

PROPOSAL FOR DISCIPLESHIP NETWORKING

(Submitted by the “Congregational Life and Pastoral Support” Team)

The Foundations

Discipleship includes both a passionate, intimate, and growing relationship with our LORD, the Creator of the universe, and Christian classical spiritual practices which encourage this relationship. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the classical summation of Christian discipleship in Acts 2:41-47 succinctly summarize both this relationship and the spiritual practices (of prayer, worship, the Word, servanthood, evangelization/mission, Christian community, and giving generously). One without the other, relationship and spiritual practices, is naïve, unrealistic, and empty. Together both are powerful and life transforming. This discipleship is not a program or check list. It is an invitational way of all of life, personally and congregationally. Our greatest recent Lutheran hero of discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has proclaimed to the world both a passionate relationship with Jesus and a joyful obedience through Christian spiritual practices. This is the core of both of his books, *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life together*.

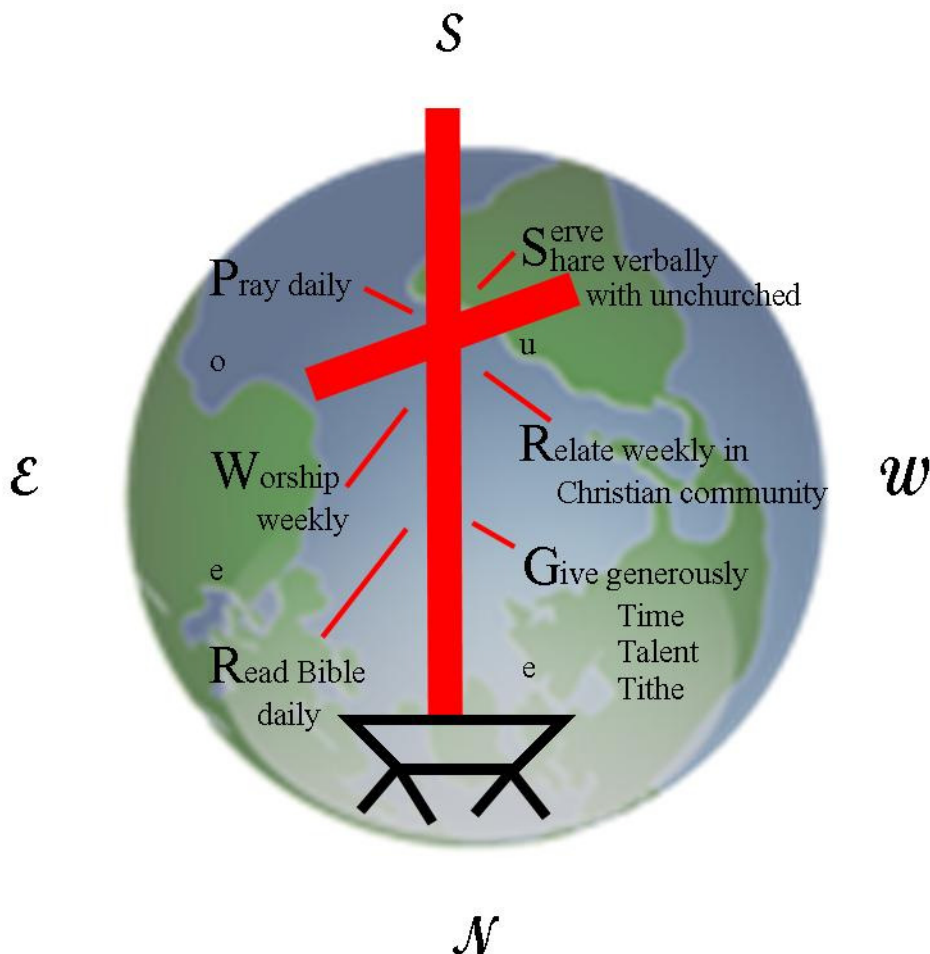
In the summary letter of February 18, 2010, for the “A Vision and Plan” for the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) and Lutheran CORE is this declaration: The NALC “will hold at its heart the Great Commission of Jesus to ‘make disciples of all nations.’ It will utilize networked ministries of local congregations and parachurch organizations rather than the large bureaucracy of a denominational body.” Throughout the draft of “A Vision and Plan” this heart of discipleship was referred to at least 9 times. Discipleship is not a *part* of but the *heart* of the NALC; it is not *what we do* but *who we are*. For many Lutheran leaders it is their great hope to see the vision of discipleship as the DNA of a new Lutheran Church.

Our “congregational life and support” team believes it is important that such a powerful vision and plan not simply remain on paper but that this discipleship DNA of the Church actually becomes reality. This following proposal affirms all the core values of the vision statement: Congregationally-Focused, Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, and Traditionally-Grounded. This proposal is radical because it is rooted in the proclamation and practice of the Early New Testament Church --- a Christ-centered, congregationally-focused, and mission driven movement. It is confessional because it is anchored within one of the most balanced, holistic, and powerful theologies --- the Lutheran Confessions. It is Traditionally-grounded because it lifts up the best of the Church Catholic throughout 2,000 years of Christian history.

The Discipleship Picture

As mentioned above, Matthew 28 and Acts 2 clarify Christian discipleship. One helpful communication tool is the “PoWeR SuRGe” acrostic/image seen on the following page #2. (Note, as we further describe this discipleship, the references to the picture are in *italic letters*.)

PoWeR SuRGe acrostic/image



We invite pastors, leaders, and laity to become passionate disciples of Jesus Christ (*the bold and red colored cross*). This focus is Christ-Centered. We are invited to continue to grow in this relationship and intimacy with Jesus, such that we become more and more like the incarnate, crucified, resurrected Christ (*the manger, and the empty cross which extends from beyond the globe into planet earth*). By the power of the Holy Spirit, such discipleship will transform not only the Church but also the entire planet earth (*the emanating lines away from the cross into the world*). Discipleship has been and always will be a radical (“to the roots”) and revolutionary movement. Notice the image of an “*upside down globe*,” referring to the commentary about the early Christians --- these Christians “have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). This “*upside down globe*” keeps before us the ultimate purpose of discipleship --- to disciple all nations. This emphasis is indeed Mission-Focused.

We are also invited to grow in relationship with Jesus through holistic spiritual practices. The words “*PoWeR SuRGe*” come from Acts 2 --- describing the continuing and ongoing powerful surge and continuing filling of the Holy Spirit within the Church and culture. One definition of “surge” from Webster’s dictionary uses the words “continuous and ongoing surging.” Notice that these seven practices are worded for beginning disciples, which we believe describe most Lutherans. Those practices are described as: ***P**ray daily, **W**orship weekly, **R**ead the Bible daily, **S**erve and verbally **S**hare with others (especially the unchurched), **R**elate weekly in Christian community, and **G**ive generously of one’s time, talent, and tithe.* These seven practices summarize the practices taught by Jesus to the disciples during His three years of ministry. These seven are holistic, including a focus upon the personal (“PoWeR”) and the social (“SuRGe”) dimensions. As mentioned earlier, this acrostic succinctly captures one of the central and marvelous passages in all of The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:41-47). Those verses summarize the life of the early disciples and the first century Christian Church. Those verses also summarize today’s Christians’ answer for the question, “What is discipleship/spiritual formation?”

The Discipleship Network of Pastors, Leaders, and Congregations.

We are proposing the development of a discipleship network of pastors and leaders. This affirms the core value of being “congregationally-focused.” Such a network would include several components:

Part 1 --- Regional two-three day “Call to Discipleship” Conferences would invite pastors and leaders to consider becoming 1st century disciples in the 21st century. Such conferences would cast the vision, clarify the Biblical understanding of discipleship, and explicate the depth of discipleship through the Great Commission and through the classical spiritual practices of the Church catholic (Matthew 28 and Acts 2). In two or three of these conferences during 2011, the “PoWeR SuRGe” image and acrostic would be shared and explained. The radical and exciting implications of discipleship DNA (for oneself personally and for the Church) would be shared. And the realism of a needed congregational paradigm shift would be unfolded. Three or four other Call to Discipleship conferences would also occur during 2011 with Matthew 28 and Acts 2 as the DNA. (See Addendum #1, pages 5ff. describing some of the organizational details which can be helpful for these conferences.)

Part 2 --- Regional/geographic clusters would be established. One important purpose (maybe the most important purpose) of the two-three day Call to Discipleship Conferences, described in Part 1 above, would be to invite pastors, leaders, and congregations to a three year commitment to each other. Monthly gatherings would provide further education, encouragement, equipping, community, and accountability. Large, medium sized and small Churches would learn not only from their own kind, but also from all other participants.

Part 3 --- Periodic national gatherings of clusters in North America would help leaders further experience inspiration, insight, and support.

Part 4 --- An international network of Churches would be established so that we learn together with the Church catholic. There is already a beginning interest from the Church of Sweden and the Lutheran Church in Latvia. Also, as the “Vision and Plan” document has shared, “In this age, however, it is also the case that Christian churches in the global south have much to give to the people of North America. The nations that once sent missionaries have now become themselves mission fields... that we might experience the fervor for Christ’s Gospel shown by new converts in mission churches elsewhere” (pg. 10). And right now there is also potential interest of networking from Lutheran Churches in India, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.

Our Lutheran Confessional Perspective

The invitation to discipleship is the major thread woven through the marvelous tapestry of Sacred Scriptures, the Early Church, Reforming movements throughout 2,000 years of Church history, and transforming 21st century discipleship --- especially within Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As mentioned earlier, we believe the historic Lutheran Tradition (including its spirituality and confessions) is the most balanced, holistic, powerful, and transforming theology within the Church catholic.

Think about the above proposal on discipleship as we enumerate a few examples of this Lutheran theology which can inform and transform 21st century discipleship. They are: the priesthood of all believers; Grace alone, Faith alone, and Scriptures alone; vocation; saints and sinners; the nature of the Church: catholic, evangelical and reforming; centrality of prayer; the Lordship of Jesus Christ; the theology of the cross; the liturgical worship and life of our Sacramental Church; Word and Sacraments; the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist; office of the keys; mutual conversation and consolation; the Holy Trinity; the Historic Creeds; the two kingdoms; and the rich meaning of the title “pastor” --- shepherd. (Note the greater meaning of “shepherd” comes from The Great Shepherd, Jesus. Pastors are invited not only to shepherd sheep but also to shepherd and multiply other shepherds --- become leaders of leaders. Following the Great Shepherd’s example, pastors are also invited to become missionaries and equip other pastors and laity to be missionaries.)

One other part of being Traditionally-Grounded is being ecumenical. Our discoveries of discipleship come not only from other Lutherans but also the Church ecumenical --- the Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Reformed traditions, Evangelical, and Charismatic. We proclaim this weekly in our Creeds --- “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

Concluding note --- Within this new Lutheran Church, Jesus Christ can use His presence and this theology to transform the Church and planet earth. Many of us believe that we live in a unique historical moment of all of 2,000 years of Christian history. We ask the Lord Jesus to work mightily through us in this moment.