



# Lutheran Coalition for Renewal CORE Voice

**A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans**

Issue 3 2020  
May

## All In!

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



## In This Issue:

- What did Jesus provide his disciples when they were in quarantine?
- The ELCA is in danger of neglecting the one thing that only the Church can do.
- What do our youth need to know about the internet in their search for truth?
- Going forward, what can we expect to be different in our congregational lives?
- What gives us value?

Something I find very encouraging are the plans for reopening our lives, including our churches. Typically those plans include three or four steps, a delineation of the conditions that would need to exist in order to go to the next step, a warning that it would be easy to have to go back to a previous step, and a concern for the elderly, those with prior conditions, and others who are among the most vulnerable. Typically, the steps basically go in this order – from severe social distancing protocols to moderate social distancing protocols to limited social distancing protocols.

Thinking through the well-known account in John 20 of Jesus’ appearing to His disciples on Easter Sunday evening, when Thomas was not with them, and then a week later, when Thomas was with them, I find the early disciples going through very similar steps.

### STEP ONE

John starts out by telling us that on Easter Sunday evening “the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.” (verse 19) Like we have been, so the disciples were under strict self-quarantine. They were inside, not because of a virus, but because of their fear of the Jewish leaders who might do to them what they had done to Jesus. And the doors were not only shut, they were locked.

What did Jesus give to them to help them move from step one to step two? Six things, and Jesus wants to and can give the same six things to us.



## Inside this Issue:

All In! .....	<a href="#">p. 1</a>
Ministry in Pandemic Era .....	<a href="#">p. 2</a>
An Appeal to Youth .....	<a href="#">p. 3</a>
Reflections on Augsburg Confession, Part 4 .....	<a href="#">p. 4</a>
All Are Wonderfully Made .....	<a href="#">p.5</a>
Two New Facebook Groups ...	<a href="#">p.7</a>
Generous Response .....	<a href="#">p. 8</a>
Enfleshed Word (Encuentro).	<a href="#">p. 11</a>
For All the Saints ALPB .....	<a href="#">p. 11</a>
Coming Events .....	<a href="#">p. 12</a>

Continued on [page 6](#)

## Ministry in the Pandemic Era

by [Dr. Don Brandt](#), Director, Congregations in Transition for Lutheran CORE



As I sit here, under Oregon's version of quarantine, I have been reflecting on the extraordinary challenges facing American society in general, but also local churches in particular. Even with the uncertainties of how the current pandemic will be playing out over the next six to eighteen months, there are a few predictions I think we can make with a relatively high degree of confidence.

### Predictions

**First**, no matter how quickly and efficiently local and state governments suspend legal restrictions to allow businesses, schools, and churches to reopen, this will *not* result in an immediate return to the life we knew before this last January. And it's not just cruise lines and airlines who will discover that it might take one to two years to return to "business as usual"; this will also be true for small, local businesses and, I dare say, many *churches*. My oldest son, Jason, is CEO of the non-profit Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association. As you can imagine, the business owners he serves have seen a virtual collapse of their industry. And for many of them their restaurants and hotels will never reopen. So besides trying to help his members access limited federal and state loans to survive in the short-term, Jason is now, with his staff, wrestling with how he can advise his members when it comes to *the challenge of motivating their customers to return once business restrictions are lifted*. Many pastors and church leaders will be facing a similar challenge in the months ahead.

**Second**, until we have an effective and available vaccine, there will be on-going anxiety and uncertainty in many if not most American communities. Epidemiologist Michael Osterholm of the University

of Minnesota, put it well when quoted in the April 22<sup>nd</sup> issue of *The Washington Post*. "As a country, we're unprepared not just logistically but mentally for this next phase." He expressed, in this article, that most Americans do not grasp the difficult months ahead and the likelihood of repeated surges of the virus. "For a while, people were told all we need is to get past the peak. Then, they started hearing all we need is testing... The way you prepare people for a sprint and marathon are very different. As a country, we are utterly unprepared for the marathon ahead." I anticipate that while most of the country begins "opening up," the national media will be quick to highlight news stories of those communities which will occasionally be dealing with local outbreaks. This will result in increased anxiety in the rest of the country; even to some degree in communities that have no covid-19 patients in their local hospital. And I suspect this anxiety will be especially prevalent among older adults concerned about their own personal vulnerabilities to this virus. Because of this, pastors and lay leaders need to factor in the median age of their members when trying to anticipate the ministry challenges ahead.

**These predictions will impact four areas of congregational life.**

The above predictions have profound implications for local congregations. And they will impact, in particular, four areas of congregational life: community service, worship ministries, member care, and financial giving.

1. **Community Service Outreach** It is essential, given the scope of the financial damage our nation has incurred in just the last couple of months, that Christian congregations be proactive in reaching out to those in need, especially in their local communities. Our economy is already in a new, major recession. Millions are suddenly out of work, and food banks across the country have been inundated by unprecedented numbers of people in need of emergency assistance. The local church needs to step up, for two reasons: First, because it has always been our scriptural mandate. And second, because each of our congregations will likely be judged, by many of the unchurched and dechurched members of our communities, based on how we respond to those in need during this national crisis. Virtually every

Continued on [page 8](#)

# An Appeal to Youth: Take Yourself — and Jesus — Seriously

by [Pr. Brett Jenkins](#), Asst. Dean, NE Mission District, NALC, & former member of the board of Lutheran CORE

## Life Was Not All It Could Be

“Well, I *do* watch a lot of YouTube videos.” The twenty-something young man sitting in my office said it to me with an air of pride — even conceit. We had spent the last two hours playing question and answer. He had asked me to make time in my day to talk with him personally after he had been away from the church since his confirmation, and I was only too happy to do it; pastors don’t typically get into this line of work because we have a burning passion for



paperwork. It was clear from his slouched demeanor, unkempt dress, and his father’s concern for his persistent depression and “failure to launch,” which had prompted him to call me, that life was not all it could be for him.

I was concerned for him. I was happy to answer his questions, but it had become apparent after two hours of doing so that he was not genuinely seeking answers; for when I gave them or offered resources that might help him think through a question, he immediately moved on to ask a different question, seeming to hope that this would be the one that forced me to affirm without reservation the ideas he had gleaned from that modern day Oracle of Delphi, Google. He didn’t come seeking wisdom or even new data; he came seeking a reason to *not* change the very points of view that were giving birth to the misery that had prompted him to call me in the first place.

I began life as a youth minister. Four of the best years of my life were spent ministering to and with the youth of Zion Lutheran Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I not only loved that time in my life, but I continue to have such an abiding passion for youth that even when I was the senior pastor of a church

and could partially define my own job description, I chose to make work with our high school students one of my primary responsibilities. Youth is a time when we make choices whose consequences shape our future in ways we can only guess at, but equally, it is a time when we can shift our convictions more easily than in later life, when we have so much more invested in the trajectory we are already on.

**He came seeking a reason to *not* change the very points of view that were giving birth to his misery.**

So momentous are the choices we make in our youth, that we cannot guess at the significance we will attribute to them in later life. Whether and who we should date and/or marry, what kind of work will make up the bulk of our waking hours, how we will spend our time, money and effort, and what kind of mark we will make on the world — at least, our little corner of it — are all things that properly consume our energy and attention at this time of life.

All those aspects of life — and many more — are areas about which our convictions about ultimate things have something to say. They are things about which the Bible in general has a great deal to say and Jesus, in particular, has even more. During my conversation with the young man I mentioned above, he made *rudimentary* mistakes about the very Biblical stories about which he was questioning me, and his mistakes in reasoning were even worse; yet clearly, he considered himself something of a great thinker — the intellectual equivalent of the classic self-made man.

## Enough to Be Dangerous

Now, the truth is, I deeply respect such people when they are people of genuine skill and achievement. They often bring a necessary outsider’s insight to intractable problems in their field and are catalysts for true change. But Google and its internet ilk can give us the impression that we have achieved such status when, in fact, we have simply acquired just enough knowledge to be dangerous.

The sources of information on the internet are provided to you free of cost simply because the advertisers on the pages you frequent pick up the tab. They pay for a presence on these pages, not because they *hope* that you will be someone interested in their

Continued on [page 9](#)

# Reflections on the Augsburg Confession, Part 4

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

**Our teachers have been falsely accused of forbidding good works. AC, Article XX<sup>1</sup>**

One of the charges that is often made against traditional Lutherans is that they are opposed to efforts on the part of Christians to work for peace and justice. This charge is made because traditional Lutherans criticize the emphasis on political advocacy in the ELCA. This is inaccurate. We no more forbid our fellow Christians from working for peace and justice than the Lutheran reformers forbid the doing of good works. Rather, like the reformers, we are concerned about the blurring of the distinction between Law and Gospel, Faith and Works, Justification and Vocation, and the like.

One way to get at this distinction is to focus on the concept of Vocation. The Augsburg Confession says,

**It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call. (Article XIV)<sup>2</sup>**

What does this mean? It means that although we believe that all Christians are equal in Christ, that in Holy Baptism all are filled with the Holy Spirit, and that all are called to bear witness to Christ through word and deed, no one has the right to take it upon himself to walk into the pulpit and begin preaching. No one has the right to take it upon herself to walk up to the table and preside at the Lord's Supper. That is reserved for the person who has been called and ordained into the Office of Ministry.

## Called by God

What is not as well known is that Lutherans believe there are other offices to which people are called by God. Those other offices include mother, father, husband, wife, son, daughter, sister, brother, and neighbor. These center around the home. In regard to the workplace, people are called into the office of employer and employee, buyer and seller, merchant and customer. People are called into various professions. As Christians, we believe that each office we hold represents an opportunity for faith to be active in love through service to our neighbor. This is what Lutherans call the doctrine of Vocation (from the Latin word for "calling").

The doctrine of Vocation helps clear up the confusion that often arises around the concept of the



Priesthood of All Believers. The Priesthood of All Believers does not mean that at any moment a Christian may assume any office he or she chooses. It does not mean that anyone can walk into the pulpit and preach. It doesn't mean that anyone who feels moved at the moment can preside at the Lord's Supper. That is reserved for persons called into the proper office.

At the same time, however, it does not mean that I, as a pastor, can walk into your home and assume the role of father. I cannot walk into your place of business and assume the role of owner or manager. I cannot decide that today I want to practice law and that tomorrow I want to practice medicine. My call is not yours, but in the same way your call is not mine. You serve as priest in your home, office, or place of work.

**No one has the right to take it upon himself to walk into the pulpit and begin preaching.**

## Confusion and Politics

This confusion of priesthood and vocation is most evident today in the realm of politics. When a person becomes a member of a congregation through Affirmation of Baptism, they promise among other things to "strive for justice and peace in all the earth." Indeed, the Lutheran Church affirms that striving for justice and peace is the calling of every Christian in baptism. The confusion arises when we think that it is the calling of the pastor or congregation to do this for the *individual* Christian.

Christians in the United States hold many offices that pertain to justice and peace. The most important office in this regard is the office of citizen. As a citizen, you vote for those who will hold public office and have the power to set policy and administer and

Continued on [page 7](#)

## Bethesda: All People Are Wonderfully Made

by [Mona Fuerstenau](#), Director of Ministry Partnerships for Bethesda

*Editor's Note: Mona Fuerstenau's conviction that all people are "wonderfully made" began in high school while working with children with learning disabilities. That led her to study Speech Pathology, Gerontology and Psychology. She worked in those fields before becoming a parent of two diverse learners; they were her post graduate education in celebrating difference, inspiring advocacy, and challenging the status quo. Her position as ministry consultant at Bethesda has led to many speaking opportunities such as the 2019 NALC Life conference. Bethesda is a nationwide 501(c)(3) charity whose mission is to "enhance the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through services that share the good news of Jesus Christ." Her passion is for all people marginalized by difference to find refuge and a place of belonging in the life of the church.*



The very real conversations today in this country and around the globe about the perceived lack of value of a life lived with disability is disturbing to say the least. The abortion rate of babies prenatally diagnosed with disability is terribly high. The arguments about being a burden to family and therefore withholding medical treatment or withdrawing life sustaining measures are becoming louder. The incidence of courts valuing the family's right to define the value or quality of life of someone very much alive are agonizing to watch. So where do we begin? Scripture of course.

Psalm 139:13-16 "For *You* created my inmost being; *You* knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise *You* because I am fearfully and wonderfully

made; *Your* works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from *You* when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." [emphasis added]



These verses profess the sanctity of every life. Bethesda has a joint initiative with [Lutherans for Life](#) and it is a natural fit. We are all about life, in all its ages and stages and abilities. No one is "less than another" to God. God calls everyone to minister in His Kingdom. Abilities and experiences uniquely equip each of us. Our witness to and with and from people with disabilities, or suicide survivors, or post abortion, or at end of life is woven throughout and has its foundation in these words.

I encourage you to think about how your congregation, as a *life* affirming place, can begin to see people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as also in need of that life affirmation.

There is a wonderful word picture in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12 of the body of Christ. It talks about the place and work of each part of the body. And then we get to verse 22.

"On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable."

Different translations say necessary, vital, without which the total is incomplete. These are the people whom we champion. Those who are marginalized because of our perceptions. But God gives them critical status, without which the body is incomplete. Without whom none of our congregations can be complete.

The world of disability is deficit based. Even the word means "without ability." But we as Christians have our value in being a child of God. That is our foundation. We all have gifts and talents and experi-

**We as Christians  
have our value in  
being a child of  
God.**

Continued on [page 10](#)

## All In!

Continued from [page 1](#)

First, His presence. Verse 19 says, “Jesus came and stood among them.” Nothing about their circumstances – neither their fears nor the walls nor the locked doors - were able to keep Him out. And nothing about our present circumstances – including all of our fears – need keep Him away.

Second, His peace. Twice – in verse 19 and then again in verse 21 – Jesus said, “Peace be with you.” Peace is also what we need. The peace that passes understanding. The peace that the world cannot give. The peace that only God can give.

Third, unmistakable evidence of His resurrection. Verse 20 – “He showed them His hands and His side.” We also need unmistakable evidence that Jesus is alive. We need the reliable, eyewitness accounts of those who were there. We need that sure and certain hope that comes from knowing that God has defeated our greatest enemies – sin, death, and the power of the devil – even the impact of the corona virus - through the resurrection.

Fourth, a purpose and a calling. Verse 21 – “As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.” I know that for me – as I seek to cope with these “stay at home” days - it has been so extremely helpful to have a purpose and a calling. It has been so helpful for me to be able to be involved in ministry that I value very much. To be able to teach a Bible study that is recorded and then posted on the websites and Facebook pages of two congregations. And to be able to do my work as executive director of Lutheran CORE.

Fifth, verse 22 – “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” We do not want or need either Jesus or us to have to wear a facial mask. We are not afraid of getting the corona virus from His breathing on us. Rather we need the Holy Spirit, whom we will receive through His breathing on us.

Sixth, authority. In verse 23 Jesus said, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” The one who just before His ascension said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Matthew 28:18), has shared with us His authority. We do not need to go out timid, afraid, uncertain, and insecure. Rather we are going and we are speaking in the name of and with the authority of the one who has all authority.

### STEP TWO

All of that must have helped the disciples move from Step One to Step Two, because verse 26 tells us that a week later the disciples were again in the

house. This time Thomas was with them. And even though verse 26 tells us that the doors were shut, it does not say that they were locked. The disciples had moved from step one to step two.

Again Jesus comes and stands among them. Again He says, “Peace be with you.” The disciples, including Thomas, are now ready to move on to step three.

### STEP THREE

Jesus invites Thomas to do what Thomas had said he would need to do in order to be able to believe that Jesus is alive – “see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side.” (verse 25) But it does not say that Thomas actually did what he had said he would need to do in order to believe. Rather in verse 28 Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas became the first disciple to be recorded as actually calling Jesus God.

**Jesus gave us: His presence, His peace, evidence of His resurrection, a purpose and a calling, His breath (Holy Spirit), authority.**

### Thomas Was All In

I believe that Thomas (so called Doubting Thomas) has been given a bum rap. I believe that Thomas wanted to believe. With all his heart he wanted to believe. But death seemed final. The grave seemed irreversible. What the disciples were saying – “We have seen the Lord” (verse 25) – was just too good to be true. So, he could not believe.

But when he did come to believe, he went all the way. *He was all in.* He became the first disciple to be recorded as calling Jesus God. Other disciples had called Jesus many other things during the previous three years – Rabbi, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. But Thomas was the first disciple to call Jesus God.

And Thomas did not relapse from Step Three back to Steps One or Two. Early Christian writings say that Thomas brought the Gospel to India. The Christian church in Pakistan and India traces itself back to the evangelistic work of Thomas.

The congregation I was pastor of in southern California before I retired included a large Pakistani community. They were all related by blood or by marriage. A relative of theirs at the time was presiding bishop of the United Church of Pakistan. In February 2011 I accepted his invitation to visit the Christians and churches in Pakistan and found them to be

Continued on [page 10](#)

## Reflections on the Augsburg Confession, Part 4

Continued from [page 4](#)

enforce laws. The office of citizen is one to which you have been called and for which you are accountable to God. Other offices include elected official, civil servant, judge, juror, police officer, etc.... As Christians, we are to work for peace and justice in every office to which we have been called.

### Presuming to Speak

Is the Church called to strive for justice and peace? Yes. It does so through the various vocations that its members have. The problem arises when the ELCA believes that it is the primary work of the Church to do this for its members. More and more, it seems that the ELCA believes the work of justice and peace must be done by synod and churchwide office and assemblies, and through congregations led by their pastors. *In effect the church has attempted to usurp the offices and callings of its members, by presuming to speak for them and by using their contributions to fund that effort.*

Meanwhile, the proper office of the ministry and the congregation is neglected. While the church attempts to promulgate and administer laws, it forgets

to proclaim God's Word and administer the Sacraments. Rather than being a place of reconciliation, where people with honest disagreements about public policy are united as forgiven sinners at the Lord's Table, *the Church becomes a place of political strife, judgment, and condemnation.*

**They expect me to use my theological education and parish experience to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments.**

The irony of this is that no one cares what I, as an ELCA pastor, have to say about public policy. I can ascend the pulpit Sunday after Sunday to lecture the governor and president, state and federal legislators, judges, and juries about how things ought to be done, but it will have little effect. They don't really care about what I think.

Things only get worse if I lack expertise on a subject but presume to give policy speeches anyway. The teachers in my congregation know more than I do about education. The doctors and nurses in my congregation know more than me about medicine. Engineers know more about engineering. The active and retired military people know more than I do about national defense and foreign policy. They don't come to worship to hear my opinion on matters

about which they know more.

### Called to Be Their Pastor

Instead, they expect me to use my theological education and parish experience to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. I have been called to be their pastor. They want to hear the Law that convicts them of sin, and the Gospel that sets them free. They want to receive the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. They want me to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that they, their children, and their grandchildren may receive the salvation that God has promised. That is my office. They expect me to fulfill that calling to the best of my ability with God's help.

**More and more, it seems that the ELCA believes the work of justice and peace must be done by synod and churchwide office and assemblies, and through congregations led by their pastors.**

### Fatal Error

The ELCA is in danger of neglecting the one thing that only the Church can do, namely, preaching the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. We run the risk of being ashamed of the Gospel, thinking that our political advocacy will accomplish more. That would be a fatal error. As Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith." (Romans 1:16, NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Theodore G. Tappert. Augsburg Confession (Kindle Location 141). Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, (Kindle Location 109).

## Two New Facebook Groups!

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lutheran CORE started two new Facebook groups. One is called [CORE Viral Connections](#) (for the sick and/or anxious and for those caring for them) and the other is called [Worship in a Time of Pestilence](#) (for online worship services).

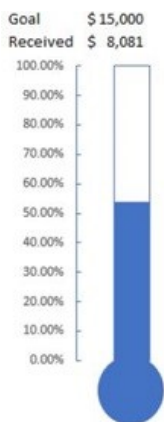
Click above or you can find these new groups by searching for their names in the Search area of the blue Facebook menubar. Please request to join.

# Thank You for Your Generous Response

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

Thank you for your generous response to our appeal for \$15,000 so that we will be able to sponsor one week of NEXUS for high schoolers at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. As of April 30, 2020, \$8,081 has been given towards our goal of \$15,000. We are 54% of the way there!

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. In addition, many college-aged mentors who have participated in the program have gone on to seminary and/or full-time church work.



The cost to host one week of NEXUS for twenty-four high school students, which includes college-age 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. The funds from Lutheran CORE will be used for a week during the summer of 2021.

If you have not already done so, please consider giving a gift to Lutheran CORE – over and above your current giving – to help fund the commitment that we have made. Please be sure to designate NEXUS on the memo line of your check.

My wife and I decided to give the amount of the financial stimulus check that we will be receiving from the federal government to five different Christian charitable causes, including NEXUS. We would like to challenge and encourage you to do the same.

# Ministry in the Pandemic Era

Continued from [page 2](#)

community now has significant numbers of residents who are poor, unemployed, and struggling to address their most basic financial needs. In addition, there are many people who are struggling with the social isolation that has become the by-product of this pandemic.

- 2. Worship Ministries** A little historical perspective: This is the first time in U.S. history that there has been a nation-wide, mass closure of churches. Not even during the 1918 influenza epidemic did so high a percentage of churches have to close. So needless to say, these are “uncharted waters.” Recently the American Enterprise Institute published, in the March 29<sup>th</sup> issue of *The New York Times*, a detailed plan for what restrictions should be maintained in local communities before our return to some kind of “normal.” One particular recommendation caught my attention: That assemblies of more than fifty people be prohibited until there is an available and effective vaccine. So, let’s imagine that this becomes the norm. What would the consequences be for local churches? Well, that depends, to a large degree, on congregational size. For mid-sized and larger churches this will mean depending on a quality, on-going, weekly online worship ministry; maybe through 2021! For smaller churches, it will mean limiting the size of their worship gatherings; possibly offering two weekly services instead of one in order that neither service exceed 50 worshipers. One idea, before regular services resume, is to survey your members regarding what kind of precautions they would prefer in order to give them “peace of mind” regarding public assembly.
- 3. Member Care** I think it’s imperative that every congregation be even more vigilant than usual in monitoring the well-being of their members. I’m concerned that this might not be taking place in mid-sized and larger churches where it’s more difficult, even in “normal times”, to provide for the emotional and spiritual needs of individual members. And there is nothing “normal” about these current “times”! This might be a good time to organize a team of volunteers to take the lead on guaranteeing that every member is being cared for. After all, the social isolation alone is making this an incredibly difficult time for many of our people. And don’t forget your members who are health care workers and first responders.

Continued on [page 9](#)



## An Appeal to Youth ...

Continued from [page 3](#)

product in the same way as a billboard advertiser, whose advertising is equally available to people of every persuasion in the cars that pass their location, but rather because your search history has indicated that you are likely — perhaps very likely — to be interested in their product. You are what salespeople called a “qualified prospect.”

**You are the product being sold on the internet.**

### Sold

Your search history will also direct you toward resources that are “themed” along the lines of inquiry you are already pursuing and unlikely to challenge your established convictions. Why? Because you will likely linger longer on those pages and be exposed to the advertising that drives the monetary engine of the internet. To put it bluntly, the advertisers are not simply trying to sell you a product, the pages you visit are selling you — your eyes — to the advertisers. You are the product being sold on the internet.

### Serious Research

What all this means is that the internet is a lousy tool for doing serious research into an important topic. You will not be exposed to the best contrarian arguments on any topic, and your natural human propensity toward confirmation bias (our tendency to not question data that affirms our current beliefs and discount data that would challenge them) will not be healthfully challenged, for that might interrupt the predictable flow of money.

By its very structure, the internet is antithetical to a serious search for the truth... and since the most important matters of our life are at stake in our choice of faith (and its attendant worldview), let alone potentially something as significant as eternal life, we can and should take the quest for religious truth seriously.

One recent trend on the internet has been celebrity “faith deconstructions.” In these personal pieces, public personalities share their often profoundly touching reasons for leaving the Christian faith in which they were raised. Many of these include somewhat detailed recounting of their intellectual journeys out of the faith, quoting scholars and/or former pastors and Christian leaders like Bart Ehrman, Rob Bell, and Bart Campolo. The problem is that they don’t often seem familiar with the most intelligent responses to and questions of their positions, and those watching their testimonies will not be helped to

find them by the internet. Besides, despite the historic use of personal, emotional testimony by some Christian groups, our sympathetic response to a charismatic person is not a reliable means of evaluating truth.

### Do This

You deserve better, and you couldn’t have more motivation to provide yourself with better. Seek wise counsel, read good, substantive books, take the quest for truth — and yourself — *seriously*, and finally, do one more thing: spend time talking to God in worship. The late Tom Hopko, Dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary and priest for 50+ years, reflected on the inestimable importance of the question of God and religious truth, saying, “If you’re not sure, you stand in worship, listen, think, and address your prayers, ‘to Whom it may concern, if you’re there.’” He had recently been informed that his grandson, named for him, had at seventeen years old declared himself an atheist.

**By its very structure, the internet is antithetical to a serious search for the truth.**

### His Truth Will Make a Difference

As a young person, you live in a world dominated by memes and internet trends. It is unlikely that you will live your life without a serious challenge to the faith that the people around you have worked so hard to pass on to you and which I hope you have embraced deeply. When that challenge happens, or even better, now, before the challenge comes, take yourself—and more importantly, Jesus—seriously. He said of Himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” and His truth will make a difference in the way you live your life.

## Ministry in the Pandemic Era

Continued from [page 8](#)

- Many of them are dealing with extraordinary and unprecedented levels of stress and anxiety.
4. Finally, the challenge of **Financial Giving**. My guess is that a great many churches will be closing their doors over the next couple of years. The combination of pandemic anxiety, cancelled worship services, and the new economic crisis will require very *proactive* stewardship strategies in the months ahead. This is the time for pastors and congregational leaders to prayerfully discuss ways to encourage members to continue in the faithful stewardship of their financial resources.

## Bethesda: All People ...

Continued from [page 5](#)



ences to bring that enrich the whole. Sometimes it takes work to see beyond the differences. It takes work. But it is critical work to show the world God’s love by being Jesus’ hands and feet.

In 1 Peter 4:10 we read: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” There are no qualifiers in this verse. It says *each* of you. Every one. Everyone is and has gifts to bring to the whole.

### Creating a Sanctuary

So, if we are going to welcome all these gifts into our congregations, we first must make it a safe place. How do we create a space of sanctuary?

Some key components we have found in our work include:

- Unconditional welcome, favorable reception,
- Communicating an authentic desire to know the hopes, dreams and needs of each person,
- Seeing everyone as not “just” a person or a family with \_\_\_\_\_,
- Identifying individual gifts, talents, and experiences to share,
- Affirming all are a necessary part of God’s family.

When we do this our congregations become richer with lived experiences. And what if the Gospel message lived out and shared by *all* people, not “in spite of” but “because of” their lived experiences, somehow makes that message more accessible to people who will not otherwise hear it as being for them?

## Resources

Bethesda has numerous resources for creating a place of belonging for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A good place to start is with disability awareness materials for all ages. Visit our website [www.BethesdaLC.org](http://www.BethesdaLC.org) and search for faith resources. We have 5 complete series and the most recent release is called *Face 2 Face*.

We have also partnered with Lutheran Hour Ministries to create a four-session course by the same name. *Face2Face, Building Relationships with People with Disabilities*. This course can be found at [www.lhm.org/learn](http://www.lhm.org/learn).

Our *Wonderfully Made* pamphlet series are also a great place to begin to understand ways to become a more inclusive and welcoming congregation. They celebrate and share ideas for communicating and easily adapting things you are currently doing. These can be ordered along with all our resources housed through Concordia Publishing House [www.cph.org/Bethesda](http://www.cph.org/Bethesda). We are currently giving away a free copy of Unit 1 of our *Building on the Rock* curriculum. Just use the coupon code BUILD.

**Everyone has gifts to bring to the whole.**

While you are on our Bethesda website check out our Home Activity Center. It’s full of ideas to do together as a family during this time of sheltering in place. And our Volunteer tab details multiple ways you can engage with the people we support and staff across the country.

If you have questions about Bethesda please don’t hesitate to ask. I can be reached at [Mona.Fuerstenau@BethesdaLC.org](mailto:Mona.Fuerstenau@BethesdaLC.org)

## All In!

Continued from [page 6](#)

incredible examples for us of courage, commitment, and faithfulness to Christ even in the midst of a very hostile environment.

In John 11: 16, when Jesus told His disciples that He would be going to Bethany, where Lazarus had recently died, Thomas told his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” Thomas is a tremendous example for us not of doubt but of courage and strength of conviction. Christians today who trace their church back to Thomas are tremendous examples for us of courage and strength of conviction. May we face all the challenges of today with the same kind and level of courage and strength of conviction. May we, like Thomas, be all in.

## Enfleshed Word / Verbo Encarnado—2020 Encuentro

by [Pr. Keith Forni](#), Lutheran CORE Member and Encuentro Convener



The Annual Inter-Lutheran *Encuentro* (Encounter) for Hispanic Latino ministries, co-sponsored by Lutheran CORE, is planned for the weekend of October 17-18, 2020 (schedule to be announced). Church leaders serving in bilingual contexts and those considering entry into Hispanic-Latino ministry will find the Encuentro to be especially beneficial.

Due to the pandemic, the event may need to be presented virtually. This year's theme: "The Enfleshed Word ... *El Verbo Encarnado*," will explore and celebrate the Advent - Christmas - Epiphany worship cycle. Accents will be placed on Advent traditions including December saints days, *Las Posadas*, Feast of the Epiphany / *Tres Reyes*, liturgies & hymns for the seasons.

The 30th anniversary of the Bilingual Ministry Resource Center (BMRC) will be celebrated with a presentation on the ministry, resources and hymn translations of the +Reverend Dimas Planas-Belfort (1934-1992), publisher with Editorial Avance

Luterano and a co-founder of the BMRC in 1990.

A Resource Fair will offer ministry materials and fairly traded, handcrafted items.

For more information please contact Pastor Keith Forni, STS, Encuentro Convener, at [keithforni@gmail.com](mailto:keithforni@gmail.com), 815 722 4800 or by mail c/o:

First and Santa Cruz

The Joliet City Center Lutheran Parish 55 West Benton Street

Joliet, IL 60432.

**Due to the pandemic, *Encuentro 2020* may need to be presented virtually.**



### ***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](#) has reprinted FATS in 2020 with a few minor changes.

For more information, click [here](#) and to read Donna Roche's article on these books click [here](#).

## 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 via our website, Facebook and Twitter feeds. Contact CORE's editor, Kim Smith, at [kss01ohio@gmail.com](mailto:kss01ohio@gmail.com).

## Coming Events

<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>LCMC 20th Annual Gathering and Convention</b>	Arden Hills, MN North Heights Lutheran Church	Oct. 4-7, 2020	20/20 Vision	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>Encuentro 2020 (Encounter 2020)</b>	Chicago, IL (possibly virtual)	Oct. 17-18, 2020	Enfleshed Word / Verbo Encarnada	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>Pro Ecclesia Conference 2021</b>	Loyola University, Baltimore, MD	June 7-9, 2021	The Sermon on the Mount	<a href="#">Click here</a>
<b>2021 Global Lutheran Forum</b>	Wittenberg, Germany	TBD 2021	TBD	<a href="#">Click here</a>

### Website Features and More

- \* CORE is excited about the opportunity to sponsor a class in 2021 at the [NEXUS Institute](#) located at Grand View University in Des Moines, Iowa. Please consider helping us [fund](#) that class!
- \* CORE's [Transitions \(CiT\) page](#) is for congregations in transition. Learn how a trained coach can be assigned to help your congregation *online*!
- \* Want to find specific newsletter articles or Letters from the Director? Check out our topical index for our Communications page. See [Topical Index](#).
- \* Check out our [Worship](#) page to see all the worship resources Pastor Cathy Ammlung has posted including [Prayers of the Church](#).
- \* CORE connects confessing congregations and pastors on its [Clergy Connect](#) page.
- \* CORE posts a new [devotion](#) each day.



### Thank you!

We are very grateful for all who support our work. Thank you, and God bless you.

Donations can be sent to our Wausau office

PO Box 1741 Wausau, WI 54402-1741

or online at [www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org).

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

Please consider setting up an ongoing regular donation via our website.

### CORE Voice

Published by Lutheran CORE

[Kim Smith](#), Editor

Read older issues [here](#).

Please copy and share widely

[www.lutherancore.org](http://www.lutherancore.org) or 1-888-810-4180