

October 2012

LSOnline

Lutheran Sentinel Online

A Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod



God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1 ESV)



Dear members and friends of our ELS:

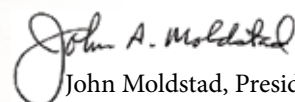
October makes us think of two discoveries—one, sort of, the other a *rediscovery*. The day of Christopher Columbus (October 12) still denotes a great find, even if he was not the first European explorer to arrive at the American continent. The second one we can call a rediscovery, epitomized by the great day of Reformation (October 31). A little-known German monk would emerge after his door-nailing incident to promote the purity of the Gospel of Christ, long hidden under the established church system. Martin Luther was nine years old when Columbus sailed the ocean blue. The whole era seemed ripe for discoveries.

Historians can debate what discoveries have greater impact on world societies. We can hardly imagine what it must have been like for the first Europeans who traveled to America. Here was a land of promise, with many trees but open spaces, and a wealth of resources and opportunities.

The “rediscovery” day of this month contains a more profound blessing. Where would we be if the October 31, 1517, Reformation event had not happened in the Saxon town of Wittenberg, Germany? Here began the epic journey of the reformer to guide souls back to Scripture alone for free salvation from sin through faith in the grace of Christ, and for all truly divine teaching in the church. Not only Lutherans, but also Protestants in general, celebrate Luther’s lead on this.

In the exploration and development of America, more and more blessings came to light. Think of the treasured freedoms we have today as a republic and as outlined in our constitution. So also with Luther’s “rediscovery” of the Gospel of Christ, came a whole host of blessings. We list some here while expressing sincere thanks to our gracious Heavenly Father.

- Luther’s vision of society as organized under three estates: family, church and state.
- Innovative and effective education programs for all citizens, not excluding girls.
- The collection of Lutheran chorales as authored by Luther, not least of which are “A Mighty Fortress is our God” and “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice.”
- The translation of Holy Scripture in the language of his people and the publication of Christian literature.
- Luther’s emphasis on doctrinal precision and boldly contending for the faith, including insistence on the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.
- His legacy— the Small Catechism, a 1529 book of Bible instruction used by 20+ generations of students.


John Moldstad, President of the ELS

The Reformation and the Means of Grace

What is your favorite book of the Bible? If you asked Luther that question, my guess is that he would probably choose St. Paul's letter to the Romans, or at the very least, it would be in his top two. I say this because of what he says about this beautiful letter:

“This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. We can never read it or ponder over it too much; for the more we deal with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes” (*Luther's Works*, AE, Vol. 35, p. 380).

As sweet as the book of Romans is, there are some parts of it that don't taste so good. In fact, we might even describe them as bitter. For example, listen to this: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

This verse leaves a bad taste in our mouths because it begins with the condemning word “all.” If you are a human being, then you are a sinful human being. Because we are all sinful we all “fall short of the glory of God.” Picture a chasm, a chasm so deep that you can't see the bottom. You are on one side and on the other side is God. No matter how hard you work, no matter how hard you try, it is impossible for you to reach the other side. Because you are a sinner, your punishment under sin is inevitable. You will fail. You will fall short. You will die—forever.

It is fundamental to the Christian faith to recognize that you are a sinner, that you can't get rid of your sin, that you can't make up for your sin, that you de-

serve to die because of your sin. When you come to grips with the fact that you are helpless, when you realize that your situation is hopeless, that is when God comes to you. God comes to you, not with threats of punishment, but with a promise of hope.

Martin Luther tried to reach God by living up to God's perfect standard. He dedicated his life to God. He even beat his body to appease God, but no matter how much he did, it was never enough. Day and night, his conscience tormented him until he discovered in the Holy Scriptures that the righteousness God demands is the righteousness that God gives.

God comes to you, not with threats of punishment, but with a promise of hope. In His spoken or written Word, in the handful of water applied along with His Word, through the simple elements of bread and wine connected to His Word, the Holy Spirit comes to us and gives us that amazing, undeserved love of a God who sent His only Son to sacrifice His life so that all may live.

Paul puts the promise this way: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:23-24). It is amazing how a word that is so condemning in one verse can be so inviting in the verse that follows. All have sinned, every single one of us has fallen short. All are justified, every single one of us has been redeemed by Christ's blood.

This Reformation season, as we once again celebrate the blessings of hope, faith, and true understanding of God's love through his servant Martin Luther, may we remember also the means by which we receive those blessings: Word and Sacraments, the Means of Grace.



Erich J. Hoeft is pastor of First Shell Rock Lutheran Church and Somber Evangelical Lutheran Church of Northwood, Iowa; Lake Mills Lutheran Church and Lime Creek Lutheran Church of Lake Mills, Iowa; and Immanuel Lutheran Church of Riceville, Iowa.



Pastor, I Have a Question...

Question: *Has a Lutheran Pastor ever exorcised a demon from a believer? Can a believer be possessed?*

ANSWER: A story is told about Dr. Martin Luther: A possessed young woman was brought to him. He asked her to confess her faith. She recited the Apostles' Creed. Luther drove out the demon.

Dr. Luther said, "People are possessed in two ways: some corporally, according to their humanity, and others spiritually, according to their spirit, as in the case of all the godless. In those who are corporally possessed and frenzied, the devil inhabits and vexes only the body, not the soul. So the soul remains secure and unharmed. The demons can be driven out of such people by prayer and fasting" (Martin Luther, "Table Talk" #1170, Luther's Works, Vol. 58; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010, page 75).

Dr. Francis Pieper wrote, "Bodily possession presents an entirely different case. Also children of God may suffer this affliction (Mark 5:6, 18, 19; Luke 8:28, 38, 39); by it the devil, under God's sufferance, takes possession of a man personally dwelling in him, so that the demoniac, bereft of the use of his reason and will, becomes the involuntary instrument of Satan. The human personality no longer functions; the devil in person becomes the acting subject. The demoniac is no longer responsible for his action" (Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, pg. 509).

Rites of exorcism have been available in the Lutheran church since the 16th century. Pastors were to use these rites to help their parishioners. These were people who had been baptized and confirmed their faith.

Into the 20th century, many Lutheran pastors and theologians taught that believers could be possessed. Added to the passages listed above, they cited the story in Job 2 and 2 Corinthians 12:7. These church fathers argued that as sin remains in the body of the converted, so, too, a demon could possess the body. Dr. Siegbert Becker (WELS) wrote: "I would be inclined to agree with Dr. Walther that we can assume that also believers can be possessed, but that they should be comforted with the assurance that the Lord Jesus has taken away their sins and will not hold them accountable for obscenities and blasphemies which they have uttered involuntarily. On the other hand, they should be reminded of the promise of God that says, 'Resist the devil and he will flee from you'" (Dr. Siebert Becker, Wizards That Peep, pg. 120).

It should be repeated that these church fathers also comforted the possessed in that they were not responsible.

This pastor does not presume to question the wisdom of the fathers. He does have a few additional thoughts.

1. God did permit Satan to afflict Job's body (Job 2:6). Satan afflicted him with sores. However, this does not seem to be demoniac possession.

2. The demoniac man in Mark 5 wanted to follow Jesus after the exorcism. The text does not say that he was a believer before Jesus healed him.

3. A lady is crippled by a spirit (demon). In defense of His healing, Jesus said, "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound-think of it-for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (Luke 13:16). It is unclear whether the phrase "daughter of Abraham" means that she was one of the children of Israel or if it means she was a believer or both.

4. Jesus said, "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself,

and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first"

Luke 11:24-26). Should a demon be driven out, the empty heart needs to be filled with something. When it is filled with faith, can the demon return?

5. God assures us, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

6. Faith is something that cannot be seen. We confess it. We are obligated to believe those who confess to faith. We cannot know for sure if they really believe.

7. Believers are the children of the eternal God. No matter what Satan does to us, we confess with Job, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19: 25-26).

8. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord (Romans 8: 38-39).



Send your questions to:

Pastor Charles Keeler
117 Ruby Lake Dr.,
Winter Haven, FL 33884
or email: cjohnk@aol.com



Charles Keeler is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida.

Singing the Gospel to the World

I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony....

Remember that tune and how it goes? It is fun for me to take a familiar melody like this and tweak it a little and let it "Sing The Gospel to The World..." like this:

*I'd like to teach the world to sing,
the Gospel of our Lord,
To share the truth throughout the land,
of peace forevermore... That's the real thing.*

Far too often, we miss what music is all about. Music expresses feelings, yes. But even more, it teaches the world something about life: a romance, an event, a sad time, a joyous truth of life. After the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land, Miriam with all the women used music to praise our God and Lord. When Saul's heart was troubled, he called David to play his harp and soothe his soul. When the early Christian church met together, they rejoiced in the Gospel salvation of Christ by "singing and making melody in their hearts unto the Lord."

Choosing the type of music we listen to is very important for every heart and soul. Enjoying the tune is only one little part. Hearing the words and understanding the message truly makes a piece of music worthwhile. So, if one can combine a good melody while expressing God's truth or sharing the Gospel, then you really have a good piece of music. Many talented theologians did just that. Martin Luther was no exception.

We think of Martin Luther as a translator, a theologian, a preacher, but he was also a musician. Young Luther grew up listening to his mother sing. He joined a boy's choir that sang at weddings and funerals. He became proficient with the lute and his emotions often erupted into song.

Luther worked with skilled musicians to make new music for Lutheran worship services and he wrote a number of hymns. Using a tune that was familiar to the common person while wanting to share God's truth in the Gospel with the World, he began to write: "A mighty Fortress is our God. A trusty Shield and Weapon. He helps us free from every need, that hath us now o'er taken. The old evil foe, now means deadly woe... He can harm us none, he's judged, the deed is done; one little word can fell him" (ELH 251:1). And that "word" is the Gospel about Jesus Christ.

Another hymn that Luther wrote to bring the Gospel to the World is one that helps me to remember how our Lord is truly with us each and every day: "In the midst of earthly life, Snares of death surround us; Where, then, flee we in the strife, Lest the foe confound us? To Thee, alone, our Savior!

Holy and righteous God! Holy and mighty God! Holy and all-merciful Savior!..." (ELH 251:1).

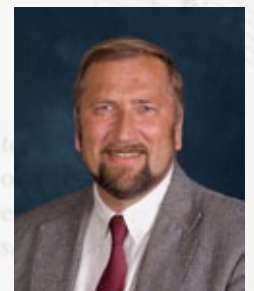
But what is perhaps the pinnacle of the iceberg of singing the Gospel to the world is Luther's hymn: "Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice, With exultation springing, And with united heart and voice And holy rapture singing, Proclaim the wonders God has done, How His right arm the victory won; Right dearly it hath cost Him" (ELH 251:1). Then again, I enjoy the Gospel sung in the hymn, "Now I Have Found the Firm Foundation." We should also not forget Luther's hymn, "God's Word is Our Great Heritage."

Luther once asked, "Why does that old devil get all the good music?" We can only guess to whom he was referring. To Luther, good music was no doubt the chants of the liturgy, when sung with real meaning and heart-felt expressions. Maybe not all of us would appreciate the chants of Luther's day or even call them good music, but we can truly rejoice in the words of truth, the Gospel, that he wrote as he would ***sing the Gospel of Jesus to the world in music.***

The words are what made a difference for people from one generation to the next because it was God's Word of truth. He was Singing The Gospel To The World in so many different ways.

Then you, too, might ***be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*** (Ephesians 5:19).

Micah Ernst is pastor of Beautiful Savior of the Lake preaching station, Osage Beach, Missouri and Grace Lutheran Church (WELS), Columbia, Missouri.



Our Synod's Budget:

A Plan for Missions and Ministry

The evangelist James writes, “Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go” (James 3:4).

Notably, when James, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote these words, he touched on a well-known fact, “*Great ships can be turned by a comparatively small rudders.*” Needless to say, without any rudder at all, a ship, no matter the size, is much more difficult to steer and may actually float about aimlessly at the whim of the wind and waves. Not only would the ship have no clear direction, but it could actually crash on rocky hazards and be destroyed.

Where would this little ship that we call the ELS be if we did not have a rudder, that is, a purpose? That is why a vital part of our synod's planning comes from our Planning and Coordinating Committee. Those who serve on that committee include our synodical officers, the chairmen of each of our boards (or his appointed representative), and two other individuals elected at large from our synod.

This committee serves as the board responsible for coordinating the plans and work of our various boards and comes to a consensus on the level of support that our synod will need and what we will give as we as we carry out the missions and ministries of our synod. What a very challenging task it is to bring about a consensus on a plan of action without knowing the future! Yet this is what our Planning and Coordinating Committee strives to do each and every year.

Under the leadership of our synod's elected officers and board chairmen, this budgeting process is a real blessing. When they present a budget report to the synod convention, our leaders are, in effect, saying, “This is what we should expect to spend in

order to carry our ministries and missions forward.” In turn, our congregational delegates and pastors come to convention each year to review these plans and the past year's actions in order to agree or, if necessary, change course in how we proceed with our work as a synod.

This year, as in past years, concern was expressed both in our floor committees and on the convention floor regarding our contributions to our synod. Our synod offerings have been flat or stagnant for some time. Statistically, in the last 10 years, we have seen a 23% increase in giving for local purposes and a 7 % decrease in synodical support. Over a 20-year period,

Essentially, our synod's budget is an invitation to each of us and to our congregations to put our mission plans into action.

there has been a 100% increase for home use and an 8% overall decrease in support of the synod (Please note that we ask our congregations to please report up-to-date statistical data. Around twenty-five percent of our member churches did not submit a report in 2011.).

While we acknowledge that mission work is done and supported in various ways and not all mission work is done directly through our synod, there still is a need for congregational support of missions and administration of those missions. Our synodical

missions have direct doctrinal oversight by our synod officials and convention representatives. Our synod and administrators are responsible to us for every dollar they spend in support of missions. In reality, as members of the ELS, with this information available to us, we are each responsible individually as well as through our representatives to convention.

Undeniably, the membership of our synod, represented at our convention, has a desire to participate in the honoring our Lord's gracious command to “go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19). While we are often limited in our ability to do mission work individually, as a gathering of believers united

together under the banner of the cross of Jesus, we can and do carry out this Great Commission as we gather together, commission, send, and support missionaries and workers to our chosen mission fields.

May we always have a desire “to engage others with Jesus more faithfully” in love for our Savior so that we are properly motivated by that love to go forth. That is why we are moved by our Lord’s command to plan and carry out Gospel ministry as efficiently and effectively as we are enabled to do by our Lord, both here at home and in faraway lands.

Essentially, our synod’s budget is an invitation to each of us and to our congregations to put our mission plans into action.

Our delegates, after years of planning and discussion, have agreed to set our new 2013 budget at \$750,000. This includes the extending of two new calls, one for evangelism and home missions and one for communications coordinator. Not all this expense will fall upon the synod’s congregations. Some grants and reserve funds will be put to use to support these calls. As our delegates voted to go forward with both positions and with the increased budget, we recognize that we have made a commitment to support this work as individuals and as congregations, trusting that our Lord will provide for and bless the work we are undertaking according to His command and in accord with the needs of His Church.

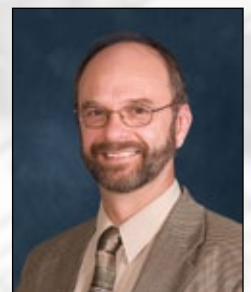
Here is how we have chosen to support the work as congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod:

Description: Our congregation-approved 2013 budget

Bethany Lutheran College	\$136,255
Bethany Lutheran Seminary	\$ 28,861
Home Outreach	\$177,085
World Outreach	\$117,675
Youth Outreach	\$ 13,625
LSA (Lu. Elementary Schools)	\$ 18,580
Christian Service	\$ 23,605
Communications and Tech	\$ 27,870
<u>Synod Fund</u>	<u>\$206,444</u>
Total Congregational Support	\$750,000

Please refer to your 2012 *Synod Report* for more details. But most of all, pray that the work we undertake together be blessed and that we gladly and willingly give generously to its support to the glory of our Savior’s name.

Daniel Basel is the ELS Giving Counselor and the Director of Synodical Stewardship living in Mankato, Minnesota.





Treasurer's Report

Summary of Income from Congregations

Budget	Actual	Balance
\$725,000	\$385,663	\$339,337

Contributions for July 2012:

Congregations - Budget	\$51,991
Designated Contributions	
Synod Fund	\$315
Home Outreach	\$1,126
World Outreach (general)	\$100
Parish Education and Youth	\$15
World Needs	\$2,040
India	\$1,668
Peru	\$288
Chile	\$25
Korea	\$1,793
Lutheran Schools of America	\$155
Cross-stitch	\$275
Thoughts of Faith	\$7,209

Other Revenue

Seminary Salary Reimbursement	\$20,000
Royalties	\$61
MAP	\$125,000
Registrations	\$19,380
Subscriptions	\$8,516
Publications	\$64

Total \$242,889

Keith Wiederhoeft, Business Adm./Treasurer
6 Browns Court Mankato, MN 56001

Memorials for July 2012

Gifts Received for the Synod in Memory of Memorial by

Marie Zawacki

Silas and Mary Born - Mankato, MN

Harold Bruss

Norma Ring Roerig - Combined Locks, WI

Rose Heikes

Faith Lutheran Church - Clara City, MN

Gifts Received for the Seminary in Memory of Memorial by

Emil Doepel

Martin and Martha Doepel - Eau Claire, WI

Harold Loe

Gaylin and Rebecca Schmeling - Mankato, MN

What Does It Mean to be a Lutheran Youth...

...when it comes to self-esteem?

A recent study showed that the average teen spends two hours every day on social media websites. This time spent online is, in theory, used to connect with friends and family. In reality, youth spend those hours posting random tweets, pointless posts, and EPIC photos about every waking moment of their lives. Is this time online supporting an inflated sense of self-importance? It seems that our socially-driven culture is inspired by a reality show mentality, which suggests that teens' value and worth comes from their ability to market themselves to the world. This clearly is not exclusive to teens, as adults are just as guilty of this ego-driven focus of self-promotion. The world of Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and Google+, just to mention a few, is reinforcing the idea that youth use social media in order to create a glamorized and idealized perception of their identity.

Also, the internet is not the only environment where teens and youth are getting the message of how special and important they are. Parents, schools, and coaches all work very hard to increase self-esteem in children. Our world is built on the idea that you are not important if you are not special and unique. An example of this is that parents increasingly give their children more and more uncommon names. Research has shown that in the late 1880's, forty percent of children received one of the ten most common names. Today, fewer than ten percent do. Additionally, it seems as no surprise that, in this world focused on self-image and individual fame, youth have also reported a significant increase in depressive symptoms. So how does a Lutheran youth live in the current world, which suggests the only way to have value and worth is to keep up with the rest of the Facebook world?

In confirmation classes and through parental instruction, you have learned the Christian ethic of humility. Perhaps the greatest Biblical example of this comes from

Luke chapter eighteen: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'"

(Luke 18:10-13). This example is a direct instruction for us come to our Savior with humility and even shame because of the weight of our sinful fallen nature.

However, observing and stressing humility does not mean that Lutheran youth aren't valuable and worthy of praise. Humility does not mean that Lutheran youth who adhere to this ethic will subsequently be more depressed and dejected because they can't feel personal value. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. Lutheran Youth should feel secure and confident about their worth because they own the greatest testament of true value and worth: self-sacrifice. Your value comes not from Facebook posts or Twitter followers, but the fact that your Savior chose you, personally you, to live a perfect life and sacrifice his own life for

you. This also impacts the way that you are able to accept acknowledgement for earthly accomplishments, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Embracing and acknowledging your earthly accomplishments is a way for you to honor the value that Christ has placed on your life.

Joshua T. Mears is a Christian counselor at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service— Christian Family Counseling.



EDITORIAL: WELLS WITHOUT WATER

In this month, when we celebrate the great Reformation that God brought to His Church, we need to deal with similar issues that Martin Luther had to wrestle with. What is truth and error? What are God's messages of Law and Gospel? What does it mean to believe that Jesus is God and man and the Savior of the world? The answers to these questions are revealed to us in the Bible, "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" because "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:15–16).

When Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth" (John 17:17), what did He mean by the concept "truth?" Was Jesus talking about an ancient set of wise sayings? A collection of fables? Or ideas that make our life better? God forbid! To God, the concept "truth" means statements that correctly describe reality without any error. If Jesus says that God's Word is truth, He means that we are to regard the whole Bible to be without error or mistake.

The Bible will tell us the truth about God's creation of the universe, for the Holy Spirit moved Moses to write down what God had done. The Bible states the truth about man's sinful state and the problem of death: "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). God's Word tells us the truth about our salvation: "For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:22-24).

Many people living today reject these three concepts as true, believing that the universe evolved over billions of years, that mankind is not totally corrupted by sin, and that humans are able to contribute some good to salvation.

What is the truth? Are there many paths to heaven if you are sincere in your beliefs or is Jesus the only way, the perfect truth, and the real life-giver? Jesus Himself declared, "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The whole Bible declares that there is only one Savior, who gave His life as a ransom for all people. Jesus alone is our sacrifice for sin because He alone is both God and man, who could keep God's law without sin and be our substitute on the cross.

These statements must be understood as "truth" if anyone is to enter heaven. Jesus said, "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not

abide in darkness" (John 12:46). "Darkness" is just one concept in the Bible for unbelief. There are many other descriptions for those who teach darkness, untruth, and error. Jesus calls them "wolves in sheep's clothing." St. Paul speaks of them as "giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

During the days of drought this summer, many wells and lakes dried up. This is an apt description of false prophets: "These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest" for they "speak great swelling words of emptiness" (2 Peter 2:17–18). The Bible has many such descriptive phrases for false prophets: wolves in sheep's clothing, hireling shepherds, and whited sepulchers. The point behind these descriptions is that what seems good on the outside is truly empty, vain, useless, and unable to save when such prophets are compared with the Bible message about Jesus and His work of salvation.

The past 150 years have witnessed a number of false men and women, who "by covetousness... exploit you with deceptive words" (2 Peter 2:3). New religions and old heresies have risen to tear people away from the narrow path of salvation through the cross of Christ. These are part of the signs of the Last Days, as Jesus warned: "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:11–12).

All these descriptions are written to warn us about falling under the influence of those who deny Jesus as their Savior. Christians can have comfort in this promise, "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9).

Our Reformation Sunday services have a twofold purpose: First, to thank God for preserving to us the true message of the Gospel about Jesus and second, to teach us the true doctrines of the Bible so that we do not fall prey to any contrary teachings. Our walk in the Spirit means walking in His Word. Jesus says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:29).

Theodore Gullixson is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin.



Starting a Spiritual Conversation

It was so hard. I loved her; there was no question of that, and I was pretty sure that she loved me. I knew that asking her father for her hand in marriage would be the right thing to do, but it would also be nerve-wracking. The location of the meeting with her dad (his “gun room”) didn’t help either. But after an hour of “chatting,” my love overcame my fear. I asked her dad for her hand. He said “yes” and so did she! Within hours, I was engaged and ready to tell the world.

Maybe you’ve also been held in the vice-like grip of anxiety when there was something important to say. Christians often feel this way when engaging others with Jesus. There is genuine love for the person. It is an important, “engaging” moment, but fear threatens to keep us silent. We worry about how to bring it up, what to say, what their reaction will be, and what rejection might feel like. So how can you overcome your fear and start a spiritual conversation? Here are some things to consider.

Jesus loves you and your friend. St. Paul said, “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NIV) Jesus’ love is what motivates us to start a spiritual conversation.

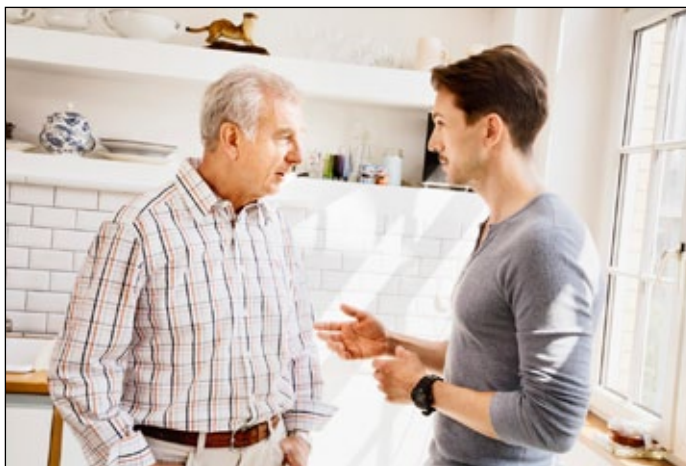
The eternal perspective. Remember that without Jesus your friend, family member, or the stranger is going to spend eternity in hell. This truly is a matter of life and death.

Nothing is worse than hell. It’s easy to wonder, “What if I mess up and make the situation worse?” Just admit that you might not handle the spiritual conversation like a pro. You might even say the wrong thing at the wrong time or not have exactly the right answer to a particular question. But you can’t make it worse! If your friend doesn’t believe in Jesus, their future is in hell. What could be worse than that?

Prayer. Even as you’re sitting across the coffee table, pray that the Lord will give you the opportunity and the words to engage them with Jesus.

God is faithful. Trust that God will use you and guide you in what to say. Worrying will inhibit your ability to apply God’s Word. Trust God to work through His Word.

The goal. Engage them with Jesus. You aren’t trying to win a debate. Although some lies and false teachings might need to be confronted during your talk, that isn’t your goal. Just tell them about Jesus.

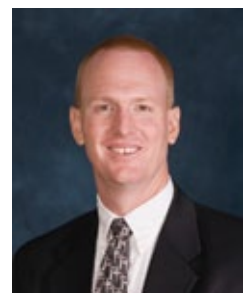


The Start. We would all love to have a smooth transition into a spiritual conversation, like Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman. Discussion of natural disasters, family struggles, and moral issues in society can create an opening. However, sometimes you will have to create it. You might do this by saying, “There is something that I want to

talk to you about.” It might not sound as smooth and natural as you’d like, but the conversation is started. Remember your goal: simply engage others with Jesus.

My life would be very different today if fear had conquered love and kept me silent: no wife, no children, and much less happiness. How different your life would be if someone hadn’t engaged you with Jesus! Starting a spiritual conversation can be difficult, but it is always worth it. Jesus loves you and all people, so let them know. Start a spiritual conversation and engage someone with Jesus!

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