

St. Paul Lutheran Seminary Trains Christian Workers

by Dennis D. Nelson

Lutheran CORE is involved in a pastoral formation project in which we are working with leaders from several Lutheran church bodies to wrestle with the question – What can we be doing to help raise up a whole new generation of Lutheran pastors who are Biblical and confessional in their theology and evangelistic in their perspective and practice? One of the joys of being involved in this process is the chance to meet and interact with people and to learn about movements and ministries that are doing something unique and effective to help make sure that there will be in the future pastors who believe that the Bible is the Word of God and who are committed to fulfill the Great Commission.

One such ministry is Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary. We all know about the close father-son relationship Paul had with his young friend Timothy. In 2 Timothy 4:1b-2 Paul wrote – “I give you this charge: preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.”

It was in the spirit of those words that Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary was founded during the early summer of 2011. A group of people came together to start a school that would train pastors to serve churches with a real depth of commitment to our Lutheran theological heritage. Right from the start the intent has been to have theological education embedded in the life of the congregation. Everyone teaching for the seminary also serves in a congregation – as either a pastor or a teaching theologian. The idea is that theological education should never become abstracted from the church. Pastor Julie Smith, Dean of Students, said, “Theological reflection is useful to the church only when it produces good preaching.”

In the spirit of Paul’s mentoring relationship with Timothy, every student in every program is expected to be serving in a congregation where they can be carrying out certain assignments under the direction of a mentor pastor. Guidelines and expectations for that mentoring relationship are provided, but students find their own mentor pastor.

In regard to an internship two options are available. Students

can do their course work full-time with a contextual component, and also have a traditional year-long internship, or they can choose to have a concurrent internship, in which there are a set of components that students fulfill over the full course of their program.

Those who were involved in the founding of Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary fully appreciated the value of residential theological education.

They fully knew the benefit of students living in community together and having faculty and students interact outside of the classroom. But they also knew that for an increasing number of people, the cost of that kind of education is prohibitive. So right from the start the entire program has been available on line. However, for students who are in a situation where no mentor pastor is available, or for students who are open to relocating in order to be with other students and have a faculty person present, a residential option is available for the M. Div. program. Residential programs are offered in several places throughout the country.

Among the offerings of the seminary are the more traditional courses of study, such as those leading to the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees, but also a certificate program for mission developers and a Lutheran year course of study for people who receive the bulk of their theological education from a non-Lutheran school but who intend to serve in Lutheran churches.

Another program that caught my eye is the seminary’s Parish Service Certificate. This program grew out of the observation that there are many churches which are not in a position to call a full-time pastor. Examples given are rural congregations where the pastor has retired, churches in urban centers where the financial resources are limited, and immigrant communities where there is an immediate need for preachers and teachers who speak the language of the people. In these settings there often are people who are willing to serve, but they are not in a position to invest in a full M. Div. degree program.

The Parish Service Certificate was developed with these kinds of situations in mind. As Pastor Smith explained, “The course work is theology-based rather than skills-based. The idea is that if you understand the theology, you can always develop the skills. If you just have a set of skills without the theological backing, as the needs of the congregation change, if you do not have the capacity to discern the theological issues, you will be in



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Through the Statistics, I Died to the Statistics

By Pr. Steven K. Gjerde

A Lutheran refugee, having fled the horrors of revisionism in his home congregation, searched hither and yon for shelter before finally landing on my doorstep for some counsel. A good man, he was careful to say nothing untoward about his former parish and pastor, except for a faint glimmer of critique when we came to the subject of Lutheranism in America.

"You know, I got so tired hearing about that," he said.

"Hearing about what?"

"How Lutheranism is dying and we need to save it."

Indeed. Who, needing a Savior, enjoys having to be one?

It happens to all of us, of course, usually sometime in the spring when the denominations release their yearly announcement: "Net Loss for Another Year." Put those numbers in the hands of high-minded church folk, and they become a cudgel for driving home a dozen new plans on how to "grow the church." Most of those plans seem to involve copying someone else, with Willow Creek and the pope vying for first place, while John Wesley and Patriarch Bartholomew duke it out for third. Listening to all the ideas, as you swerve to duck the mud-pies of Lutheran self-loathing, you soon start to smell it, stronger than sweat and sweeter than a dead mouse in cider: The sharp, pungent scent of anxiety.

I've listened to it for 20 years. Some of my good friends have heard it for 50. None of it seems to work, probably because everyone's a deconstructionist now, right? So even if you *Cast New Visions for Ministry* with all the enthusiasm of Kelly Ripa at the Rose Parade, people catch the opposite message. They absorb what lurks beneath it: Not hope in the Lord and His life, but fear of the dying church and its laziness — "change or die," as certain friends of the church keep telling us — and who is inspired to a greater, more passionate love of a thing when its own leaders fear and distrust it?

How refreshing, then, to read two recent studies sponsored by the Office of National Mission in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. They're refreshing, not because they paint a rosier picture of Lutheranism's future in America, but because they do just the opposite, honestly and without much fear — and thus they free us to do exactly what everyone's afraid we won't do.

To put the studies in a nutshell: The LCMS has a snowball's chance of experiencing any net growth for the next few decades, but not because of the Sacred Canards most people cite. First, it appears that the LCMS (contrary to some slurs against it) *hasn't* "been waiting for the next boat from Germany": it has had more adult conversions than infant baptisms for several years, and a higher rate of conversion than the Southern Baptists, putting the Missourians in the top tier of convert-to-congregant ratios in America.

Also contrary to some rumors, these spiritual heirs of Perry County have not neglected the growing urbanization of America, a common concern about Lutherans. While rural LCMS congregations have declined (as has the population of rural counties), their suburban congregations have grown, albeit at a slower pace than the suburbs themselves.

Third — and here many a sacred cow perishes — even if the LCMS "conversion rate" suddenly topped that of the Mormons, who currently hold the top spot (and you don't hear too many people saying that we should copy them, do you?), it would not

deliver the LCMS from a "net loss" over the next several decades. Natural attrition resulting from a high number of elderly members and a lowering birth rate would still overwhelm that number of conversions (and a new "baby boom" probably wouldn't help much, either).

So how do these studies help folks related to Lutheran CORE? If the LCMS faces this situation — an existing high rate of conversion, but no hope of net growth even if they started beating the Mormons — then the picture can hardly be better for the NALC, LCMC, or traditional folks in the ELCA. (Word to the wise: Crowing about the numerical decline of liberal denominations soon sounds like chickens coming home to roost, yet another reason to respect the hidden God and leave Him be.) Yet if so, then the implication is simple: renewal programs driven by a concern for net gains in national membership (or you might say, approaches built on the fear of a lazy church) are as dead as the future they predict — thanks be to God.

To be sure, the Holy Spirit does wonders. He has not yet, however, materialized human persons out of thin air to increase the joy and gain of ambitious pastors and questing lay people. Even God has a mother, remember? Therefore, "the nation-wide trends" will likely not change if we all got a praise band, or became more ancient-futurish, or started knocking on doors. Some of those things may well help your congregation (and sure, I have my own thoughts on it). But if what you do helps your parish, please don't take your experience, duct tape it to the latest statistical report, and start beating people over the head with it. Not even your *New Localized Pentecost* is going to save Lutheranism in America — and when was that ever the point, anyhow?

See, that's the point: When the numbers will be what they will be, then the Church is free to be what it will be, and that, I figure, is when growth happens. "What we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Congregations with their eyes off the numbers and on the Scriptures are free to preach from and for that hope rather than fear, and that preaching makes the only difference that matters.

When congregations live in, with, and under the promise of Christ's advent in creation and the gift of Himself (the love that banishes fear!), then congregations forget themselves, drink more wine, and start wooing sinners (and can God's Word return empty?). All those old, fearful dichotomies — are you a chaplain or a missionary? An innovator or an institution? A liturgist or a leader? — simply die, die, die as faith infuses the whole shebang and makes happy use of every gift given to it, whether institutional, charismatic, or otherwise. It's the best program I know. Everything else is probably just a scare tactic — and remember the warning of the Lutheran refugee: The just live by faith, but by fear live the weary and the tired.



Pueblo Que Camina ... A Pilgrim People

Lutheran CORE Co-sponsors Third Annual Hispanic-Latino Ministry Encuentro in Chicagoland

by Pr. Keith Forni

Consistent with the intentions of various Lutheran church bodies, Lutheran CORE is actively supportive of ethnic-specific ministries. For the third consecutive year, the renewal organization has co-sponsored an *Encuentro* (Spanish for “Encounter”) for those serving in Hispanic-Latino ministries *and* those considering entry into such Kingdom work.

Sixty-five persons, including clergy and laity, adults, youth and children took part in the most recent *Encuentro* held October 17-19, 2017 at St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Chicago and the First &

Santa Cruz Lutheran Parish, Joliet IL. These ELCA congregations, also affiliated with Lutheran CORE, welcomed participants to the three day gathering, centered on the theme “*Pueblo Que Camina...A Pilgrim People.*”

“While the gathering draws ministry practitioners and scholars with decades of experience in bilingual settings, the *Encuentro* provides a context that also welcomes those new to Hispanic-Latino and multicultural ministry...those whose congregations are discerning their way forward in mission,” notes Pastor Keith Forni, *Encuentro* Convener and Director of the Bilingual Ministry Resource Center in Joliet.

Best Practices in Bilingual Ministry “Table Talks” were offered, with topics including “Congregational Ministry with Pre-Schoolers: The Presentation of Three Year Olds,” and “*Quinceanera*: Princess-for-a-Day? — or — Ministry Toward Maturity?” Both pastoral ministries accent God’s faithfulness, the cultivation of baptismal identity and engagement of parents, sponsors / *padrinos*, congregation, family and friends in discipleship growth. Pastor Josh Ebner of St. Andrew / *San Andres* Lutheran Church, ELCA, West

Chicago, IL was the “Presentation” leader. Pastor Forni and Pastor Myrta Robles facilitated the *Quinceanera* conversation. Lively dialogue ensued, with participants expanding the reflection, giving consideration to other congregationally celebrated life-transition milestones. The need for a *Quince Ano*

(fifteenth birthday / coming of age) service for young men was considered.

Keynote speakers included The Rev. Dr. Alberto Garcia of Decatur, GA of the LCMS and The Rev. Kenneth Elkin, STS, Williamsport, PA, retired ELCA pastor. Dr. Garcia offered two lectures, entitled: “Re-imagining the Reformation for Our Cities at 500 Years: Under the Principle of *Sola Agape Dei*” and “Living the *Sola Agape Dei* in Our Cities: A Proposal in the Spirit of Pentecost.”

Pastor Elkin provided three sessions based on his various journeys along the 500 mile pilgrim way of *El Camino de Santiago de Compostela* in northern Spain. He provided a history of pilgrimage in the life of the Church and an assessment of the *Camino*’s surging popularity today.

An outdoor Vigil for Peace on the Streets was held on the first evening of the *Encuentro*, attracting the involvement of several area families along with registered participants. Held in the church parking lot in St. Timothy’s Hermosa community, the Vigil commemorated the life and witness of Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador (martyr, 1980) and concluded with bilingual Compline / Night Prayer in the sanctuary and the distribution of “Peace Kids” T-shirts donated by Peace

Lutheran Church of New Lenox, IL. Vigil keepers were mindful that the City of Chicago had only recently recorded its five hundredth

homicide.

The theme of pilgrimage ran throughout the gathering, reminding participants that “we have here no lasting city” and that we “walk by faith, not sight” as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Encuentro* participants considered the Christian faith-life journey from childhood toward adulthood. Actual, physical pilgrimage throughout the church’s history into our own age was highlighted in the *Camino* sessions with Pastor Elkin. Dr. Garcia’s talks guided those present to journey toward the margins



March On

by Kim Smith

I was probably under ten when I first learned that some pregnancies were deliberately terminated, and I was shaken to the core by that fact. We adore children in our family. I thought everybody wanted children. I reeled at the thought that *anyone* could kill a helpless baby — particularly its own mother. The thought still saddens me.

I was 13 when an all-male Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decided that abortion was a legal right. How that decision could trump an unborn human's right to life still baffles me. I wonder if millions of babies would have been saved if today's technology, which allows a virtual window into the womb, was available to the court when *Roe v. Wade* was being decided.



I remember a high school assignment about abortion — I still recall the cons. I was horrified to learn how saline abortions were performed and I was appalled at the pain the babies likely felt. How did my teacher and students respond to my speech? Crickets. I don't recall anyone discussing it with me afterwards or in the days to come. Maybe I was the only one who cared about this topic? It seemed unlikely.

As a Christian sinner, I was taught, "Thou Shalt Not Kill" in Sunday school. But don't we all know that already? Isn't it written on our hearts? I do not understand how our once largely Christian nation went from this universal truth to legalized abortion. But here I stand ...just waiting for someone to do something. Luther would not be proud of me.

I remember stressing about the SCOTUS decision and thinking *the adults* should protest and not stop until the decision was reversed. Where was the crying and gnashing of teeth? Later, during my college years, one woman at church was protesting against abortions, but mostly we went on as if nothing monumental had happened. At that age I was aware that I was an adult too, but I was looking for older adults to step up to lead the way. I don't even remember my baby-loving mom, aunts or grandmothers discussing the topic. I don't remember the men saying anything either. Was this because SCOTUS had spoken? Maybe so. How sad. I say its decision was wrong, because, decades later, our country remains sharply divided on this topic.

Perhaps some women aren't so much *pro-choice* as they are *see-no-other-choice*. I read that some women seek abortions because they feel *pressured* to do so by others. Think about that

for a moment; how terrible to be in that position just lie down and put your feet in these stirrups ...while your loved ones, out in the waiting room, celebrate the death of your child. My heart aches for women who are mourning the babies they never met and for the babies who never saw the light of day.

So, how can Christians help pregnant women? How can they help provide them with other options? One thing they can do is march.

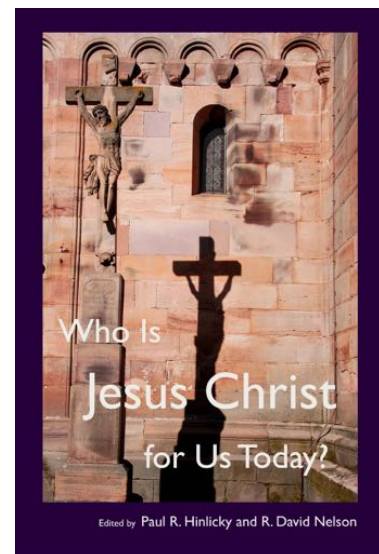
I *am* now one of the older adults I wrote about earlier. After 45 years and nearly 60 million abortions, it is way past time for me to stop standing and to travel to Washington, DC for the *March for Life* being held on January 19, 2018. Dennis Di Mauro, pastor at Trinity Lutheran in Warrenton, VA, is in charge of organizing NALC and other interested Lutherans who attend the march. He stressed the importance of having a huge crowd (usually 200,000 or so) of protestors as a yearly witness for life. He also invited us to attend an interdenominational church service called the *National Memorial for the Pre-Born*, at the Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall (near the White House) at 8:30 a.m., also on the 19th.

If all you can do is come and march, then you will be part of the powerful witness to the nation. If you can march and make contacts so that you can participate in abortion clinic protests or help at your local pregnancy centers and maternity homes, then that's even better. I hope you and the rest of our fellow Lutherans, across all denominations, join us in our march to make the womb a safer place for mother and child.

Photo: Lutherans from different denominations gather at the NALC banner at last year's March for Life. We hope to have an ELCA delegation to join our friends from NALC this year, and to have our own ELCA banner. [Contact Steve Shipman](#) to let him know you plan to participate and to learn where to meet.

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What Kind of Pastor Does the Church Need Today?

Part 1 of 3

by Pr. Brett Jenkins

If you are reading this journal, you are probably convinced that the pastors the church trains to minister in Twenty-First Century America should be people of profound faith, orthodox convictions, and confessional fidelity. This constitutes the absolute baseline answer to the above question.

I agree with you; as Bishop C. Fitzsimmons Allison demonstrates convincingly in his book *The Cruelty of Heresy*, heterodoxy in doctrine not only results in poor preaching, it results in ungodly personal lives, deformed spiritual formation, and “pastoral care” that is anything but, causing pain and even devastation in the lives of those ministered to.

That is not the question I want us to ponder.

As I have ministered in and among young people for the past 21 years, I have seen a seed change occur; when I began in youth ministry in 1996, the relatively cosmopolitan young people in my care, growing up in a college town, had a different high school experience than I did growing up in semi-rural Pennsylvania, but they asked most of the same questions and understood the world using most of the same categories I did.

This is no longer the case. The nihilistic ideas that were once the purview of the nineteenth century effete elite now frame the worldview of people who will never read their works. (Did you know that Oxford Dictionaries declared “post-truth” to be the word of the year for 2016?) The internet has made it easy to at least virtually satisfy nearly every appetite, and those it can’t immediately satisfy it constantly stimulates to pursue the gratification of all our desires — the *Sears Wishbook* from which I built my Christmas list as a child was a piker in this regard compared to today’s complex wrap-around marketing schemes employed by companies like Lucas Films and Lego. In the sexual dimension, the constant access permitted by smart phones to this carnal cornucopia has made hyper-eroticism the rule among the young, with many children experiencing full-blown sex before they even have their first kiss. This has created a situation wherein Millennials not only don’t follow the sexual mores that governed Western society for centuries (the hippies of the sixties did that), they can’t even understand the moral intuitions about human

dignity and the specialness — even holiness — of intimacy that underlie them. As David Kinnman in his massive study of the spiritual lives of Millennials, *You Lost Me*, notes, the understanding of sex possessed by people under 35 can best be summed up in the phrase, “It’s just sex; what’s the big deal?”

Yet with the easy satisfaction of every desire and the adoption of 19th century philosophies has come the widespread affliction with the same nihilism that plagued those philosophers. Perhaps it is little wonder that in a recent symposium of college students they identified the top two crises facing their generation as “stemming the plague of pornography” and finding reasons not to kill themselves.

It is a new world. It is, in fact, a brave new world, and it is growing up right beside the old one, slowly supplanting it the way my mint takes over the herb garden if I am not attentive. It is sprouting and spreading in our children’s bedrooms, on their cell phones, in college dorm rooms, in coffee houses and microbreweries, and in the small apartments of couples who by the old standards just can’t seem to get started with adult life and never intend to get married. (Is it not ironic that “gay marriage” became the law of the land at precisely the moment that marriage itself lost its iconic cultural status?)

The pastor needed by the church has got to be able to reach across this cultural divide with the true (read: *orthodox*) Word of Christ, the “eternal gospel” proclaimed by the angel in the passage most of us heard read in church on All Saints’ Sunday. They must be able to present Him who is “the way, the truth, and the life” and who alone offers the hope that can disarm their nihilism to members of a post-truth society. Next month, I will begin outlining some of the qualities such pastors will need to possess. Many of these ideas have their origin in conversations I have had as a board member of Lutheran CORE, others in the course of academic research, and still others in conversations with colleagues or the great many people I have had the privilege to minister to and with over the years. I offer these ideas as part of what I hope will be a broad and deep conversation in the years to come, a conversation we at Lutheran CORE feel called to help facilitate.

To be continued next issue

Helping Orthodox Pastors and Orthodox Congregations Connect

One of the greatest challenges that orthodox ELCA congregations are facing is finding an orthodox Lutheran pastor. We are in conversation with the leadership of several ELCA churches who are saying that the names they receive from their synods do not even come close to matching their needs in terms of theology and mission perspective. We believe that that situation will only become more severe as an increasing number of orthodox pastors who remain in the ELCA continue to retire and as ELCA seminaries continue to produce pastors whose priorities are a far cry from preaching and teaching the Bible as the Word of God and reaching people for Jesus Christ.

A few churches have listed a pastoral vacancy on Clergy Connect, which can be found by going to the [home page of our website](#). We encourage more congregations to make use of this free service. Here is a brief description of one ELCA congregation in Oregon, which is looking for a pastor —

Congregation is twenty-five years old with an average attendance of two hundred per Sunday

Two blended services with Sunday School between services during the school year — one service preceded by breakfast during the summer

One hundred fifty-two members participating in twelve adult small groups, who meet for Bible study and fellowship and are involved in some kind of service project

Ninety-five members involved in some way in putting on the worship services

A full program of children’s, youth, and music ministries

Various outreach ministries, including the following -

Support for a hospital in Tanzania, including a school and housing for lepers

Mission to low income youth in the Dominican Republic

Local efforts, which include annual events in support of foster children and home repairs for low income folks

Please contact me at dennisdnelsonaz@yahoo.com for a more detailed description of this pastoral position.

CORE Is Your Voice in Renewal Movements across North America

Meeting of the Common Ground Christian Network, October 23-25, 2017

by Pr. Cathy Ammlung

“The Common Ground Coalition is a group of denominations, organizations, congregations, and individuals who believe that 21st century Christians need to stand together for the cause of Christ... The common ground upon which we stand is the affirmation of classical orthodox Christianity summarized in [the] statements which we hold in common...”

So begins the Purpose and Mission Statement of the Common Ground Christian Network. The statements referred to are similar to those of Lutheran CORE’s Common Confession. In the past few years, CGCN has particularly emphasized the sanctity of life; the nature of marriage and family; and religious liberty. All of these are under threat. All demand a solid, united response grounded in Christian social teaching.

The Coalition includes representatives from the Anglican Church in North America, the NALC, ELCA, PCUSA, PCA, and Southern Baptist, as well as other spinoffs from mainline denominations. The CGCN met in Atlanta October 23-25. Several of the keynote speakers’ addresses are available on streaming audio.

Mark Tooley, president of the Institute for Religion and Democracy, spoke on: “What principles guide us in social witness and how do we do so with integrity in Christ and according to God’s Word?” [Download or Stream Audio](#)

The Rev. Dr. Scott Weimer, Senior Pastor of North Avenue Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, spoke on “Engaging Our Post-Truth Culture.” He reflected on the concrete ways his congregation has done so by witnessing to the light of God’s love in a polarized, blighted neighborhood. [Download or Stream Audio](#)

A panel discussion followed on the larger topic of the Church as an agent of reconciling grace in a hurting world. Carmen Fowler Laberge, President of the Presbyterian Lay Committee



and CGNA president, convened this; Kathy Branzell, National Coordinator of LOVE2020; Justin Giboney, President of AND Campaign; and Rev. Weimer participated.

Kathy’s organization has the ambitious goal of touching every person with the love of Jesus by 2020. She calls this “image-bearing, armor-wearing, pulling people out of the fires of hell” love.

Justin, a young African-American lawyer, formed a non-profit representing an authentic and active Christian witness in the public square and a resource for churches, faith organizations and families seeking to disciple through cultural and civic engagement. They train aspirants in a Biblical worldview while addressing contemporary political and social issues and work to find common ground with people of faith across geographic,



socioeconomic, and racial divides.

Jeff Christopherson is Vice President of *The Send Network*, part of the North American Mission Board the Southern Baptist Convention. He spoke about planting churches for the Kingdom of God, and is author of two books that I believe dovetail well with Phase 2 of our Summit on Pastoral Formation.

The Send Network was developed as a pipeline to identify and train church planters in postmodern society. It assumes they are working at a “day job” already and may be co-vocational in a mission field.

The Send Institute has a financial analysis tool, *Planting Projector*, that helps assess the potential costs of mission startups. It also has many “White paper” resources that can be downloaded and distributed interdenominationally.

John Spellman is a convener of an interdenominational cadre of church planters in the Atlanta area. He spoke of having one foot “on the fringes,” with the planters in the mission field, and one foot in the institutional church. Among his advice to the latter: Develop “peripheral vision,” look beyond your “faith bubble” or comfort zone, to where the Spirit is leading the Church. Then... equip and support those who go there.

Rev. David Roseberry, Rector Emeritus of Christ Church, Plano, and CEO of LeaderWorks, gave the final presentation on generosity as the foundation for evangelism and discipleship. [Download or Stream Audio](#) Focusing on the mission of St. Paul, he noted that the only direct reference Paul makes to Jesus’ teaching concerns generosity. A core value of the early Church was generosity: not just pew-to pulpit, but church-to-community.

He ended with an observation from Rodney Stark’s book “How the West Won.” *Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world. . . . Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachment. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a*

St. Paul Lutheran Seminary

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trouble.” Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) has an option called a contract call. The Parish Service Certificate is designed for people who might be pursuing that option.

By not having the overhead of their own campus, the seminary is able to experiment, easily adjust, and make use of the resources of the church. They do not need to own buildings in order to have classrooms. Pastor Smith said, “There are hundreds of classrooms available throughout the church. Many of these classrooms are empty five or six days a week. It is really a stewardship issue.”

The vision of the seminary is to continue to train faithful pastors for the church. They are not independently seeking accreditation. Rather they are in partnership with Sioux Falls Seminary, a North American Baptist school in South Dakota, for students who desire to receive an accredited degree.

Another goal of the seminary is to launch an international program. Starting this fall instructors are going to Mexico and Nicaragua to help the churches in those two countries prepare pastors for their settings. Thirty-eight students have signed up for the instruction in Mexico, while another ten have signed up in Nicaragua. When I asked how that came about, Pastor Smith responded, “They sought us out. Their leadership checked out a number of seminaries and chose us, so we designed a program just for them.”

More information about Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary can be found on their [website, www.semlc.org](http://www.semlc.org), or by contacting Dean Julie Smith at jsmith@semlc.org.

Common Ground

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new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fire, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services. ...For what they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities more tolerable.”

— Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, Princeton University Press, 1996, page 161

Photos: Participants in the Common Ground meeting, and Pr. Ammlung furiously taking notes at the Common Ground meeting in October.

A fuller version of this article is posted on our [Lutheran CORE blog](#).



left: The Rev. Dr. Alberto Garcia speaking to the Encuentro held in the greater Chicago area, which was co-sponsored by Lutheran CORE.

See article beginning on [page 3](#).

I Died to the Statistics

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For their own part, the LCMS leadership attached to these studies seems to have undertaken a hopeful perspective on the resulting statistics. Rather than giving up, they have made some simple conclusions about where they will preach Christ more and more intently, and they have begun thinking what it will look like to be a “faithful remnant church.” You may not like the language, but it’s more honest than our fears, isn’t it? You may read more about their studies and conclusions, as well as some further links and critique of them, [here](#) and [here](#).

Perhaps you will draw different conclusions. All I’m really saying is what Lutheran CORE has always said: The church lives well when it’s Christ-centered and congregationally-focused. Wherever Christ is, there a congregation will follow, as the Lutheran confessions teach. You might even say, congregations in Christ don’t need an outreach program, because they are the outreach program.

Once we catch that Spirit, we can stop scaring each other with our fears, wearying the faithful with our dreams, and simply preach the Word of the Lord.

Pueblo Que Camina

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of Lutheran identity, engaging the rich dynamics of Hispanic-Latino Lutheran communities too often overlooked in mainstream North American denominational life. St. Timothy Lutheran Church provided a parish mission field site, giving insights into intentional, urban, congregational outreach in a demographically changing community.

Encuentro 2017 recalled God’s steadfast mercy and love for His sojourning Israel, His leading and guiding of the Holy Family and His care for the Church — God’s New Israel, in-but-not-of the world. Christ’s body has here no lasting city, walking by faith not sight, commissioned to go to all nations -- baptizing, teaching and calling to obedience all who will hear and join in “the Way” as disciples of Jesus Christ, equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s Pilgrim People bear witness in word and deed to the Lord who sends them forth in mission and ministry to a sin-weary world.

Pastor Dennis Nelson, Lutheran CORE director and Board president, gave an overview of CORE’s ministries, accenting recent work with the theological education Summit and providing encouragement to the Encuentro organizers and hosts.

Next year’s *Encuentro Luterano* is likely to fill a single day, so as to focus energies and facilitate greater participation. For more information, contact Pastor Keith Forni by [clicking here](#).

Photos in order:

- 1) Pr. Ken Elkin, with Pr. Keith Forni, Clifford Johnson and Cris Cardenas of First and Santa Cruz Lutheran Church, Joliet, IL.*
 - 2) Children received "Peace Kids" T-Shirts*
 - 3) The vigil drew family participation from the Neighborhood.*
 - 4) Pr. Ken Elkin presented “On the Pilgrim Way: Reflections from El Camino de Santiago de Compostela, Spain.” His engaging sessions, in Chicago and Joliet, IL, addressed the history, theology and experience of the renowned pilgrimage way.*
- More photos from the event are posted on our [Facebook page](#).*

Coming Events

March for Life, January 19, 2018, Washington D.C. Plan to join us! See article on [page 4](#).

NALC Pastors Conference, “Discipleship, Leadership, and the NALC Pastor.” Dr. James Nestingen, presenter. Drury Plaza Hotel, San Antonio, Texas, January 30-February 1, 2018. [Registration information here](#).

Pastoral Formation Summit, Phase 2, April 11, 2018. Please hold this event in your prayers.

LCMC Youth Event, July 17-20, 2018. Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa, “Called 2 Follow.” [Click here](#).

Lutheran Week, August 13-17, 2018. Crowne Plaza Denver Convention Center, Colorado. [Watch here for more information](#).

LCMC Annual Gathering, October 2018 TBA, Des Moines, Iowa.

Are You Sponsoring an Event? We Would Love to Help You Get the Word Out

If you are planning an event that you believe Lutheran CORE members would want to know about and that is consistent with the *Common Confession*, please let us know. Brief articles and pictures are always welcome. We also can share them on our website and our Facebook and Twitter feeds.

Contact the editor, Pr. Steve Shipman, by [clicking here](#).

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or online at www.lutherancore.org.*

[Click here for a link to make an online donation!](#)

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donation via our website.*

Weekly Devotions and Sermon Starters

Weekly devotions continue to be available on [the blog](#) on Lutheran CORE’s website. Pastor Dennis Nelson, president of the board and director of Lutheran CORE, posts a devotional based upon one of the following Sunday’s readings every Tuesday. Pastor Steven Gjerde, vice-president of the board, writes a devotional based upon one of the previous Sunday’s readings in the Missouri Synod lectionary series, which is posted every Wednesday. A link to these devotionals is then posted on a number of different Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Please help us get the word out about these resources. We desire that they be an inspiration to all who read them, and also a source of ideas, thoughts, illustrations, and images for pastors as they prepare for the following Sunday’s sermon.

CORE Voice

**News and Information from
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