* department will need to determine if and when it will be technologically or financially feasible to make easy-to-use video hosting available for this website.

The final goal of this project would be to become incorporated into Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's continuing education initiative where it could be offered as a free "course" on their *Grow in Grace* website. Loving and encouraging peer sermon review hosted on this site could offer WELS pastors the opportunity to sharpen each other's homiletical skills for years to come. This would be one more way for the Seminary to partner with the parish as WELS pastors pursue growth in preaching for the glory of God and salvation of souls.

Appendix A – Survey Results

The following survey was taken by parish pastors of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod during the Fall of 2011. 87 surveys were sent to parish pastors who represented a wide range of experience (3 WLS graduating classes were selected which fit in each age range), 57 pastors returned the survey. Below are the complete results of this survey.

Question # 1

How many years have you served in the public ministry?

	Response %	Response Count
1-9 years	36.8%	21
10-19 years	29.8%	17
20 years or more	33.3%	19

Question # 2

Preaching is the most important work a parish pastor does in a typical week.

	Response %	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	5.5%	3
Moderately Disagree	1.8%	1
Moderately Agree	18.2%	10
Strongly Agree	67.3%	37
Other (comments):	7.3%	4

Question # 3

How often do YOU ASK a fellow pastor to review your preaching?

	Response %	Response Count
Never	28.1%	16
Rarely (once a year on average or less)	35.1%	20
Sometimes (at least twice a year on average)	19.3 %	11
Very often (almost every time I preach)	3.5%	2
Other (comments):	7%	4

Question # 4

Objective peer sermon review is essential for growth in preaching.

	Response %	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	0%	0
Moderately Disagree	21.1%	12
Moderately Agree	45.6%	26
Strongly Agree	26.3%	15
Other (comments):	7%	4

Question # 5

I am comfortable receiving constructive criticism from fellow pastors.

	Response %	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	1.8%	1
Moderately Disagree	1.8%	1
Moderately Agree	40.4%	23
Strongly Agree	50.9%	29
Other (comments):	8.8%	5

Question # 6

I am comfortable offering constructive criticism to fellow pastors.

	Response %	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	1.8%	1
Moderately Disagree	14%	8
Moderately Agree	52.6	30
Strongly Agree	28.1	16
Other (comments):	8.8%	5

Question # 7

How much time would you be willing to spend reviewing a fellow pastor's sermon?

	Response %	Response Count

I do not have time in my ministry to do this	7%	4
1-2 hours per week	14%	8
1-2 hours per month	52.6%	30
1-2 hours per year	14%	8
Other (comments):	12.3%	7

Question # 8

How likely would you be to participate in a peer sermon review group at least once a year?

	Response %	Response Count
Definitely will not participate	1.8%	1
Unlikely to participate	17.5%	10
Likely to participate	61.4%	35
Definitely will participate	8.8%	5
Other (comments):	10.5%	6

Question # 9

I would be willing to use an online forum to facilitate this peer sermon review group.

	Response %	Response Count
Strongly Disagree	12.3%	7
Moderately Disagree	15.8%	9
Moderately Agree	42.1%	24
Strongly Agree	14%	8
Other (comments):	19.3%	11

Question # 10

My congregation would be willing to pay a fee in order for me to take part in an online peer sermon review group.

	Response %	Response Count
Yes	14%	8
No	47.4%	27
Other (comments):	38.6%	22

Sample #1

WR 1051-52   Preaching in Worship

Sermon Evaluation Form

Preacher: _____   Date: _____

Evaluated by: _____

Sermon Text: _____

Sermon Theme: _____

Sermon Parts: _____

I. Reading of the sermon text

     A. Reading with expression _____

     B. Reading with clarity _____

II. Introduction

     A. Captured one's attention _____

     B. Touched a need, directly or indirectly _____

     C. Aroused a desire to listen and learn _____

     D. Expressed theme and parts clearly _____

III. Body of Sermon

     A. Main points were clear _____

     B. Main points clearly drawn from text _____

     C. Meaning of text adequately explained _____

     D. Content of points adequately developed on basis of text _____

     E. Illustrations/examples were clear and to the point _____

     F. Applications/appropriation were specific to needs of hearers _____

     G. There was material appealing to all age groups _____

Further comments on any of the above.

_____

_____

_____

_____

IV. Theological Considerations

    A. The sermon was clearly textual _____

    B. The doctrine taught was biblical _____

    C. The sermon pointed to Christ _____

    D. The tone was evangelical, i.e., Gospel-oriented _____

    E. The sermon divided Law and Gospel properly _____

    F. The sermon preached the Law explicitly _____

    G. The sermon preached the Gospel explicitly _____

V. Closing application and conclusion

    A. The Gospel predominated _____

    B. The theme/title was clearly restated _____

    C. The main points were made personal _____

    D. The hearers were exhorted to appropriate or apply the truths _____

VI. General Considerations

    A. Delivery and Style

      1. Appropriate inflection, volume & clarity _____

      2. Appropriate gestures and expressions _____

      3. Appropriate pace and pauses _____

      4. Eye contact with audience _____

      5. Ease and confidence in pulpit _____

      6. Length of sermon _____

    B. Effectiveness

      1. Presentation was interesting & engaging _____

      2. Sermon was moving and persuasive _____

VII. General comments on strengths and weaknesses

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(This sample, while similar to sample #2, could be used for peer evaluation or even evaluation by trained members of a congregation [e.g. elders].)

Sample #2

WR1051-52 +++ Sermon Evaluation Form

Preacher:_____   Date: _____

<u>Reading of the text:</u>   With expression and with clarity

<u>Introduction:</u>   Captured one's attention;   Touched a need, directly or indirectly;   Aroused a desire to listen and learn;   Led into the sermon theme;   Expressed theme and parts clearly.

<u>Body of Sermon:</u>   Main points were clear;   Main points clearly drawn from text;   Meaning of text adequately explained;   Content of points adequately developed on basis of text;   Illustrations/examples were clear and to the point;   Applications/appropriation were specific to needs of hearers;   Material appealing to all age groups.

<u>Theological Considerations:</u>   The sermon was clearly textual;   The doctrine taught was biblical;   The sermon pointed to Christ;   The tone was evangelical, i.e., Gospel-oriented;   The sermon divided Law and Gospel properly;   The sermon preached the Law explicitly;   The sermon preached the Gospel explicitly.

<u>Closing application and conclusion:</u>   The Gospel predominated;   The theme was clearly restated;   The main points were made personal; The hearers were exhorted to appropriate or apply the truths.

<u>Delivery:</u>   Inflection, volume & clarity;   Gestures and expressions;   Pace and pauses;   Eye contact with audience; Ease and confidence in pulpit;   Length of sermon;   Interesting & engaging;   Moving & persuasive

<u>General comments on strengths and weaknesses</u>

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

(This sample, while similar to sample #1, could perhaps better be used for congregational feedback because of its simplified format.)

GUIDELINES FOR SERMON ANALYSIS

The preaching partner should receive a copy of the sermon several days before the sermon is preached in class. Many of the questions that follow ought to be answered on the basis of work done in advance of the class sermon.

Content

How did the preacher catch the attention of the hearers in the Introduction? Was this effective?

What was the specific malady he wished to cure? Did he identify it clearly?

Did he point to the cure and then to the text in the Introduction? -

How could you tell he was preaching the text and not using the portion of Scripture as a pre-text for his own ideas?

Did you sense he interpreted and explained the text properly?

Give an example from the sermon of specific proclamation of the law. Did he preach the law recognizing that his hearers are both saint and sinner?

Indicate how he announced the good news of the gospel a) specifically to people and b) specifically to the malady of the sermon.

Give an example of an application that was practical and timely.

Would this language and style of this sermon enable the preacher to communicate to a person who was in a Lutheran Church for the first time? To a child? To a teenager? To a middle-aged or elderly person?

Why do you think the Conclusion was (or was not) effective?

Sermon Structure

Could you tell as you listened to the sermon that he was following a logical outline or train of thought?

How well did the details of the sermon focus on the central thought of the theme and parts?

Could you tell when he was moving from one part to another?

Was he clear or were there times when you scratched your head and wondered where he was going?

Delivery

Did he read the text in an interpretive way?

Did he memorize the sermon he wrote?

Were you able to hear and understand the speaker?

Did you notice problems with the correct pronunciation of the words or correct grammar?

Did he speak too fast? Too slowly?

Was there an acceptable modulation in his speech patterns?

Did he articulate clearly?

Was he at times emphatic?

Were his movements in the pulpit distracting in any way?

Did he look his hearers in the eye?

Did his gestures seem natural?

Suggest something in his delivery that he needs to work on.

In General

Give the preacher advice:

Keep doing this:

Stop doing this:

How did serving as a preaching partner for this sermon help you as a preacher?

Junior Homiletics Sermon Evaluation Form

Preacher: Evaluator: Date:

	Poor Excellent
I. Scripture Reading	
A. Read with expression	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Read with clarity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
II. Introduction	
A. Touched a need, directly or indirectly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Aroused a desire to listen and learn	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
III. Body of Sermon	
A. Meaning of text adequately explained	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Application/appropriation was specific to needs of hearers	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. The transitions from point to point were smooth and natural	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
IV. Theological Considerations	
A. The sermon pointed to Christ	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. The sermon preached the Law explicitly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. The sermon preached the Gospel explicitly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
V. Conclusion	
A. The gospel predominated in the conclusion	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. The theme was clearly restated	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. The main points were made personal	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
D. The hearers were exhorted to appropriate or apply the truths	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
VI. Delivery and Style	
A. Appropriate inflection, volume & clarity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Appropriate gestures and expressions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. Appropriate pace and pauses	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
D. Eye contact with audience	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
E. Ease and confidence in pulpit	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

General comments on strengths and weaknesses:

(This sermon evaluation pattern is a shortened version of the longer evaluation form developed as part of the *Preach the Word* initiative. It is also used in preaching classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary when the goal is to provide not quite as much feedback at one time.)

Sample #5

Form for offering sermon critique

The material below is the final section of "Revitalizing Our Preaching," a presentation by Joel Gerlach to the WELS Board for Parish Services in January 1994. At that time Pastor Gerlach (now retired) served St. John's, Wauwatosa, WI. He formerly taught homiletics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The full presentation is in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Fall 1994, pages 273-295. Used by permission.

Getting feedback

An important element in any effort to revitalize preaching is feedback. The usual feedback we get at the door while shaking hands after the service will do little, if anything, to revitalize preaching. If we want to improve our preaching, we need something more substantial than a few people to say, "Good sermon, pastor."

How do we get substantive feedback-even at the risk of exposing ourselves to pot shots by chronic complainers? During the last years that I served at King of Kings in Garden Grove, California, I told the Board of Elders that I expected them as part of their responsibility to offer constructive criticism of my preaching. We periodically set aside time for it on the agenda. I made it clear that I expected straightforward criticism for the good of the kingdom, and that if that created problems for my ego, so be it. Perhaps they could help me with an ego adjustment as well.

Unstructured though they were, those brief sessions were profitable and appreciated. One man, a technical writer for McDonnell Douglas, continued to share worthwhile comments when he was no longer an elder. Another former elder, who is still a close friend, does not hesitate to offer his evaluation of a sermon he occasionally hears me preach after all the intervening years.

At the seminary during the 70s, I became acquainted with Reuel Howe's Partners in Preaching (Seabury, 1967). We used it as a supplemental textbook in a summer quarter course to encourage preachers to provide a structured way to solicit feedback from the congregation. One of Howe's suggestions was to select a small group of members to meet with the pastor after a Sunday service to provide feedback. After several months a different group took its turn.

More recently William Willimon, dean of the chapel at Duke University, addressed the subject of getting helpful feedback in an article in the 1992 spring quarter of Leadership. He refined a sermon reaction questionnaire developed in the 1970s by Boyd Stokes as part of his doctoral work at Emory University. The questionnaire is attached as an appendix. (Perhaps some of its negative points could better be expressed positively.)

As preachers we want to be faithful to our Lord. And that means we are accountable first of all to his Word and then also to a confessional Lutheran tradition. But in a secondary sense we are also accountable to the people who sit in the pews on Sunday morning. One way we can give evidence of our accountability to the people is by soliciting substantive feedback from them. If

that can contribute to the revitalization of our preaching, as well as to the well-being of the church, it is something we ought seriously to consider doing.

I am delighted-more than that-I am thankful to the Lord of the church that the BPS has undertaken this study. I am grateful for the opportunity to have had my say. May God prosper whatever you decide to do to revitalize preaching in our church, and may he open the minds and hearts of our pastors to make them receptive to the encouragement and help offered to them. For it is still true that "Nothing attaches people to the church as does good preaching" (Apology, Art XXIV, 51).

Sermon reaction questionnaire

Do not sign your name.
Supply the following information:

Sex: male ____; female ____

Age:	under 20 ____	20-29____	30-39____
	40-49____	50-59____	over 59____

Regarding the sermon you just heard, indicate whether you agree or disagree with these statements. Circle 1 if you strongly agree, 2 if you agree, 3 if you're uncertain, 4 if you disagree, 5 if you strongly disagree.

Your honesty and frankness will be appreciated.

1. My interest was maintained.	1 2 3 4 5
2. The sermon was integrated into the service of worship.	1 2 3 4 5
3. I was not inspired.	1 2 3 4 5
4. The preacher's personality came through.	1 2 3 4 5
5. The scripture text was not used or illumined.	1 2 3 4 5
6. The preacher used contemporary language.	1 2 3 4 5
7. The preacher did not evidence a personal faith.	1 2 3 4 5
8. The sermon was too long.	1 2 3 4 5
9. I did not understand the sermon well.	1 2 3 4 5
10. The preacher referred to notes too often.	1 2 3 4 5

11. The preacher sounded like he loved us.	1 2 3 4 5
12. The sermon spoke to some of my personal needs.	1 2 3 4 5
13. The sermon did not sufficiently emphasize the greatness of Christ.	1 2 3 4 5
14. The preacher showed self-confidence.	1 2 3 4 5
15. The sermon did not make me eager to serve God any more than I'm already serving him.	1 2 3 4 5
16. I identified with the preacher.	1 2 3 4 5
17. The preacher spoke down to us.	1 2 3 4 5
18. The sermon did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion.	1 2 3 4 5
19. The sermon did not help me encounter God.	1 2 3 4 5
20. I can remember most or all of the sermon's points.	1 2 3 4 5

[The Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly article ends with this questionnaire.]

Joel Gerlach suggested that the questionnaire above could be improved. The Commission on Worship office has chosen not to offer an improved version through the Internet for several reasons.

- Some language and categories above might not represent an ideal confessional Lutheran perspective.

- A questionnaire is best used in conjunction with some training for those who will fill out the questionnaire. Note this suggestion in the article above.

- Revisions and improvements should reflect the particular goals of those using a questionnaire.

Sample #6

Sermon critique:

1. Introduction: *Did it engage the people? Was it relatable?*

2. Specific law: *Was I convicted of my sin and shown my inability to save myself? Was I shown that I deserve eternal punishment for my sins? Were the examples relevant to my personal life?*

3. Specific gospel: *Was I convinced of the forgiveness of my sins? Did I see how Jesus lived, died and rose again for me? Was I offered the personal assurance of eternal life?*

4. Applications: *Were they relevant and practical for my personal life?*

5. Illustrations and personal examples: *Did they fit life in the 21st century? Does the pastor understand what life is really like in the real world today?*

6. Mechanics—voice inflection, movement and animation: *Was the sermon presented in a lively manner that held my interest? Did I find my mind wandering? Was the delivery energetic and enthusiastic? What was the style -- conversational, preachy, instructional, etc.? Was there any humor in the sermon and was it appropriate?*

7. Length: *Did the sermon move along or did it drag? Exactly how long was the sermon?*

8. Crafting of the sermon: *Did it flow? Was the thought process logical and easy to follow?*

9. Visitor/unchurched friendly: *Could persons without previous Biblical knowledge gain something from this sermon for their daily life? Did the pastor give the impression that this Word of God had impacted his life that week?*

10. Relevant: *Did the sermon offer something for the youth, young adults, older adults, elderly?*

11. Special references: *Were there references to the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its power in our daily lives? Were there references to the means of grace; to the gospel in Word and sacraments?*

12. Conclusion: *Did the pastor give me something to take home and use in my daily life?*

(This sermon evaluation pattern was developed by Mission Counselor Ed Schuppe as he worked with mission pastors.)

Sample #7

Sermon Evaluation Form

Preacher:

Evaluated by:

Sermon Theme:

Sermon Parts:

I. Scripture Reading	Poor						Excellent

A. Read with expression	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Read with clarity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

II. Introduction

A. Captured one's attention	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Touched a need, directly or indirectly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. Aroused a desire to listen and learn	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
D. Led into the sermon theme	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
E. Expressed theme and parts clearly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

III. Body of Sermon

A. Main points were clear	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Main points clearly drawn from text	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. Meaning of text adequately explained	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
D. Content of points adequately developed on basis of text	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
E. Illustrations/examples were clear and to the point	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
F. Applications/appropriation were specific to needs of hearers	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

G. The transitions from point to point were smooth and natural   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

H. There was material appealing to all age groups   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

IV. Theological Considerations

A. The sermon was clearly textual   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. The doctrine taught was biblical   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. The sermon pointed to Christ   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. The tone was evangelical or Gospel-oriented   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. The sermon divided Law and Gospel properly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

F. The sermon preached the Law explicitly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

G. The sermon preached the Gospel explicitly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

H. The sermon was Lutheran, not merely Protestant   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

V. Conclusion

A. The gospel predominated in the conclusion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. The theme/title was clearly restated   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. The main points were made personal   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. The hearers were exhorted to appropriate or apply the truths   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

VI. General Considerations

A. Delivery and Style

1. Appropriate inflection, volume & clarity   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Appropriate gestures and expressions   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Appropriate pace and pauses		1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Eye contact with audience		1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Ease and confidence in pulpit		1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Length of sermon		1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Effectiveness

1. Presentation was interesting & engaging	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Sermon was moving and persuasive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

General comments on strengths and weaknesses:

(This sermon evaluation pattern was first developed as part of the *Preach the Word* initiative. It has been slightly modified for use in preaching classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.)

PREACH THE WORD!
Encouraging Brothers in Their Ministry of the Word

I. THE CALL TO PREACH AND THE THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

A. Answer the following questions about the ministry on the basis of the passages noted:
   1. Who instituted the office of the holy ministry? Cf. Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11-13
   2. What comfort do modern preachers derive from this truth? Cf. 1 Corinthians 4.1
   3. What exhortation does this truth lay on their hearts? Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Timothy 2:15
   4. How does God's call to the preaching ministry usually come to men today? Cf. Acts 13:2; Titus 1:5
   5. What confidence can and should pastors still have? Cf. John 20:21; Acts 20:28
   6. What is the primary responsibility of those called to the pastoral ministry? Cf. 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2.
   7. Why do pastors need to be reminded of their primary responsibility? Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
   8. What distinction is there between the universal priesthood of all believers and the call into the public ministry? Cf. 1 Peter 2:9,10; Romans10:14b,15; 1 Corinthians 12:29; Acts 20:28.
   9. What are some of the terms Paul uses to describe his preaching office? Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:7
   10. What is the significance of these different terms for us today?
B. Answer the following questions about preaching on the basis of the passages noted:
   1. Why do we emphasize preaching at a time when other forms of communication seem more appealing and effective? Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21b
   2. Why, even from a human perspective, is preaching so vital in carrying out the work of Christ's church? Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 1:18-23; cp. 1 Corinthians 1:21
   3. What confidence does every pastor have when he preaches the Word of God? Cf. Romans 1:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 1:23,24.

4. How can ministers today speak authoritatively when authority is being challenged and disputed at all levels? Cf. 1 Pet.4:11a; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Luke 10:16.

5. Why do we consider relevant a message that comes from a culture so different from ours and removed from us by at least 2,000 years and 10,000 miles? Cf. John 6:63; Hebrews 4:12,13.

PREACH THE WORD!

II. Homiletical Training and Growth

  A. Answer the following questions on your homiletical development:

    1. Which homiletics text(s) did you use to develop your initial preaching techniques and skills?

    2. Which homiletical model(s) most influenced you when you were first learning to preach?

  B. Answer the following questions on your current homiletical thinking:

    1. Which homiletical work(s), if any, have been most influential in shaping your present homiletical approach?

    2. What significant changes, if any, have you made in your preaching philosophy or approach in recent years?

  C. Which purpose(s) do you most often strive to achieve in your sermons? (In the space provided, rank these purposes in order of importance, "1" being the most important.)

    1. _____ Expound the text

    2. _____ Proclaim Jesus

    3. _____ Teach Christian doctrine

    4. _____ Give guidance for daily life

    5. _____ Other (Explain)

  D. Characterize your present homiletical style, choosing from among the following (circle those that apply.):

    1. the type of sermon you most often preach:

        a. liturgical

        b. expository

       c. exegetical

       d. topical

       e. doctrinal

       f. practical

       g. other

2. the structure you most often use to present your message:

       a. analytical

       b. synthetic

       c. homily

       d. narrative

       e. "moves"

       f. other

3. the method you most often employ to present your message:

       a. deductive

       b. inductive

       c. combination of deductive-inductive

E. Describe your rhetorical style in the pulpit, choosing from among the following as many as apply. (Rank in order of frequency of use, "1" being the most frequently used.)

1. ____ formal or oratorical

2. ____ conversational

3. ____ very informal, using humor and personal observations

F. List anything you have done in the last five years to hone your homiletical skills, discussing:

1. homiletical works, if any, you have studied in the last five years.

2. homiletical courses/workshops/seminars, if any, you have attended in the last five years.

3. current homiletical issues or trends that you consider important and with which you are presently wrestling.

PREACH THE WORD!

III. HOMILETICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Planning, Preparing and Preaching Your Sermons

A.   Answer the following questions on any spiritual analysis that has been done in your congregation:

1.   Has a systematic spiritual analysis of your congregation been done in the last five years?

2.   If a more systematic or organized spiritual analysis has been done in the last five years, who did it?

B.   Answer the following questions on how you determine the preaching needs of your congregation:

1.   Have the preaching needs of your congregation been discussed and defined in the last five years?

2.   If the preaching needs of your congregation have been assessed, who has done this?

C.   Answer the following questions on how you plan your preaching schedule:

1.   Which texts are used in your regular preaching? (Circle all that apply.)

   a.   Pericopes

   b.   Free texts

   c.   Preaching through books

   d.   Texts for a series or on related subjects

   e.   Other (Describe briefly)

2.   Who selects the texts on which you'll preach?

3.   On what basis are your preaching texts selected?

D.   Answer the following question on how you prepare your weekly sermon:

1.   When do you begin work on the next Sunday's sermon?

2.   What are the steps you follow in your sermon preparation?

   a.

   b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

h.

i.

3. How much exegetical work do you do in studying a text? (Describe briefly)

4. How often do you use commentaries in sermon preparation?

   a. Rarely
   b. From time to time
   c. Regularly

5. What is/are the main purpose(s) you have in using a commentary in sermon preparation?

6. How often do you refer to sermon books in sermon preparation?

   a. Rarely
   b. From time to time
   c. Regularly

7. What homiletical principles do you try to keep in mind as you develop the outline or structure for your sermon? (List below)

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

f.

8. What techniques or thought processes do you most often use to determine how to apply the text?

    a.

    b.

    c.

    d.

    e.

    f.

9. How much importance do you place on including stories, illustrations and examples in your sermons?

    a. A great deal — at least one for each main point

    b. Average — include them if I can think of them

    c. Little — not necessary if I explain the text well

10. What is/are the main source(s) of your stories, illustrations and examples?

    a.

    b.

    c.

    d.

    e.

    f.

11. What is the final manuscript of your sermon like?

    a. Detailed outline

    b. Written manuscript

    c. Combination of the above (Explain)

      d.   Other (Explain)

12. How do you deliver your sermon?

      a.   Recite sermon from memory

      b.   Deliver sermon from being familiar with manuscript or outline

      c.   Read manuscript while maintaining eye contact with congregation

13. How long does it take you to memorize/familiarize yourself with your sermon before preaching?

14. Do you take your manuscript/outline into the pulpit?

15. How long does it take you to prepare an average sermon?

E. Answer the following questions on how you evaluate your sermons:

1. Do you practice your sermon in church before preaching?

2. Do you listen to or watch tapes of yourself after you have preached?

3. Do you have any formal methods of getting feed-back from your congregation regarding your sermons?

4. Do you have any members on whom you rely to give you regular, informed feed-back on your sermons?

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF YOUR PREACHING PRACTICES

A. How regular are you in assessing the preaching needs of your congregation?

B. Who assists you in analyzing the preaching needs of your congregation?

C. In the list below of steps to a sermon, determine whether a particular step is one of your strengths or weaknesses and make a brief note as to why you answered as you did:

Step	S/W	Reason

1. Choosing preaching portion

2. Studying text

3. Finding telic note of text

4. Formulating theme/proposition

5. Determining parts/points/moves

6. Selecting form for presentation

7. Expounding text

8. Unfolding images/concepts of text

9. Reflecting language of text

10. Applying text

11. Illustrating sermon

12. Introducing sermon

13. Concluding sermon

D. In which areas of sermon preparation do you feel strongest or most confident and comfortable?

E. In which areas of sermon preparation do you feel weakest or would you like encouragement and counsel?

F. Which two or three areas would you like to focus on as you work to improve your preaching?

G. Whom could you enlist to give you informed, constructive feedback on your sermons? How could you enlist this/these person(s)?

"PREACH THE WORD!"

IV. Guiding Questions for Consultant

A. Textual Matters

1. Does the sermon catch the telos (purpose, intent) of the text?
2. Does the sermon convey the "flavor" (images, concepts) of the text?
3. Does the sermon reflect the "color" (specific language, words and expressions) of the text?
4. Does the sermon imitate the "flow" (line of argument or presentation of points) of the text?

B. Biblical Principles

1. Is the sermon textual, clearly expounding the text on which it is based and helping the hearers understand that text?
2. Is the sermon biblical, that is, do the truths the sermon presents accord with the biblical body of doctrine?
3. Is the sermon Christ-centered, focusing on Jesus as the only hope of salvation?
4. Is the sermon evangelical, conveying a spirit of reconciliation, love and concern?

5.   Does the sermon properly divide Law and Gospel, using the Law to condemn the sinner and the Gospel to comfort the penitent?

6.   Does the sermon preach both Law and Gospel explicitly?

7.   Is the sermon relevant, addressing God's people regarding matters of supreme importance in their lives?

8.   Is the sermon interesting, engaging the hearers in both a meaningful and memorable way as it unfolds God's truths?

C. Congregational Considerations

1.   Is the sermon pointed to specific needs of a specific body of believers?

2.   Does the sermon speak to people of all ages and in a variety of situations?

3.   Does the sermon address the minds of the hearers, instructing and informing them regarding truths of Scripture?

4.   Does the sermon address the emotions of the hearers, inspiring and encouraging them with the wonders of God's love?

5.   Does the sermon address the will of the hearers, calling them to rededicate themselves to the service of the Lord?

6.   Does the sermon expect and suggest some specific response on the part of the hearers?

D. Matters of Delivery

1.   Does the pastor read the text clearly and with understanding?

2.   Is the pastor's voice clear and easy to listen to?

3.   Does the pastor modulate his voice in an appropriate manner?

4.   Does the pastor use facial expressions and body language that are appropriate to the subject matter?

5.   Does the pastor use gestures that fit his specific point and support his message?

6.   Are there speech or body language habits that draw attention to themselves and away from the message?

7.   Is the volume of the sermon adequate for the size of the congregation and of the room?

E. General Questions

1.   What new insight or understanding did I gain by listening to this sermon?

2.   In what area or in what way was I strengthened by this sermon?

3.   What did I especially like about this sermon?

4.   Were there elements that were unclear or expressed in a too-familiar way?

5.   What might I suggest to enrich and revitalize this sermon?

"PREACH THE WORD!"

V. Sermon Evaluation Form

Date: Sunday of Church Year:

Sermon Text:

Sermon Theme/Title:

I. Scripture Reading	Poor Excellent
A. Appropriate to Sermon Theme/Title	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Read with expression	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. Read with clarity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

II. Introduction

A. Captured one's attention	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Touched a need, directly or indirectly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
C. Aroused a desire to listen and learn	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
D. Led into the sermon theme/title	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
E. Expressed theme/title clearly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

III. Body of Sermon

A. Main points were clear (list below)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
B. Main points clearly drawn from text	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Bible passage adequately explained   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. Content of points adequately developed on basis of text   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. Illustrations/examples were clear and to the point   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

F. Applications and appropriation were specific, pointed and appropriate to the needs of the

    hearers   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

G. The transitions from point to point were smooth and natural   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

H. The sermon taught something new or in a striking way   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I. The sermon refreshed the hearers by what it presented   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

IV. Theological Considerations

A. The sermon was clearly textual   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. The doctrine taught was biblical   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. The sermon pointed to Christ   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. The tone was evangelical or Gospel-oriented   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. The sermon divided Law and Gospel properly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

F. The sermon preached the Law explicitly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

G. The sermon preached the Gospel explicitly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

H. There sermon was Lutheran, not merely Protestant   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

V. Conclusion

A. There was a well-rounded wrap-up   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. The theme/title was clearly restated   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. The main points were made personal   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. The hearers where exhorted to appropriate or apply the truths to themselves

                                                      1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. The emotional level was appropriate to the purpose of the conclusion

                        1 2 3 4 5 6 7

V. General Considerations

A. Delivery and Style

1. Level and appropriateness of vocabulary	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Variety and imagination in language	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Appropriate inflection, volume & clarity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Appropriate gestures and expressions	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. Appropriate pace and pauses	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. Eye contact with audience	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. Ease and confidence in pulpit	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. Sense of momentum in sermon	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Sense of unity and coherence in sermon	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. Length of sermon	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Effectiveness

1. Level of authority and conviction	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. Truths of Scripture were aptly taught and applied	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. Presentation was interesting & engaging	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. Sermon was moving and persuasive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Overall Evaluation of the Sermon   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Theme:

Main Parts:

Comments:

Appendix D – Feedback questionnaire found on WLS Seminary Online beta site

Sermon Evaluation Form

Preacher:

Evaluated by:

Sermon Theme:

Sermon Parts:

I. Scripture Reading	Poor					Excellent

A. Read with expression   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Read with clarity   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

II. Introduction

A. Captured one's attention   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Touched a need, directly or indirectly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Aroused a desire to listen and learn   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. Led into the sermon theme   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. Expressed theme and parts clearly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

III. Body of Sermon

A. Main points were clear   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Main points clearly drawn from text   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

C. Meaning of text adequately explained   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D. Content of points adequately developed on basis of text   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

E. Illustrations/examples were clear and to the point   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

F. Applications/appropriation were specific to needs of hearers   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

G. The transitions from point to point were smooth and natural   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

H. There was material appealing to all age groups   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

IV. Theological Considerations

    A. The sermon was clearly textual   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    B. The doctrine taught was biblical   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    C. The sermon pointed to Christ   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    D. The tone was evangelical or Gospel-oriented   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    E. The sermon divided Law and Gospel properly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    F. The sermon preached the Law explicitly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    G. The sermon preached the Gospel explicitly   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    H. The sermon was Lutheran, not merely Protestant   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

V. Conclusion

    A. The gospel predominated in the conclusion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    B. The theme/title was clearly restated   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    C. The main points were made personal   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    D. The hearers were exhorted to appropriate or apply the truths   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

VI. General Considerations

    A. Delivery and Style

        1. Appropriate inflection, volume & clarity   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

        2. Appropriate gestures and expressions   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Appropriate pace and pauses   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Eye contact with audience   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Ease and confidence in pulpit   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Length of sermon   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

B. Effectiveness

1. Presentation was interesting & engaging   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Sermon was moving and persuasive   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

General comments on strengths and weaknesses:

The following document was created by WLS student Ryan Kolander

HOW TO: S̲UGAR̲S̲YNC̲

In order to share your sermon video online, you will want to use SugarSync. SugarSync is basically an online back-up, storage, and sharing center for files. It's like Drop Box, except better. You can actually "sync" any folder you have on your computer to the site. That means you don't have to manually save files to SugarSync every time you create one; rather, the file will automatically save to the site whenever you save it to your computer.

Here are two useful words for understanding this document:

1. **Sync (v.):** To put something into harmony with another. In this case, putting a folder on the desktop of your computer into "harmony" with SugarSync online.
2. **Upload (v.):** To digitally transfer something directly. In this case, it means you go directly to the site www.sugarsync.com to upload a file through the internet, rather than "syncing" a folder from your desktop.

Here's how to download and use SugarSync for uploading and sharing your sermon videos.

Download SugarSync
1. Go to www.sugarsync.com/plans/
2. Select the *5 GB Free* option on the left side of the screen. Click on *Download*.
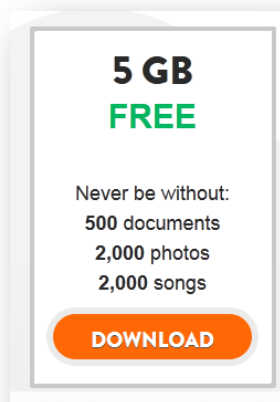
3. A pop-up window will appear, click on *Save File*.
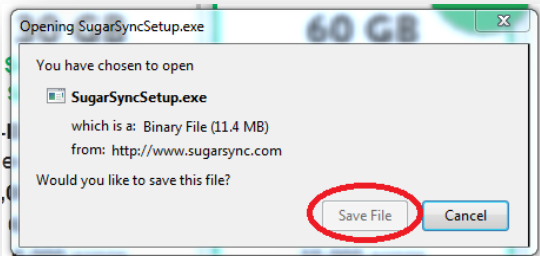
4. The file will load for several minutes.
5. When it's finished loading, right click on the *SugarSyncSetup(2).exe* tab. Select *Open* from the pop-up window.
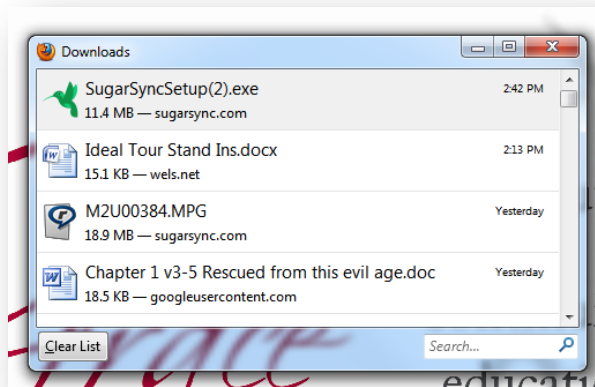
6. Click on *Run*.
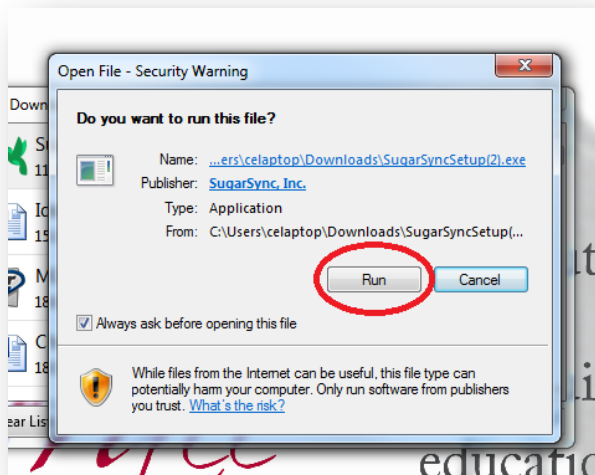
7. Follow the steps to finish the process.
8. A small blue and white window will appear. Select any of the four blue boxes to learn how to sync and share files or anything else. If you know everything already, click on *Close.*
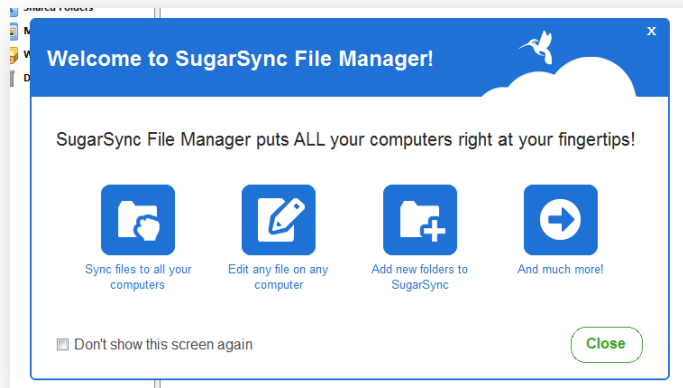

SIgn Up with SugarSync

1. Now that you have downloaded SugarSync, you will want to actually set up an account.
2. At sugarsync.com, follow steps to enter your name, e-mail, and password to create a new account.
3. Finished. Now you just need to sync folders from your computer to your online account (see next section).

To sync a folder from computer to SugarSync

1. Set up a folder on your desktop. You may label it in any way.
2. When finished labeling it, right click on the folder.
3. Hover over the *SugarSync* icon from the pop-up menu that appears. Follow to the right and click on *Add Folder to SugarSync…*
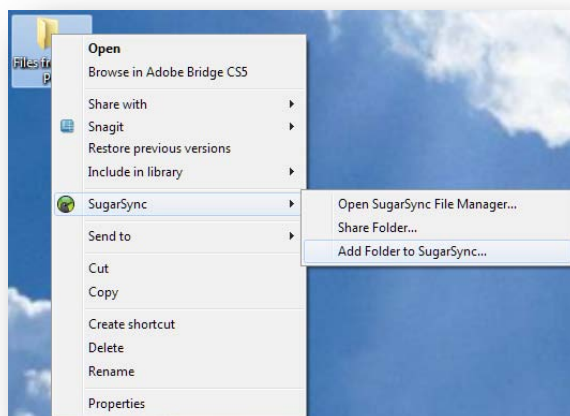
4. **Just sync it.** Once you've done that, anything you save to that folder will automatically go to your SugarSync account online. You don't need to drop a file anywhere. Just save the Word document, video, PowerPoint, or any other file like normal, making sure to save it to the file, and it will appear in SugarSync within minutes (depending on size of file). To prove that it's synced, a small yellow or green circle icon will appear next to the folder you've synced (see image below).
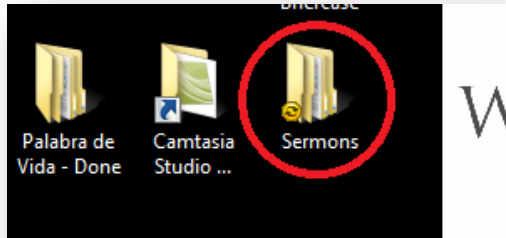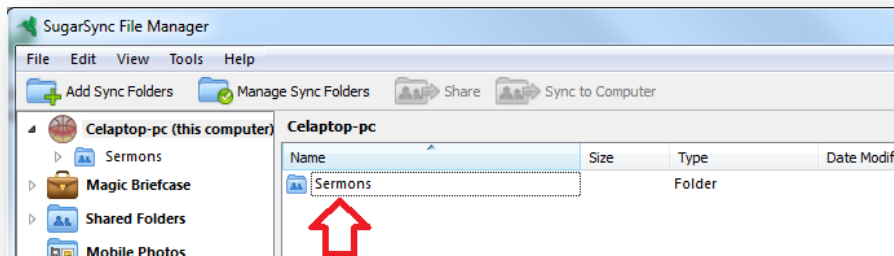

Organize Folders

1. SugarSync automatically places a shortcut on your desktop. Click on it.
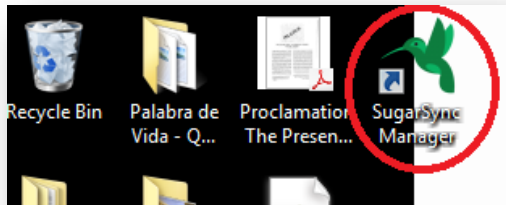
2. Upon clicking on the icon, you will see this screen. I've only synced one folder entitled *Sermons*, so that shows up in my *Manager* alone. All the folders you sync will appear here.

3. If you wish to organize or order your folders in any way, this is the place to do it.

Getting videos onto SugarSync

Your sermon video will be a large file, but no bigger than 5 GB, which is the amount of space you have on your account. However, it will be big enough that you will not be able to upload the file directly to SugarSync. You have to save it into your "synced" folder. For me, that means I have to save it into my

folder entitled *Sermons.* As soon as you save the video into that folder, you might have to wait up to an hour for it to transfer onto SugarSync.

1. **Save file to synced folder.** After you've uploaded your video onto your computer desktop, click and drag it into the synced folder. You may want to save a file directly to the folder without dragging or dropping.
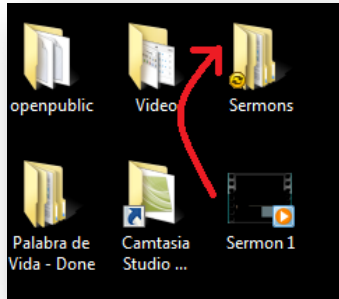

2. **Wait.** After dragging it into your synced folder, you might have to wait for around an hour or even more until it loads onto SugarSync. The small circle icon will be yellow until it loads.
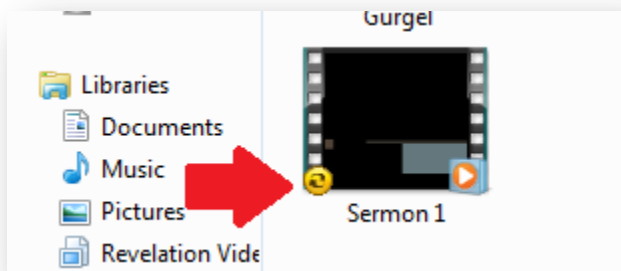
3. **Syncing status.** To check the status of your file, go to your SugarSync account online. There you can see that the folder on your desktop is syncing the video with your online account. The status appears on the right side of the line (*Pending upload* is your status until it finishes syncing).
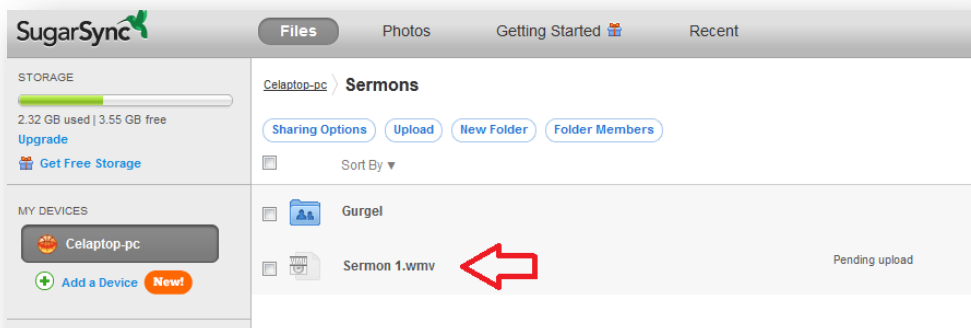

4. **Finished.** Once your video has finished syncing, the yellow circle icon will change to a green one with a check mark. That means your file is available online.
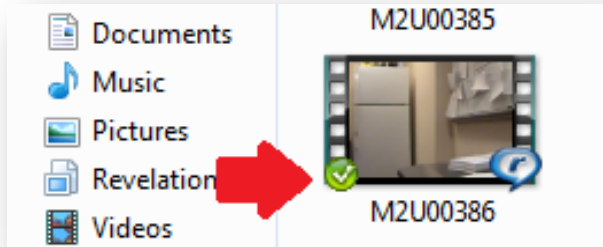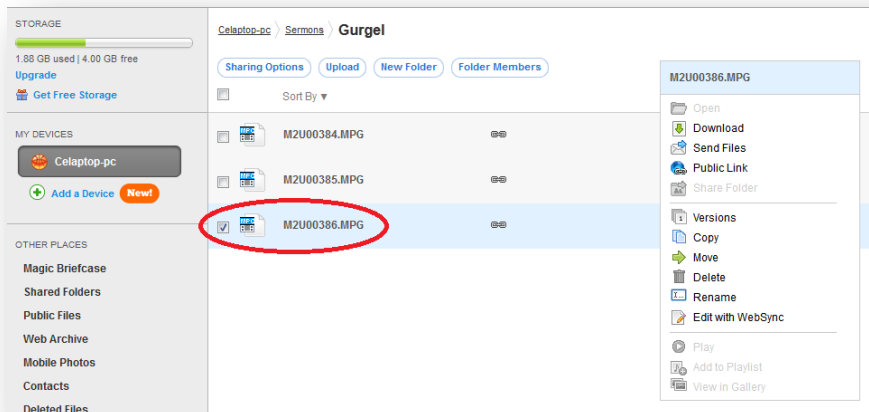
Sharing your folder(s)

Now that you have a video online, you might want to share it with someone. Whether that's your professor or a fellow pastor, there's one easy way to do it.
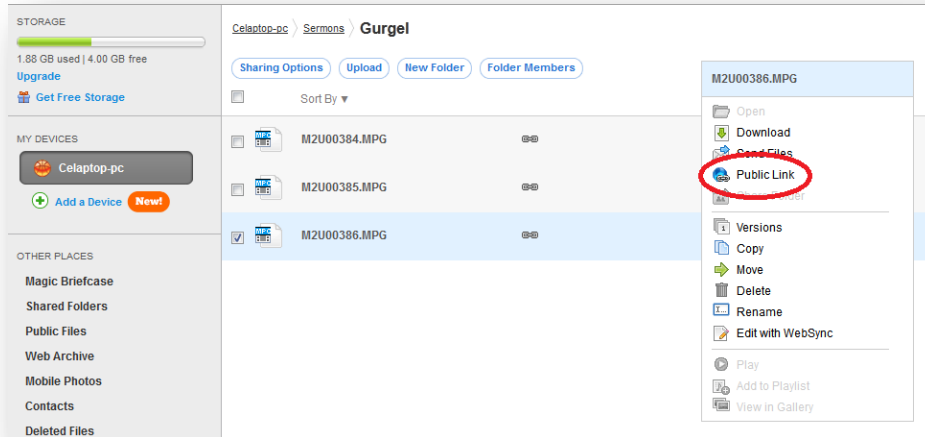
1. Go to your account on www.sugarsync.com
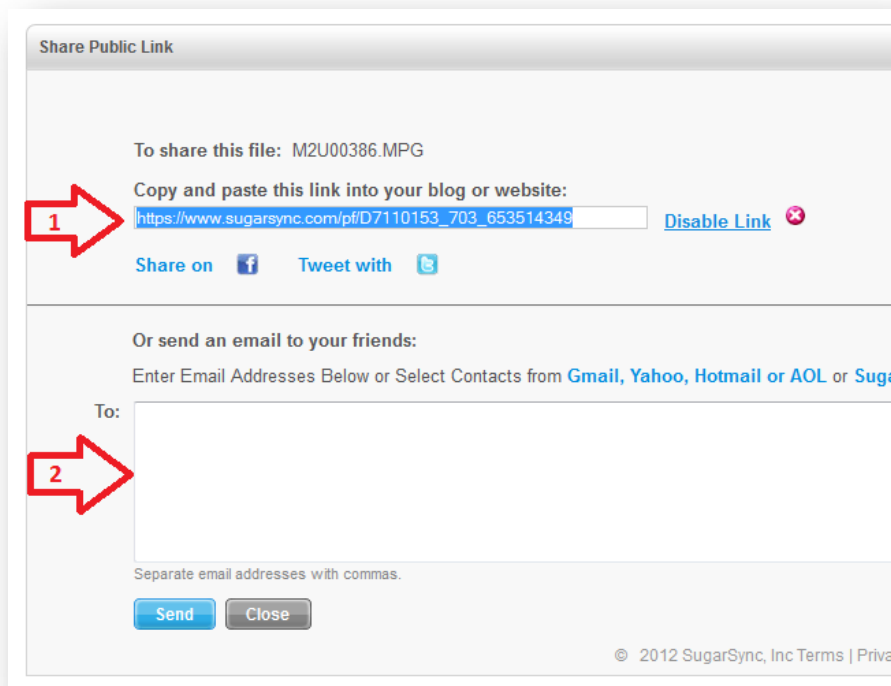2. Click on your synced folder.
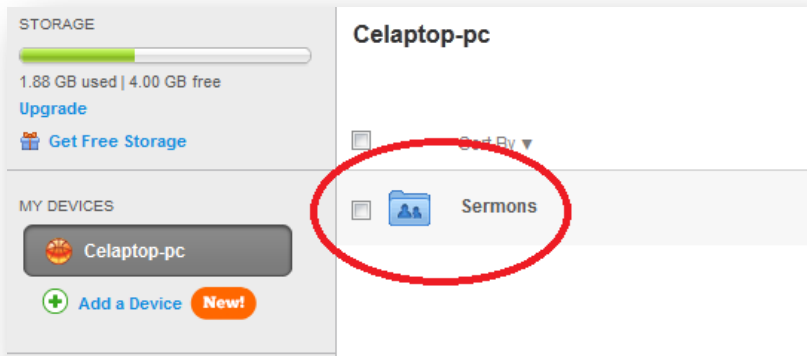
3. Select the video you'd like to share by checking the box next to it.

4. On the pop-up menu to the right, click on *Public Link*.

5. **Two sending options.** You can share the link in one of two ways. Either copy and paste the link and send it in an e-mail (1) or type in the intended recipient's e-mail into the box below and then click the blue *Send* button (2).

6. **NOTE**: if the recipient doesn't have SugarSync, he will have to download the free version to view your video.

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