



# Lutheran Coalition for Renewal CORE Voice

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## Where Will Our Future Pastors Come From?

by [Pr. Dennis D. Nelson](#), Lutheran CORE Executive Director



Last May I had the privilege of attending the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of my graduation from Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. It was a splendid event. I was deeply moved by how much my class had become a real spiritual leadership powerhouse in the Christian community. I felt honored and privileged to have been a part of it. From college I went to Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. After graduating from Fuller, I served my internship under Luther Seminary in the congregation where I had been working as youth director during my final year at Fuller. After serving my internship, I was a graduate student at Luther for one year in order to fulfill ordination requirements of the former ALC (American Lutheran Church).

### Raised in a Christian Home

While attending the celebration event at Wheaton I thought of how privileged I was to have grown up in the church and been raised in a Christian home (my father was a pastor), to have been a leader in our high school church youth group, to have gone to summer Bible camp, to have attended a Christian college and sung in a Christian college choir, and to have attended seminary. The program at Wheaton on Saturday evening included singing a number of favorite Christian hymns. One of them was “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” The person who was leading the singing introduced that selection by saying, “I’ll bet that song means far, far more to

### In This Issue:

- How *you* can help Lutheran CORE provide theological education for high schoolers who may become future pastors.
- Did you know CORE now offers *online* coaching in preparation for and during pastoral transitions?
- Unity or politics? What say you, Augsburg Confession?
- How might the Gospel be preached to those who don't believe their *future* is connected to the past?
- How do I talk to others about my faith?

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# Lutheran CORE's CiT Coaching Ministry: Now Available in a Second, Online Version

by [Dr. Don Brandt](#), Lutheran CORE's CiT Director



[Congregations in Transition](#) (CiT) coaching has always, from its beginning, been available as an expenses-only, volunteer coaching ministry. But CiT can now provide assistance even when a church finds the cost of an on-site visit by the coach to be an obstacle to its participation. This means that even small and geographically more isolated churches can now afford the services of a trained CiT coach. In fact, the *only* cost to a church taking advantage of this new online, distance-coaching version of CiT is the initial registration fee of \$150 paid to Lutheran CORE.

This means months of coaching guidance—at virtually no cost—to help your congregational leaders navigate through what can be an extremely challenging time in the life of your church. And, in the case of LCMC churches, your CiT coach can advise you not only in the initial period following your pastor's departure, but also in your search for your next pastor.

**CiT can now provide assistance even when a church finds the cost of an *on-site* visit by the coach to be an obstacle.**

So how can *distance*, online coaching make a difference for your church? Let me answer that question based on what I have discovered in working with congregations over this last year. I have found that effective coaching of transition teams can take place with conference phone calls, individual phone conversations, and through regular, on-going email communications. And I should not have been surprised. The professional coaching industry—whether church-related or secular—is based, in large part, on the model of online and phone communication, not face-to-face meetings. And unlike forty years ago,

long-distance phone calls are free, and on-going written communication can be by email or text, not snail-mail.

The primary key to making this kind of distance coaching effective is that individual phone calls, conference phone calls, and video conference meetings are based on written answers, from church leaders, to questions that have been provided by the coach in advance of each meeting. Then the answers to these questions are emailed back to the coach, and set the agenda for the subsequent meeting.

But how does the coach become personally acquainted with transition team members when there is no on-site visit? Through an individual phone conversation with each team member. (Conversations—you guessed it—based on each team member's responses to questions he/she has received in advance of that phone call.) Then, after these individual phone conversations, the first meeting of the entire team with the coach is by video conference. (Subsequent team sessions can be by conference phone call.)

Through this kind of ministry your lay leaders can learn—from the coach—about the collective experiences of churches that have successfully addressed the challenges inherent in a period of transition. Additional information about Congregations in Transition can be found on the Lutheran CORE website.

How can you inquire—*before* formally signing up—as to whether CiT can help your congregation? Simple. Contact me, CiT Director Don Brandt, either by phone or email. I hope to hear from you.

Dr. Don Brandt  
503-559-2034  
[pastordonbrandt@gmail.com](mailto:pastordonbrandt@gmail.com)

**Note:** Recommendations and references are available from congregations working with CiT. Click [here](#) for more information on CiT.



**The *only* cost to a church taking advantage of this new online, distance-coaching version of CiT is the initial registration fee of \$150.**

# True Unity: Reflections on the Augsburg Confession, Part 3

by [Pastor David Charlton](#), Lutheran CORE Member

*For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. (Augsburg Confession, Article VII)<sup>1</sup>*

## Maintain Unity

One of the most difficult and important tasks of pastors and leaders in any congregation is to maintain unity. It is no easy thing to keep a group of several hundred people united around a common vision of mission and ministry. Many of you have experienced how painful and destructive conflict within a congregation can be. Friendships are broken, people become disillusioned with the Church and therefore with the Gospel itself. Some just drift away and stop going to church altogether. Even when things seem to be resolved, distrust can continue to simmer below the surface.

## Politics Are Divisive

One of the things that seems almost certain to cause division and distrust in 2020 is politics. The division between Red State and Blue State, conservative and progressive, Democrat and Republican is as wide and deep as it has been in a long time. Just begin to discuss immigration, LGBT rights, war, abortion, gun control, religious freedom, Israel/Palestine, global warming, and a host of other issues, and the conversation will quickly become heated. Express the wrong opinion and you might be shunned, or unfriended on Facebook. In some cases, you may even lose your job or be sued. This is as true in the family and the church as it is in the workplace or social media.

**They expected to hear about how the synod planned to proclaim the Gospel.**

## My Congregation Is No Partisan Platform

As a pastor, I have always worked carefully and diligently to make sure that people of all political stripes feel welcome in my congregation. I encourage each person to live out his/her vocation as citizen by voting, volunteering and advocating for those causes that he/she believes are in accord with God's will. However, I have made it clear that the congregation and its ministries cannot

**They heard a laundry list of political tasks the VP insisted the Church must undertake.**



be used as a platform to advance partisan causes. For instance, the congregation does not pass out voting guides or endorse amendments to the state constitution.

## And yet at the Synod Level ...

You can understand my dismay then, when I have seen the annual assembly of my synod used as such a political platform. Several years ago, members of St. Paul were shocked when they listened to a report given by our synodical VP. They expected to hear about how the synod planned to proclaim the Gospel. Instead, they heard a laundry list of political tasks the VP insisted the Church must undertake. To add insult to injury, the VP suggested that those who were skeptical of or opposed to her agenda were in the same moral category as Nazis and White Supremacists. This same pattern of behavior has continued for at least four years, if not longer. I can imagine the voting members to the synod assembly thinking to themselves, "But pastor said that the Church is not to be used as a political platform for one's favorite political causes. Was he being untruthful when he said that?"

**The Synodical VP suggested that those who were skeptical of or opposed to her agenda were in the same moral category as Nazis and White Supremacists.**

## Where Does the ELCA Leadership Stand?

The bottom line on all of this is that it is no longer clear whether the leadership of the ELCA agrees with what the Augsburg Confession (AC), Article VII, says about the true unity of the Church. It seems

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# Why They May Not Hear You

by [Rev. Dr. Steven K. Gjerde](#), Vice President of Lutheran CORE

Have you ever preached the Gospel to people who don't care about anything but the present moment? Or to put it differently, can you imagine sharing the good news with people who don't believe that the past and future have any claim on today?

## Past, Present, Future

A Facebook group to which I belong recently shared a "[Preaching Moment](#)" video by Thomas G. Long, homiletics professor at the Candler School of Theology, in which he addresses this situation. According to Long, the so-called "narrative" mode of preaching has become less effective in recent years because fewer people view their lives as a story with a past, present, and future.

"The narrative mode of preaching addressed this need: the need is, I have heard the gospel; I know the biblical message, but I am not existentially engaged with it," Long explains. "And therefore I need to move from knowledge to delight." Narrative preaching seeks to move listeners from passive knowledge of the Gospel to a lively faith in it by telling stories that help listeners see themselves within the grand narrative of Scripture.

## Location on the Timeline

But you know how stories work: they typically connect the past, present, and future, making sense of how one event touches another. What if the culture to which you preach lacks that sense of time? That is, what if it lacks not only knowledge of the biblical narrative but also what Long calls *narrative competence*, the ability to view things in chronological relationship and locate oneself within that timeline?

Referencing an Oxford scholar named Galen Strawson, Long points to the rise of people who understand themselves in this "episodic" way. People who think "episodically" know that certain things happened to them in years past, but they insist that those things don't have a material effect on who they are today. Moreover, they don't view their present in light of any anticipated future.

Instead, the present moment alone becomes the workshop of identity. A person's origins, experiences, and ultimate destination have no necessary bearing on beliefs and moral decisions. "Who I am today



**Speaking of forgiveness necessarily assumes the relevance of both the past and the future to the present.**

may not be who I am tomorrow" — we'll have to wait and see. (Read Strawson's argument [here](#).)

You and I, like Long, may disagree with this episodic interpretation of human nature. It seems, perhaps, a bit defensive, like an argument for how someone wants things to be more than a confession of how things really are. But now consider some of the trends that we see in our culture and churches.

## Trends and Doom

In the realm of identity politics and intersectional theory, both personal and national identities can be forged through hard breaks with the past that disavow its relevance for the present. Perhaps the past is viewed as too oppressive or indecent for serious consideration, even to the point of rejecting the literary and artistic accomplishments of prior eras due to their supposed moral degeneracy.

**You can always smell a church without a Christ-centered vision of the future, especially if you've had prior experience in smelling corpses.**

Likewise, scientific and quasi-scientific foretelling of the earth's future can sometimes paint such a vision of doom as to deny any real future at all. Ecological prophecy can leave people anywhere from dismal about tomorrow to blithely unconcerned about it. The future looks as impossible as the past looks dangerous, rendering both irrelevant for the present.

## Torching the Church's Past

We have whiffs of this episodic malaise in the church, too. Some of its leaders seem intent on torching the church's past, perhaps deeming it too white, too capitalist, or too cis. Better, they say, to remake the church in light of present sensibilities alone. Others, in their radical calls for social justice, appear almost to despair of any future change, their cries increasingly vengeful. Where, one might won-

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# How to Tactfully Navigate Conversations About Your Christian Faith

by [Ken Coughlan](#), Christian Apologist, Trinity Lutheran Church, Joppa, MD

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20*

*“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9*



## Jesus Told Us to Go

Go, and do not be afraid. At once these instructions are both so easy, and yet for many Christians they are also so difficult. Despite God’s clear command to teach others about our faith and His reassurance that He will be with us, American culture is in the midst of a staggering trend against evangelism. In 1993, a Barna Group study showed that 89% of Christians believed it was the responsibility of every Christian to share their faith. By 2018 that number had dropped 25 points to only 64%. 65% of Christians said they share their faith by the way they live *instead of* (not *in addition to*) talking to people about Christ.

## Why the Hesitation?

Why are people so hesitant to open their mouths and declare the name of Jesus? Yes, we should be living out our faith with our actions, but Jesus specifically said to “teach” people. That requires us to talk to them. Yet so many Christians are afraid to do so.

Have you ever heard any of these statements?

*Conversations about religion always become so heated.*

*What if I don’t know how to answer their questions?*

*How do I even get the conversation started?*

These are all common refrains that hold people back from talking about their faith. The reason they hesitate isn’t because they don’t know they *should* be evangelizing. It’s because they’re afraid they don’t know *how*.

## Two Main Fears

In my experience people’s hesitancy is largely driven by two main fears. First, “How do I get the conversation started without sounding awkward?” Second, “What if I don’t know how to answer the other person’s questions?” What follows is a brief introduction to how we can overcome these fears while at the same time showing courtesy and respect so as to keep the conversation cordial.

**In 25 years, there has been a 25% drop in Christians who believe it is the responsibility of every Christian to share their faith.**

## Talk *with* People

First, how do we begin the conversation? For starters, we need to talk *with* people and not *at* them. We may have a whole list of important information about the gospel and we just have to get it out. We launch into a rapid-fire monologue, taking short breaths in between sentences, so the other person doesn’t have time to interrupt our incredibly important litany. After all, if they get a word in edgewise we might get sidetracked from our list.

## Shields Up!

When we talk *at* someone, our primary concern is to convey all the information we think they need to hear. But when we talk *with* them we are more worried about listening to what they have to say and engaging in a two-way dialogue. The moment someone senses you are talking *at* them their defenses will go up and any opportunity for a meaningful conversation will be over. They’re not listening to you. While you’re rambling on, their mind is planning out their counterattack.

Talking *at* someone places the focus on us. Talking *with* someone places the focus on them. The people we are speaking to are individuals, not targets. Showing respect to someone means being invested in

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## Where Will Our Future Pastors Come From?

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us now than it did fifty years ago.”

### Of Great Concern to Lutheran CORE

All during my growing up years I experienced God’s faithfulness and His guiding me to become a pastor. And yet I realize that many of the Lutheran ministries that used to engage young people with a high view of the authority of the Bible and the challenge to consider a career in Christian ministry no longer exist or no longer function in that way. Because of that reality the following are among Lutheran CORE’s greatest concerns –

How can we help raise up a whole new generation of Lutheran pastors who will be Biblical and confessional in their theology and who will be committed to fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples for Jesus Christ?

What can we do to reach young people for Jesus? How can we present the Gospel of Jesus to them in a clear, compelling, and engaging way? How can we help them feel and be connected to the church?

### Opportunity to Act

Lutheran CORE is very grateful for the opportunity to do something about these concerns through sponsoring a week of [NEXUS](#) for high schoolers at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa.

Originally funded by a substantial Lilly Endowment Grant, NEXUS is designed to give high school students a chance to engage in the study of the Bible and Lutheran theology, be involved in service, and discern whether God has gifted them and is calling them to full-time Christian ministry and/or leadership in the church. In the past three years, over one hundred high schoolers have gone through NEXUS. Grand View has found that after a week of NEXUS, students grow significantly in their understanding of Scripture, Lutheran theology, faith practices, and the doctrine of vocation. In addition, many college-aged mentors who have participated in the program have gone on to seminary and/or full-time church work.

There is no charge for high schoolers to attend NEXUS, and Grand View wants to keep it that way. The original grant from Lilly Endowment will have been spent by the end of this coming summer, so Grand View has approached Lutheran CORE and other ministries about sponsoring a week of NEXUS.

The cost to host one week of NEXUS for twenty-four high school students, which includes college-aged mentors, teachers, activities, room and board, and materials, is \$30,000. Lutheran CORE has committed half of the amount for one week - \$15,000.

The funds from Lutheran CORE will be matched by Lilly Endowment to cover a full week’s cost of \$30,000.

Because the original grant from Lilly Endowment will cover the costs for the two weeks of NEXUS during the summer of 2020, the funds from Lutheran CORE will be used for a week during the summer of 2021. However, we do not want to wait until next year to be involved. I plan to attend at least a significant part of the week of NEXUS this year that will be sponsored by the NALC (North American Lutheran Church) – July 12-17 – to further observe the program and to get to know, listen to, learn from, and share with the young people who are there about such things as these –

What are they thinking about, running into, and dealing with in their lives?

What are the questions that they are asking and facing?

What hopes do they have for the church and for their own lives?

What is stirring them?

Sharing in that interaction and experiencing a week of NEXUS will help us know how best to put a “Lutheran CORE imprint” upon a week of NEXUS in 2021.

### Funding Our NEXUS Commitment

We are very grateful to all those who have already given — over and above their current giving to Lutheran CORE — to help fund the commitment that we have made to provide \$15,000 for one week of high school NEXUS. To see how much has been contributed for NEXUS 2021 so far, click [here](#). We will continue to update you on our progress via social media and via CORE’s regular communications.

If you have *not* already given, we urge you to join with those who have. You may donate [online](#), or you may use the response form that you will find [here](#). Please remember to designate NEXUS on the memo line on your check. We are very grateful for the faithful generosity of our friends, which will enable us to help support this fine ministry, in addition to all of the other ways in which we seek to be a Voice for Biblical Truth and a Network for Confessing Lutherans.

**NEXUS is designed to give high school students a chance to engage in the study of the Bible and Lutheran theology.**

# True Unity: Reflections on the Augsburg Confession, Part 3

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that many believe that the true unity of the Church is found in a common socio/political agenda. Those who do not share or will not support this agenda are anathematized.

A further problem arises when we consider what the AC, Article V, says about the Ministry:

*To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>*

## The Holy Spirit Gives Faith in Jesus Christ

The primary calling of the pastor and the primary mission of the congregation is to preach the Word of God, in Law and Gospel, and to administer the Sacraments. The Lutheran Church confesses that it is through these means that God gives the Holy Spirit. It is this Holy Spirit that gives the gift of justifying faith in Jesus Christ. In turn, it is faith that becomes active in good works for the neighbor. (See Article VI on the New Obedience.) You might say that through the faithful ministry of the pastor and congregation, God brings about true change in persons, communities and the world.

## Lost Confidence in the Gospel?

One of my primary concerns with the current emphasis on political advocacy and engagement in the ELCA is that it suggests we have lost confidence in the power of the Gospel to change the world. It is often suggested that the mission of the Church is to be transformative. It is our calling to change the world. And it is through engagement in the issues of the day and in the promotion of certain political causes that the Church truly makes a difference. This turns the Augsburg Confession on its head.

## Political Advocacy Is ELCA Pastoral Duty?

Of more concern is the notion that, within the

**The Lutheran Church confesses that it is through the Word of God and the Sacraments that God gives the Holy Spirit.**

**Through the faithful ministry of the pastor and congregation, God brings about true change in persons, communities and the world.**

ELCA, it is the duty of pastors to promote the political causes and agendas endorsed by the larger denomination. Wording in the standard letter of call in ELCA synods says that a pastor shall “impart knowledge of this church and its wider ministry through distribution of its communications and publications.” When the focus of the ELCA was primarily on Word and Sacrament ministry, this was not problematic. When the majority of the communications and publications of the ELCA focus on political advocacy, however, it turns the pastor into a political operative or press agent.

## Unity via the Gospel and the Sacraments

The current direction of the ELCA in regard to political engagement and advocacy presents a serious challenge to the ministry of pastors and congregations as outlined in the AC. It encourages and sometimes insists that we welcome a major cause of division into our congregations at a time when the political divide is at its worst. It would prevent us from finding the only unity that is necessary, namely unity through the Gospel and the Sacraments.

**The current direction of the ELCA encourages and sometimes insists that we welcome a major cause of division into our congregations at a time when the political divide is at its worst.**

<sup>1</sup> Theodore G. Tappert. Augsburg Confession (Kindle Locations 79-81). Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore G. Tappert. Augsburg Confession (Kindle Locations 88-89). Kindle Edition.

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## Pro-Ecclesia Conference

The Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology (CCET) will sponsor the 2020 Pro-Ecclesia Conference at Loyola University in Baltimore, Maryland from June 8-10. This summer’s topic is The Sermon on the Mount.

The CCET is “a theological enterprise of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians whose goal is to promote faithfulness throughout the Church to the Word of God in Jesus Christ.”

Click [here](#) for registration and hotel information.

## How to Tactfully Navigate Conversations About ... Faith

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who they are, not just in what you want to tell them.

For many people I've probably just ratcheted up the anxiety level even higher. After all, it's a lot harder to talk with someone than it is to talk at them. If I'm talking at a person, I'm in complete control. I don't have to worry about anything they might say because ... I'm never giving them a chance to say anything. But engaging in a dialogue is scarier. All of a sudden I have to worry about what someone else is going to say to me, and that's what I don't know if I can handle.

**I don't know if I can handle what someone else is going to say to me.**

But dialogue doesn't need to be scary. In fact, it's a lot easier than many people think. There are three easy steps that can serve as a broad outline to any faith conversation, and with just a little bit of practice all of us can all become more comfortable declaring Christ both with our actions and our words.

### First Pray

The first step should be the most obvious but is one I think too many people today skip over. *Pray*. God has told us not to be discouraged because He will be with us. Do we believe Him? Walking with us in our times of need is an incredibly small thing compared to dying on the cross. If God did the latter, shouldn't we be able to trust Him to do the former? Yet we live in a culture that tells us to pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps and praises individual accomplishment. So ironically even in much of our ministry, many Christians try to "do it on their own" without first stopping and asking the Holy Spirit to be a part of what they are undertaking. Just like we should pray before every ministry meeting, we should pray when we set out to evangelize.

### Then Look for Opportunities

Second, we need to *look for opportunities*. They're all around us. Most of the time we're just not paying attention. Michael Ramsden, President of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, tells a story about a time he was in a hair salon and overheard the owner say to a stylist next to her, "My business is doing so well but there must be more to life than this."<sup>1</sup> That was an opportunity, and he took it. There *is* more to life than suc-

**Be aware of the god our culture is worshipping.**

ceeding in business, no matter what our culture says. By paying attention to what was going on around him, Mr. Ramsden was able to start up a conversation that led to an hour and fifteen-minute discussion of the gospel.

### Keep Doors Open

Not every opening will be that obvious. Recognizing when these chances arise will often require us to have at least a basic understanding of the topics that are permeating our culture. Maybe it's a meme circulating on social media. Maybe it's the acceptance speech some Hollywood celebrity just gave at an awards show. Maybe it's the latest blockbuster in the movie theater. People are always talking about something, and those "somethings" very often will open the door to a discussion on faith. The question is simply whether we are going to walk through it. We don't need to immerse ourselves in every aspect of contemporary Western culture. But at the same time, we can't be completely oblivious to it either. Paul knew what the Greeks valued when he spoke at the Areopagus. We need to be aware of what unknown god our culture is worshipping.

**Our goal is to listen and have a dialogue.**

### Ask Questions

So, we've prayed, we've seen an opportunity arise, and now we're wondering how to seize it. What do we say to get the conversation started? That leads into step 3, *ask, don't tell*. This one seems a bit counter-intuitive to some people. If we have all this information we want the other person to hear, shouldn't we be the one doing the talking and they be the one doing the listening? Actually, you can accomplish even more by primarily using questions, plus you gain some other important advantages.

**When a person makes a statement, the first thing to ask is a question.**

Questions invite the other person to speak. They can't shut down because you are talking *at* them if they are doing most of the talking. But even though they are doing most of the talking, you are actually in control of the conversation. Questions determine which topics are up for discussion, and you are the person asking all the questions. Finally, questions foster conversation. When one person is asking a question and another is giving an answer, there are two people invested in the discussion. Our goal is not to lecture, but to listen and have a dialogue.

Greg Koukl has a fantastic book called *Tactics: A*

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## How to Tactfully Navigate ... Christian Faith

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*Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions.* Anyone who wants to learn more about how to effectively evangelize should have a copy, read it, and keep it handy. Koukl calls his primary tactic the “Columbo Tactic,” named after the famous television detective played by Peter Falk. Columbo was famous for asking question after question while investigating a case, and our approach to evangelism can look very similar.

### Three Ways to Direct a Conversation

Koukl explains three ways we can use questions to direct a conversation. The first is to use them to gather more information. An example is, “What do you mean by that?”<sup>2</sup> When a person makes a statement, the first thing we should do is ask a question. Something of the variety of “What do you mean by that?” not only allows us to make sure we are understanding them correctly, but sometimes it gets the other person to think through what they’re saying. In today’s social media age, many people are merely repeating slogans they’ve heard that sounded good, but they have no idea what they actually mean.

The second way to use questions is to reverse the burden of proof. Koukl’s example for this is, “How did you come to that conclusion?”<sup>3</sup> There is a trap that almost all of us have fallen into from time to time. Someone makes a statement that we know is false. Our immediate instinct is to explain to them why it is false. So, we launch into our long explanation, rattling off all our evidence, convinced that in the end the other person will come around and see things our way. If we do that, we end up talking *at* people again and their defensive walls will spring right up.

There’s a better way to handle this situation. When someone makes a statement that runs contrary to what God has told us to be true, just ask them a

1. **“What do you mean by that?”**
2. **“How did you come to that conclusion?”**
3. **“Have you ever considered...?”**

**Asking shows genuine interest in them and their opinion.**

question. Start out by making sure you are understanding them correctly with “What do you mean by that?” But then follow it up with “How did you come to that conclusion?” It may surprise you to hear that the vast majority of conversations I engage in with people when they make claims like this never need to get past this second question. Most people have no idea how they arrived at any particular conclusion.

Their claim wasn’t borne out of some rational evaluation of the arguments and evidence resulting in a well thought out conclusion.

They read some meme online that they agreed with, so now they’re just repeating it. If someone else makes a

claim, it is not your job to refute it. It is their job to defend it. Asking them politely “How did you come to that conclusion” is one way to respectfully place the burden on them, where it belongs.

The third way Koukl suggests we can use questions is to make a point.<sup>4</sup> This is where you finally have the opportunity to inject all that information you have inside your head into the conversation. But you still need to resist the temptation to talk *at* people. The most inviting way to insert information into the discussion is to use a question. “Have you ever considered...?” “What do you think about...?”

### Ask, Don’t Tell

There’s a fundamental difference between merely *telling* people information and *asking* them questions about it. When you *tell*, you may come across as if you believe you are smarter or superior. But when you *ask*, you are showing genuine interest in them and their opinions. At the same time, you are inviting them to think through something they may not have thought about before. They are much more likely to do so if they don’t feel like they are being “preached at.”

Suppose you know absolutely nothing about embryology, but you hear someone say, “Christians have no right to object to abortion unless they’re willing to take care of all the extra babies that will be born if abortion is outlawed.” You can still ask them a “what do you mean by that” type of question. For example, “I just want to make sure I’m understanding you correctly. You’re saying that no one has the right to object to unborn children being killed unless

**When someone makes a statement that runs contrary to what God has told us to be true, ask a question. Make sure you understand them correctly with “What do you mean by that?”**

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## How to Tactfully Navigate Conversations on ... Faith

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they're willing to take care of those unborn children, is that right?" You could follow it up with a question of the "how did you come to that conclusion" variety. "How is it that my not having the resources to personally take care of a child makes it okay to kill it?"

Too often people hesitate to evangelize because they don't think they know enough. They want to leave that sort of thing to the "professionals," like their pastor. But each and every one of us is expected to share our faith, not just those in church leadership. Anyone can ask questions, so all of us know enough to get out there and get started.

### Admit You Don't Know

But what if someone says something that you don't know how to answer? That is one of the biggest causes of anxiety, and yet at the same time it is one of the easiest questions to answer. If someone asks you something you don't know how to answer, you politely say, "I don't know the answer to that. Let me look into it and I'll get back to you." Then you politely end the conversation.

### Conversion Is the Holy Spirit's Job

We often put way too much pressure on ourselves. We think that each and every conversation needs to result in the other person accepting Christ or else it was useless. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have to remember that conversion isn't our job. We can't convert anybody anyway. That's the Holy Spirit's doing. Our job is to do as we have been instructed, so that if the Spirit wants to use us as an instrument through which He works, then we are obediently available.

### To Sum It Up

Greg Koukl describes a more modest goal he sets for himself when engaging in evangelistic conversations. "All I want to do is put a stone in someone's shoe. I want to give him something worth thinking about, something he can't ignore because it continues to poke at him in a good way."<sup>5</sup> We worry so much about what other people will say because we think we need to have all the answers. We don't. Just set yourself a modest goal and get out there and share the gospel. First, *pray*. Second, *look for opportunities*. Third, *ask, don't tell*. Use questions to gather information, to reverse the burden of proof and to

make a point. We all know that we *should* be sharing God's good news. Hopefully this basic outline can help reassure you as to *how*.

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Public Christianity, "Conversation Apologetics – Michael Ramsden," March 24, 2018, video, 44:32, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MJb5\\_2CABI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MJb5_2CABI).

<sup>2</sup> Greg Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 49-52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-87.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



## For All the Saints

Twenty-five years ago the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (ALPB) published *For All the Saints (FATS)*, a four-volume prayer book that always seems new and is still in demand today. Each individual volume can be purchased for \$38 plus shipping or the entire set can be purchased for \$140 (shipping included).

To keep up with demand, the [ALPB](#) is going to reprint FATS in 2020 with a few minor changes.

For more information, click [here](#).

## Why They May Not Hear You

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der, is their enlivening hope in the advent of Christ? You can always smell a church without a Christ-centered vision of the future, especially if you've had prior experience in smelling corpses.

### How Now Shall We Respond?

So Strawson and Long may have touched on something significant. Their reflections dovetail with what others have noted about the growth of a “new paganism” in America, given that many non-traditional spiritualities also lack a clearly linear conception of time. But now the question is: how shall confessing Lutherans respond?

First, we should answer for ourselves the basic challenges that the episodic mindset poses to our confession of faith. For example, speaking of forgiveness necessarily assumes the relevance of both the past and the future to the present. Forgiveness only matters as part of a story where people are otherwise responsible for their past action and face condemnation in the future. But why should that be? Why should my actions yesterday have any claim on who I am today? Don't Lutherans believe in a “new Adam and Eve rising daily” before God?

### Why the Past and Future Matter

In response, Lutherans might start with what we consider the hallmark condition for freedom and life before God: “the righteous shall live by faith.” Trust in Christ justifies the sinner, Scripture says, and just a little reflection on the nature of faith will reveal why the past and future matter as much as the present.

Simply put, trust is necessary for happiness. It is trust that allows us to form commitments that provide us with daily security and open the future to such fundamental things as love and family. At the same time, trust thrives on the past and anticipates a future. Whether it's trust in God or trust in our neighbor, faith in anyone depends on the reliability of that person, a reliability that is only known through the narrative of that person's past. As a colleague of mine points out, you may consider yourself as free of your past as you wish, but your boss may have other thoughts. A boss relies on your dependability in anticipation of the company's future success.

### Why Trade Freedom for Bondage?

Having reflected on those connections between happiness, trust, and time, confessing Lutherans may then critique the episodic mentality and answer its challenges with the renewing Word. By way of the Law, we may press a culture that seeks to ignore the past and future with a simple question: why would

you trade freedom for bondage? Why give up the necessary conditions for *trust* and *commitment* and *love* (the life God would have for you)?

Indeed, why not acknowledge things for how they really are, even if it means finding yourself saddled with a history of wrong? Facing our past error ultimately sets the stage for greater trust, commitment, and love in the future by exposing our unreliability and asserting that both God and we hope to end it.

Then, having exposed the happy life's dependence on both the past and the future, we may introduce the narrative of God's utter dependability. His trustworthiness, pictured through the history of Israel and fulfilled in Jesus, not only justifies the existence of sinners now — they exist for His glory, as it turns out — but it also opens the future with the promise of their ultimate healing. Preaching this faithfulness of God starts to root a rootless culture into His narrative.

### Rise of the New Adam

It also allows us to grant the episodic mindset at least one gracious nod. Inherent to episodic thinking is the desire to be continually new. As noted earlier, some might say that thinking episodically is good Lutheranism. “Don't Lutherans believe in a new Adam or Eve emerging daily?” Yes, it is essential to faith in Holy Baptism! Recognizing that the past and future play a role in shaping identity should never steal from the believer that fresh joy of Christ.

But now we can see what makes such joy possible. The believer only comes to newness of life by trusting God's trustworthiness over the sinner's unreliability. That is, it only comes by way of repentance, and that repentance is made possible only through trust in God's mighty works and what they promise in the world to come. Only through this intersection of the Biblical narrative and one's personal narrative does the New Adam arise.

I'm not writing these reflections to advocate a renewal of narrative preaching. To the contrary, I agree with Long that the narrative preaching of the last century has probably enjoyed its heyday. But consideration of how the church and its neighbors divide over one key aspect of narrative (time!) may help us speak the Gospel. It may lead us to understand better why some people are not hearing us, and how we may overcome that divide with the good news that turns past, present, and future into a really good time.



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<b>Lutheran Week (NALC Convocation)</b>	Omni William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA	Aug. 3-7, 2020	God The Father Creates	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>2020 Global Lutheran Forum</b>	Wittenberg, Germany	Sep. 1-6, 2020	TBD	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>LCMC 20th Annual Gathering and Convention</b>	Arden Hills, MN North Heights Lutheran Church	Oct. 4-7, 2020	TBD	<a href="#">Click here</a>
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