

LUTHERAN SENTINEL

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RECAP: P. 10-11

LYA17

XAVIER UNIVERSITY
CINCINNATI, OHIO

by Angela Brinkman



"He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15)

Blessings Among the Thorns

Dear Members and Friends of our ELS:

“How could so much have been accomplished through the life of one man?” We marvel how God has brought so many blessings upon his church through the 63 years of the life of a man named Martin Luther (1483-1546). The restoration of the central Bible teaching – justification. The Catechism. The translation of Scripture into the common language of the people. The confessional writings, commentaries, and letters from his pen. The witness of his unflinching demeanor when challenged to surrender the truth.

But something else amazes us. The Reformation blessings came through much hardship – even the deeply personal kind. Martin battled illness with kidney stones. At times he suffered from bouts of depression. Then, too, tragedy struck the Luther family. In this 500th anniversary year, we should note what occurred for Luther and his wife Katie 475 years ago. On September 20, 1542, their fourteen year-old daughter died.

One month later, Luther wrote to his friend Amsdorf:

I rejoice that she [Magdalena] is living with her Father in sweet sleep until that Day. Moreover, in view of the nature of our times and the prospect of their becoming increasingly worse, I desire from the bottom of my heart that to me and all of mine, and also to you [Amsdorf] and to all of yours, a similar hour of departure be granted, with such great faith and quiet rest. (Plass, *What Luther Says*, I, p. 382)

In the middle of adversity for Luther and his family, God yielded rose-like blessings among the thorns. When the trials of life came, Luther – like all Christians – went to the sure place for comfort and strength: the immovable Word of God with its sure promises through the work of Christ the Savior. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it* (12:11).

For each of us today, the same is true. As hard as it is to see blessings when the fog of despair creeps in and the storms of life swirl, we can be certain of a rainbow of blessings peeking through the clouds because of all we have through our Lord Jesus! That is how God often works. He uses what appears disastrous to serve his own purposes for spiritual and eternal good.

“How could so much be accomplished through the life of one Man!”

This time, we are not asking a question, but expressing reverent awe as we think of the One from whom Luther drew strength and of whom he taught: Jesus the crucified for our salvation. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed* (1 Peter 2:24).

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LUTHERAN SENTINEL

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2017

- 4** VISUALISING THE REFORMATION
Vocation & The Artist
REV. LUKE ULRICH
- 6** APOLOGETICS SERIES
Answering Objections from Darwinian Evolution
MR. ALLEN QUIST
- 8** **Luther’s Brilliant Teammate Philipp Melancthon and His Role in the Reformation**
REV. SHAWN D. STAFFORD
- 11** **LYA Convention Recap**
MS. ANGELA BRINKMAN
- 12** **The Dilemma or Opportunity of Accumulated Wealth**
REV. DANIEL A. BASEL
- 14** CATECHISM IN CONTEXT SERIES
Office of the Keys
REV. JEFF HENDRIX
- 16** EDITORS SERIES: REFORMATION VOCAB
“Vocation”
REV. KYLE MADSON

.....

DEPARTMENTS:

- 2** From the President
- 5** Pastor, I Have a Question
- 9** Synod Synopsis



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“Vocation” & *the Artist...*

“Christ came to serve me....
I will do likewise, seeking from
my subjects not my own
advantage but theirs...
that they, not I may benefit.’ ”

MARTIN LUTHER
(LW, AE, vo. 45, p. 120)



A major emphasis of Martin Luther was the doctrine of “Vocation.” Luther understood that if one desired to serve God, they did so by serving their neighbors. In this way, Christians serve as “Little Christs” to their neighbors within the different roles and vocations that they carry out. Luther pointed out that the milkmaid, the cobbler, or even the father changing dirty diapers are each performing great service to their neighbors in spite of the lowly tasks they carry out. Though their vocations are simple and unimpressive, by carrying out these tasks they are serving and glorifying God as much as a learned theologian or ruler. In this way, the doctrine of vocation sanctifies even humble, lowly roles and tasks and gives people in these lowly vocations encouragement to carry out these tasks with willing and cheerful hearts. Christians can be assured that they are honoring God, though their tasks may be menial.

The doctrine of vocation has implications for Christian artists. Certainly, liturgical art (i.e. art used to promote and share the Word of God) was important—especially within the Reformation—but with a proper understanding of vocation, the Christian artist should feel free to produce art for other purposes as well. Even if the art has no religious imagery and is secular in content, the Christian artist carries out his task of producing the artwork in service to his neighbor and therefore also in service to God.

Lucas Cranach, the famous artist and friend of Martin Luther, demonstrated a proper understanding of vocation and how it applied to artists. Not only did he produce beautiful pieces of liturgical art (as we have previously studied), but he also used his skills in service to his neighbors by producing secular pieces of artwork. He beautified spaces with his paintings. He produced works that were political in nature—commissioned by the Elector and local government. He also produced portraits for families and couples (as shown above in his portraits of Martin and Katharina Luther). Cranach demonstrated that the Christian artist could serve God in all aspects of his work. By serving his neighbor as an artist, he was serving and honoring God.

*Let Your blessing rest on seed time and harvest,
on commerce and industry,
on medicine and science;
sanctify the arts and culture,
the rest and leisure of Your people.*
(ELH, p. 96)

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Q

QUESTION:

I am at a time in my life where it is difficult for me to leave my home. When I must go out, I am afraid. Is it wrong for me to invite Jesus to go with me by saying, “Okay, Dear Jesus, it is time to go”?

A

ANSWER:

We need never be timid with prayer. There are many ways to pray. Prayer is talking with God. We may talk with Him in a formal way as we do in worship and the Lord's Prayer or in a causal way as we might talk to a good friend over a cup of coffee. We may address Him in times of fear as St. Peter did when he began to sink into the sea. He prayed, “Lord, Save me!” (Matthew 14:30).

And we may leave the safety of our homes with confidence even when we are afraid. Jesus commanded us to pray and promised to hear our prayer (Matthew 7:7-8, Psalm 50:15). The form of our prayer does not diminish God's command and promise.

God's good news is filled with His comforting promises. Through His servant Moses, God told His people, “*And the Lord, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed*” (Deuteronomy 31:8). Before He left this world, Jesus promised His people, “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). Leave your home with confidence that your loving God is with you to watch over you and to protect you. You go together.

Of course, Satan sets his traps. Our consciences would make us doubt. God's Word speaks to our doubts. Surely we do not deserve to be God's children. We do not deserve

to be God's people. We are full of sin, but God gave us His Son as our Savior. The Christmas-tide epistle states, *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* (Galatians 4:4-5).

Satan would have us doubt. “You don't deserve to be God's child,” he whispers. Our faith responds, “Jesus is my Savior.” He earned for us the privilege of being God's children. He lived the perfect life God demanded of us. He did it as our substitute. We don't deserve God's love, but Jesus did. He gives us the credit for what He did. When Satan tells us that we deserve to die, we look to Jesus' cross, where He died for us. We do not deserve anything from God, but God is gracious. Jesus is our righteousness.

Should it seem that God is not with us, should we continue to be afraid, we remember the story of the Syrophenician woman who prayed again and again. The Savior seemed to ignore her, to discourage her faith. She would not be deterred. She held Jesus to His promises and heard from Him the blessed words, “*O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire. And her daughter was healed from that very hour*” (Matthew 15:28).

The Lord is our Shepherd. He goes with us even through the valley of the shadow of death. Thanks be to God.

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APOLOGETICS

"TO DEFEND A PERSON OR THING"

THIS ISSUE PART 4:

Answering Objections from Darwinian Evolution

The Christian Church has often found it necessary to refute accusations against it. Jesus, for instance, answered the objection that He was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub by explaining that Satan would not weaken his own kingdom (Matthew 12:25-29). And Peter, at Pentecost, clarified that he and the other disciples were not drunk, as Jewish culture didn't allow drunkenness early in the morning (Acts 2:15).

One of the most common accusations against Christianity in our time is the allegation that evolution proves the Bible to be inaccurate. Large numbers of people have been convinced that evolution is now a proven fact, and that means the Bible cannot be true. How can we respond to this attack on the Christian faith?

We can reply by pointing out, as prominent biologist Jonathan Wells has said, that we are continually being misled about the evidence for evolution.¹ An important example of our being misled involves the evolutionist's claim that various forms of life are continually improving. Some even say that humans will soon live to be 135 or even 150 years of age. (Wishful thinking, anyone?)

In direct contrast to this evolutionary dogma of ongoing improvement, famous geneticist John Sanford has stated that the genome (the genetic structure of all forms of life) is in constant deterioration, not improvement. Since negative genetic mutations vastly outnumber the positive ones,

said Sanford, the negative mutations accumulate, and for that reason the genetic information for all life-forms is in steady decline.²

Anyone can put what Sanford said to the test by doing an internet search for "positive genetic mutations" and for "negative genetic mutations." The list of positive mutations will be short and questionable; the list of negative mutations will be long and impressive—including such common human maladies as Alzheimer's disease and various forms of cancer. Sanford is correct in what he says: The negative mutations are far more numerous and more clearly identifiable than any positive ones.

¹ Jonathan Wells, *Icons of evolution: Science or Myth*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2000, xiii.

John Sanford, *Genetic Entropy & the Mystery of the Genome*, 3rd edition. Waterloo, NY: FMS Publications, 2008, 145-156.

As an illustration of how this works, I once used a photocopy machine to make 25 copies of a one-page paper. But instead of using the original to make all 25 copies, I used the first copy to make the second copy, the second copy to make the third, and so on. As you might expect, the 25th copy was so distorted as to be illegible. This is how genetics works. Each new generation possesses genetic information that has been copied and recombined from the previous generation. No copy is perfect, so errors continually creep in.

The significance of this information is enormous. It means that the central explanatory paradigm of evolution—that of progress by means of genetic mutations and natural selection—is now known to be false. Unfortunately, most members of the public have not been informed of this new information.

Another major problem for evolutionists is their flawed methods for dating the age of the earth. In his debate with Ken Ham, for instance, Bill Nye said that analysis of the ice cores on Greenland demonstrate that the Greenland ice cap is 680,000 years old—far too old for Genesis to be historically accurate.³ We now know, however, that this argument of Nye and other evolutionists is pure fantasy.

We know the above position of the evolutionists to be false because of the 1992 discovery of an airplane called Glacier Girl. During World War II, on July 15, 1942, Glacier Girl's squadron was forced to make an emergency landing on the Greenland ice cap. All the crew members were rescued, but Glacier Girl, along with the unit's five other P-38 fighters and two B-17 bombers, was abandoned and eventually buried beneath 264 feet of ice.⁴ In 1992, the plane was discovered and brought to the surface by members of the Greenland Expedition Society. The aircraft was then restored to flying condition.

Numerous search parties had attempted to locate one of these planes, but had failed. Why? One reason is that the world of science had advised the would-be rescuers that the plane should at

most be forty feet below the surface of the ice, and probably far less than that. It turned out, however, that the supposed maximum depth of forty feet was one-sixth of its actual depth.

This means that we now know the actual rate of ice accumulation on Greenland. The plane did not sink in the ice. Doing so would have broken off its wings. All 264 feet of ice accumulated over the plane after it had been abandoned. The actual depth of the plane means that the scientific consensus regarding the rate of ice build-up on Greenland is wrong. At the known rate of ice accumulation on Greenland, as revealed by Glacier Girl, it would take about one thousand years to accumulate a mile-thick ice cap, which is what we now have. This information is consistent with reliable historical records revealing that Greenland was much warmer one thousand years ago than it is today, and that, because of the favorable climate, some five thousand Norwegian settlers lived there at the time. These colonies were successful until the climate started getting cold around 1200 AD.⁵

All this means that the Greenland ice cap could have easily accumulated during the biblical time frame as described in Genesis. An important argument used to discredit Genesis is now known to be fantasy. This same conclusion can be reached for all the dating methods that evolutionists use.

■ For additional information on evolution, see the author's book: *Ten Truths About Evolution That Everyone Should Know*, available at the Bethany Lutheran College Bookstore. -Ed

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³ "Transcript of Ken Ham vs. Bill Nye Debate," February 4, 2014, transcript by Bill Browning, February 10, 2014, Rocky Mountain Creation Fellowship, www.youngearth.org/index.php/archives/rmcf-articles/item/21-transcript-of-ken-ham-vs-bill-nye-debate.

⁴ Air & Space Magazine, July, 2007, <http://www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/glacier-girl-the-back-story-19218360/?page=4>

⁵ "Greenland: What happened to the Greenland Norse?" <http://naturalhistory.si.edu/vikings/voyage/subset/greenland/environment.html> Dale Mackenzie Brown, and Archeology Archive, February 28, 2000, <http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/greenland/>

LUTHER'S BRILLIANT TEAMMATE

Philipp Melancthon

AND HIS ROLE IN THE REFORMATION

Do you have a favorite professor or teacher? Is there a professor or teacher you particularly remember because of their quirks or mannerisms? For many students at the University of Wittenberg, Professor Philipp Melancthon met both descriptions. He was small of stature with a frail physique, halting gait, homely features, lofty brow, and timid eyes. Yet he became so loved in Wittenberg that five to six hundred students crowded his lecture hall. Even Luther himself humbly sat among his pupils.

Who was this great teacher and what was his role in the Reformation? Born Philipp Schwarzerd ("black earth") in 1497, this wunderkind earned his Bachelor's Degree at age 14 and his Master's Degree at 17. Under the spell of the Renaissance humanism, he followed the rallying cry "ad fontes," "to the sources," the classical languages of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Like many contemporaries, he changed his last name to its classical Greek equivalent, "Melancthon."

Melancthon's mastery of Greek caught the attention of Elector Frederick the Wise, who appointed him to teach at his fledgling University in Wittenberg. In 1518, Philipp gave his first lecture, "On Improving the Studies of Youth." He outlined his program for education centered around grammar, dialectics, rhetoric, history, and philosophy and emphasized the importance of studying the Biblical languages for maintaining pure Christian teaching. His ideas about classical education greatly impacted both the Lutheran Reformation and education in Germany.

Luther and Melancthon formed a brilliant team to lead the Reformation, Luther as preacher, Melancthon as teacher. At the same time, Melancthon's temperament was quite different from Luther's. While Luther enjoyed combat, Melancthon longed for peace and conciliation. Luther sometimes chided him as "immoderately moderate." While Luther used vivid language, Melancthon used explicit, precise language. He became Lutheranism's first systematic theologian, organizing the teachings of Scripture by topic in his *Loci Communes*.

Melancthon's irenic yet precise tone is on full display in the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530.

Throughout the Augsburg Confession, his greatest contribution to the Reformation, Melancthon demonstrated that Luther's followers teach in agreement with Scripture and the early church. The classic expression of the central article of the faith, justification, is found in Article IV: "Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4." Other writings by Melancthon included in the *Book of Concord* are the *Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession* and *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*.

Especially following Luther's death, Melancthon showed a tendency to compromise with other Reformers and with Roman Catholics on key issues. While Elector John Frederick was imprisoned by the Emperor, Melancthon stopped using the expression "sola gratia," grace alone. He began to teach three causes of conversion: the Word, the Holy Spirit, and the human will. This error that humans can cooperate in their own conversion is called synergism. The 1540 *Variata* edition of the *Augsburg Confession* reveals his weakened position on the Lord's Supper from the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine to Christ being present in the action of communion, but not necessarily the elements.

Philipp Melancthon is remembered as the second Reformer, the teacher of Germany, pointing followers of the Reformation back to the sources, especially the study of Scripture in its original languages. He presented Luther's teachings in an organized form in his lectures and writings. While Melancthon's legacy is marred somewhat by his compromises in his later writings, Lutherans are grateful for his clear teaching of justification by faith alone in the Lutheran Confessions.

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SYNODSYNOPSIS

Blessings at Holy Cross



Sunday, August 27, was a day of wonderful blessings at **Holy Cross in Madison, Wisconsin!** Our new school and early learning center gave us the opportunity to baptize five children from two different families: **Yuriza and Rhonaldo Leon-Peralta, and Sebastian, Alastair, and Thaddeus McCredie**. What a joy to see these lambs become a part of God's Kingdom!

We also thanked God that we were able to install three new teachers in our school: **Amanda Schulz** (grades 1-2), **Sarah Vidrio** (grades 3-4), and **Andrew Schoenfeld** (grades 5-6). Amanda and Sarah both received their education degree from Bethany Lutheran College, while Andrew received his from Martin Luther College. We're grateful to our synod's college as well as our sister synod's college for training teachers for our Christian Day Schools! We thank God for his many blessings on our congregation!

Ordination / Installations



Aaron Ferkenstad was ordained and installed as pastor of **King of Grace Lutheran Church** in Golden Valley, Minnesota on July 16, 2017.



Alex Ring was installed as pastor of **Christ Lutheran Church**, Port St. Lucie, Florida on August 13, 2017.



Kyle Madson was installed as pastor of **Norseland Lutheran Church, and Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church**, Norseland, Minnesota on August 20, 2017.



LYA17
XAVIER UNIVERSITY
CINCINNATI, OHIO



This year, the LYA Convention took us to Cincinnati, Ohio.
*The theme was **Saved Through Water**, and we talked about the saving power of water through Baptism and even the cleansing power of the water that lifted Noah's Ark.*

Thursday afternoon, we checked into our dorms at Xavier University, then met in the theater for chapel and mixers. There was an intense competition between the groups for a bag of Starburst, too. It was lots of fun and we even persevered through the technical difficulties as well. The pizza arrived and we headed off to bed (although it's probably safe to assume most of us were up late talking to our new friends.)

The next morning, we had breakfast in the Xavier cafeteria, morning chapel, and then headed to the Ark Encounter in Williamstown, Kentucky. We got the full experience, too – it was pouring while we ran into the shelter of the Ark! We spent several hours walking around looking at the amazing exhibits, posing for pictures with the bearded dragon in the live animals section, and learning a ton.

We loaded up the buses (minus the bus that broke down) and headed back to Xavier for our first sectional. For some, this meant choir practice for Sunday's service. We had dinner, fun singing with Chappy D, and evening chapel in the theater. The next few hours were set aside for the Annual Volleyball Match between Camp Indianhead Minnesota and Camp Indianhead Wisconsin, swimming, soccer, basketball, or just free time. We then had Rap Room, which was extended curfew, and then got a few hours of shut-eye before our adventures continued the next day.

After breakfast and chapel, we had our second sectional followed by a presentation from Dr. David Menton in the rather chilly theater. Following that, we had lunch, our final sectional, and then headed into downtown Cincinnati. We had several hours to spend, but many suggestions of activities we could do. I can't speak for everyone, but I know some activities included a tour of the Cincinnati Reds ballpark, visiting the library, the Contemporary Art Museum, discovering a mascot of Harambe the Gorilla, and eating ice cream. There was a neat park down by the river and we were allowed to cross into Newport, Kentucky. We headed back to the dorms, had evening chapel, and then had a dance (DJ-ed by Pastor Abrahamson). The boys and girls faced off in an intense dance battle, and then we retired to our dorms for the last time – after seeing how many people we could pack into an elevator.

Sunday morning, we packed up and went to church – the choir did a lovely job – and after lunch together, we all said our goodbyes and went our separate ways. LYA is an incredible experience and an amazing way to learn lots and make friends for life.

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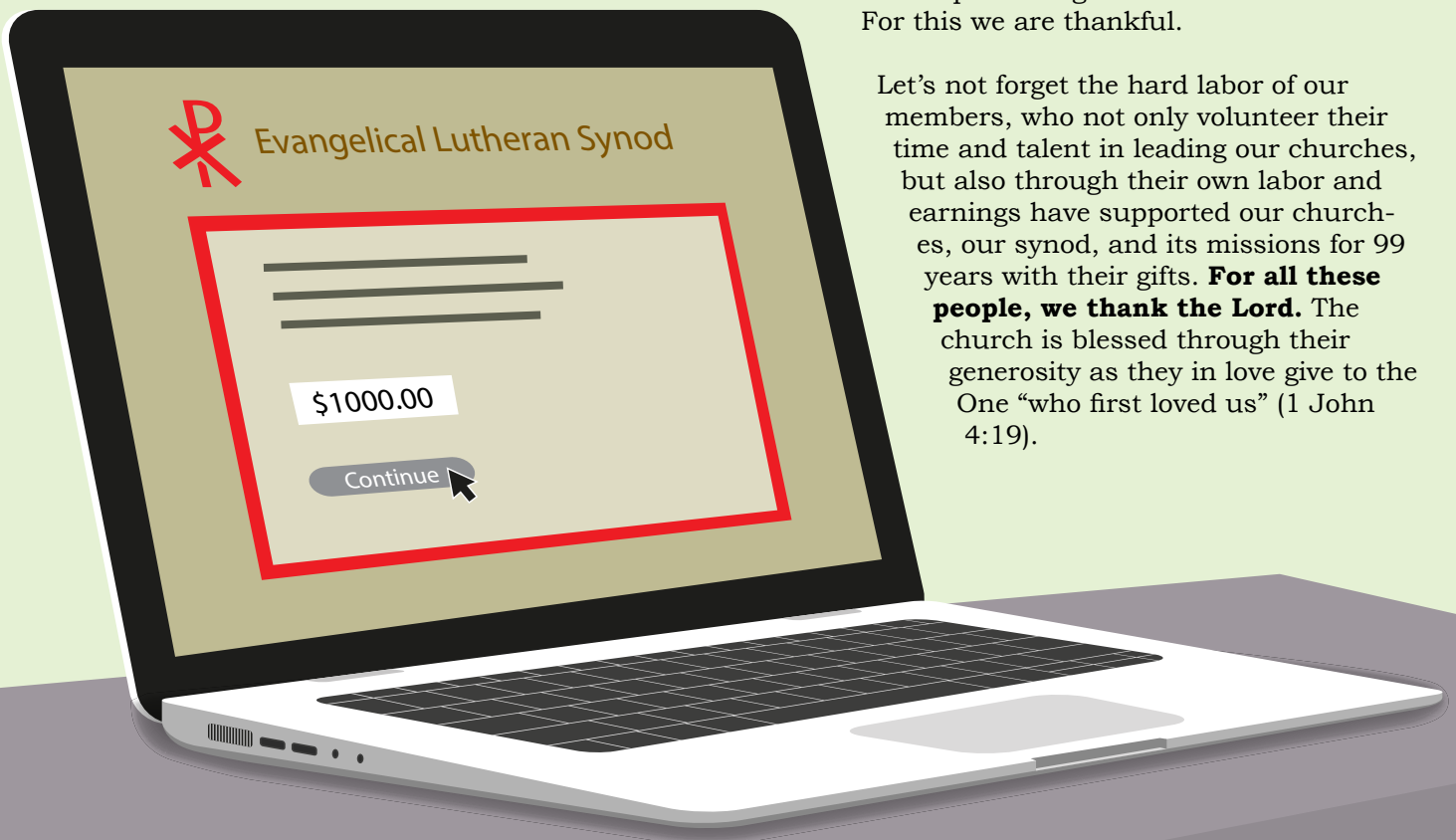
THE DILEMMA OR OPPORTUNITY of Accumulated Wealth

For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. (Ecclesiastes 2:21 NKJV)

As we, the heirs of the Reformation, celebrate this 500th Anniversary, we can do it with a true sense of thankfulness. As a church body and as individuals, we have contended for the faith. We have wrestled with challenges, even threats, from within as well as from without. As the years have passed, by God's grace the Gospel and our Lord's church have been preserved to this day.

Yet we have to admit much labor has gone into what we have in our Evangelical Lutheran Synod: our college, seminary, and world missions, not to mention our well-maintained churches and schools and home mission churches all across the USA. Think of all the work our pastors and teachers and administrators are enabled to do on a regular basis in order to proclaim and teach God's Word in all its fullness and with great delight as we share the Gospel through Word and Sacrament. For this we are thankful.

Let's not forget the hard labor of our members, who not only volunteer their time and talent in leading our churches, but also through their own labor and earnings have supported our churches, our synod, and its missions for 99 years with their gifts. **For all these people, we thank the Lord.** The church is blessed through their generosity as they in love give to the One "who first loved us" (1 John 4:19).



How important the love of Christ is to our planning. The reality is that our lives and time on earth are limited. Even though our eternal life is sure in Christ, soon all that we have on this earth will be another's. As the wise Solomon points out, we "must leave (this) heritage to a (person or persons) who has not labored for it" (emphasis added) (Ecclesiastes 2:21).

Sounds kind of frustrating, doesn't it? In fact, it sounds almost futile. Solomon by inspiration says it this way: "*This also is vanity and a great evil*" (Ecclesiastes 2:21).

But what message was the Holy Spirit conveying through this writer? If you study Solomon's frustration with life, you can easily see that he was saying, "What a pity to be thus blessed and to feel powerless to prudently direct our things, even our wealth, for good."

You have to admit, he makes a valid point. How will what we have be managed by those who follow us? Will they have the same values, the same wisdom in their use? Will they support the work of spreading the Gospel, work to build up their congregation, start and maintain missions at home and around the world? As the Proverbs remind us, "*The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways*" (14:8).

As we celebrate our Reformation heritage, we can take this opportunity to help make a huge difference in our church's history. It is a very critical time and your response can make a difference for a generation or more to come. Our need to focus on building ELS churches in our growing cities is evident in several ways. Not the least of these is that many of our own young people are seeking employment and starting families and will need a church home, often far from where they were born.

With this in mind, join many of us in the ELS in making a plan to pass on not just our family's heritage, but the heritage of the Gospel as preserved in the Reformation and through our ELS. History teaches us that it takes ordinary people, much like you and me, to step up and do extraordinary things to make a lasting difference.

What role will you take in this greater picture? We'd like to have you consider not just planning, but joining others in promoting the missions of our synod as we seek to gather \$1,500,000 in support of Home Missions in the coming months. Whether we want to support the vicar-in-mission program, our cross-cultural projects, or help to start and maintain new missions, all are vital to fulfilling our Lord's gracious command to preach the Gospel to every creature.

The Anniversary Offering is all about passing on our heritage and the gracious inheritance that our Lord has granted us through the Reformation. It is worth our time and effort to plan for its support.

Do go online at els.org/donate to make a contribution today or make a request for an offering booklet and envelopes. Challenge yourselves to support this work by pledging your gift today and making plans for generous support in the months ahead. You can also call the Estate Planning Office of our ELS at 507-344-7311 today and plan boldly to leave your lasting legacy of sharing the Gospel during as well as after your earthly life.

REVEREND
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CATECHISM *in* CONFESSION

OFFICE OF THE KEYS CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION

Backstabbing. Betrayal. Offense. Trespass. It happens: In school, after you told your close friend (at least you thought) an embarrassing secret. Online, where someone decided to message others about you behind your digital back. At work, where your boss promised that you'd get that day off you wanted, but then at the last minute forces you to come in. In a relationship, where you caught your boyfriend/girlfriend flirting with someone else. In your family, where your parents told you they trusted you, but then you find them seemingly keeping track of everything you do. Or, on the flip side, when parents trusted their children to not do something, but then catch them doing it. It even happens at church, which is supposed to be a place of healing and trust, but then fellow members, or maybe even your pastor, seem to throw you to the wolves before hearing you out.

With experiences like this, it can be hard to trust anyone. When it happens we'd like to just well up in the depression of the feeling of being betrayed. Whatever we do, we definitely don't want to forgive.

But it is in forgiveness where the Church is found. God gave His Church on earth the power to forgive the sins of penitent and retain the sins of impenitent. In fact, it was after many in His small congregation of closest friends betrayed Him that Jesus gave this power. This is all surprising, but even more so is that the power of our forgiveness comes from the result of that betrayal: Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus' death on the cross was when the debts, trespasses, and betrayals of the entire world were paid and forgiven.

OUT OF CONTEXT

This doesn't make much sense. When someone betrays us, if we are going to forgive them, we want them to do something for us first: We want them to pay for it. Then we'll forgive them. In daily life, this attitude shows itself in making your friend prove to you that he/she is still trustworthy before you forgive them, or is shown by parents forgiving their children on the condition that they will never betray their trust in the same way again.

The popular conception of absolution is that only someone who is sorry and proves it deserves forgiveness. Not only is this the wrong way to view absolution, it is also dangerous. It's a common misbelief that God forgives us for the same reason: if we confess our sins to God, then God will forgive us. Or just as common of a misbelief is thinking that the moment we first believe is when God forgave us. However this turns our confession or our faith into the cause of justification. Then we're left wondering "Have I confessed enough?", "Was I sorry enough?", or "Have I actually believed?"

Pulling confession and absolution from its proper context, believing that absolution is to only be given conditionally, actually pulls Jesus from it. It puts the emphasis on a person's confession rather than Jesus' absolution. Jesus forgave the whole world their sins in His death on the cross. This is why when we forgive the sins of another, they are forgiven. They aren't forgiven because of their degree of sorrow or even because of their confession. They are forgiven because of Jesus.

IN CONTEXT

Confession and absolution should be understood in context. We make confession in two ways: in general like we do in our worship services or in the Lord's Prayer, or in private before the pastor or some other Christian. In either case we receive absolution, meaning that Christ Himself forgives us through the word of forgiveness given to us by the other person.

Confessing our sins has the purpose of making us aware of our great sin against God and our need for forgiveness. In absolution we hear that this forgiveness is truly given to us because of Christ.

Confession and absolution can also be understood in context with the rest of the Catechism. In examining our vocations in life, we see how we have sinned against each one of the Ten Commandments. We are forgiven not because we keep them, but because of Christ's work shown to us in the Creed. Having confessed our sins, we acknowledge that we are in need of the forgiveness offered especially in the Lord's Supper. Receiving absolution is returning to our Baptism, receiving again the promise of what we first received in Baptism: the forgiveness of our sins. When we do this, we also live what we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

What we translate as "trespass" in the Lord's Prayer literally has the connotation of the aftermath of having a debt. When someone betrays us, it feels as if they have taken something from us (and maybe they even have), and so there is a debt. Regardless of what effect the sin caused and how large it was we are to remove and forgive that debt.

This can be hard because we look to words and actions and sometimes it might seem that whoever betrayed us isn't sorry enough. After all, we can't judge hearts. But again, the degree to which a person is sorry isn't what we look to in order to forgive. We look to Jesus. But not just as an example; we look to Jesus who has already forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Christ died for them. He even died for the sin they committed against us. Seeing the other person as having been absolved by the blood of Jesus will help us to forgive. It still may be hard to do, but even in this situation, we can pray to God, "Father, forgive them," and "forgive us..." knowing that God has forgiven them and will help us to forgive those who trespass against us.

Luther wrote that God's promise to forgive is a "sign [that] can serve to confirm our consciences and cause them to rejoice. It is especially given for this purpose, so that we may use and practice forgiveness every hour, as a thing we have with us at all times" (LC III, 98).

REVEREND

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In Your blest body let me be / E'en as the branch is to the tree / Thy life my life supplying
P. NICOLAI

REFORMATION VOCAB

Vocation: Called Down Low

When you come across something you're really good at, then someone says to you, "It seems you've found your calling." The disciples were "called" to follow Jesus. But that still left some question as to what their daily duties would entail. The disciples presumed their duties would be lofty and prestigious. Peter fancied himself to be Jesus' body-guard (Matthew 16:22, John 18:10). James and John, with their mother, were in a heated debate over the prestigious positions they would/should have in heaven.

The Reformation started as Luther's stony and terrified heart was called to peace by the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17). This Gospel calling, though, has very immediate traction with everyday life – with vocation. To be called by the Gospel is first to be called into *Jesus the Servant of sinners*. Called to be beggars who receive His living and dying and rising as unmerited gifts. Our vocation of faith is as blessed beggars.

We are also called by the Gospel to love. The Bible calls us to love and serve God. But this is not as ambiguous as we often make it. When Jesus depicts such *love and service*, much to our surprise,

He does not draw our eyes to high and lofty places. He points us to the ordinary and everyday needs of those around us, to whatever is done for our needy neighbor through us. Jesus says:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, [f] you did it to me." (Matthew 25:35-36 & 40)

Christian Vocation – our calling to faith and love – is central to the Reformation. That means it's central to our lives today, too. How right it is, then, for us to pray that through Jesus' body and blood our Father would "strengthen us IN FAITH toward (Him) and in fervent LOVE toward one another (ELH p. 83).

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