

Thanking God for Our Young Adult Group

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



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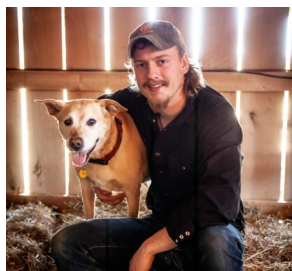
Thank you to Ethan Zimmerman for his reminding us of the power of prayer and our need to respond when someone is requesting prayer.

Thank you to Jacob Moorman for writing about a successful young adult group. Ethan and Jacob belong to a group of younger persons with whom Lutheran CORE is working.

We thank God for this group, which includes a pastor, several seminarians, several who are considering going to seminary, and others who are seeking to be faithful in their daily lives. Among the goals of this group are developing a support network for orthodox seminarians and finding ways to communicate the Christian faith to younger persons in a clear and compelling way. Please pray for them, read and *share these articles with others*.



Ethan Zimmerman



Jacob Moorman

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Our Thursday Night Group: The Lord Can Do This Anywhere

by [Mr. Jacob Moorman](#)

Editor's Note: Jacob Moorman is a student and a tax preparer with plans to attend seminary after graduation. This is his second article for CORE. Click [here](#) to read his first article.

Recently, I was honored to be asked to write about River's Edge Ministries' (REM) young adult Bible study and outreach group. I believe my generation is asking two questions: "Who am I?" and "What's my purpose?" Answering these questions together as a group has been key to our spiritual growth.

I decided to share the backstory of how we formed, what we do, how we have grown, and where we are headed. We began with God's grace and promise, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20, RSV)

From a personal perspective, our "group" began over four years ago at a local IHOP restaurant. Fresh out of high school, my good friend Ben and I felt a little unsure of what to do next in our lives. During the summer of 2016 we both took jobs in construction and we both had friends heading off in various directions. Some moved and some, like us, stayed behind. We noticed a significant void in our lives and in the lives of many around us. We couldn't find a strong young adult Bible study or community gathering taking place in our area. There were high school groups, but we had phased out of that. There were groups for couples, groups for the married, but the twenty to thirtyish age group seemed relatively overlooked, at least in our area. So the two of us decided to start meeting every Monday evening at IHOP. We resolved to study God's Word together and be intentional in prayer. That first summer we read through the Book of Acts.

We met there so often we became regulars. We befriended the waiters and waitresses. It was a special time and a memory I hold dear. We began to talk about revival and envision what the Lord was doing and what He would do one day. Our yearning to see unity in the Body of Christ was a big part of those initial conversations. We then began to talk about reaching out to our peers who hail from many

Pray for Kanye

by [Mr. Ethan Zimmerman](#)

Editor's Note: Ethan Zimmerman is a junior at Ohio Northern University where he heard the call to become a pastor. He plans to attend seminary after graduation. His grandfather, the Rev. Jerry Rhea, a NALC pastor, has encouraged Ethan to apply to the NALS.

Recently, I was sitting in my car after class, listening to music on random shuffle, and eating Taco Bell, when the song, "[Hands On](#)" from Kanye West's album, *JESUS IS KING*, started playing. I sat there listening to it, really listening, instead of passively enjoying it as I do with most music, and I had a revelation.



First, let me give you some context about Kanye West. For those who don't know, he is a famous hip hop/rap star who has written many songs that hit the top of the charts; many of those songs are quite vulgar. Recently, Kanye took a 180 degree turn and wrote a gospel album. It received both surprised and mixed reviews from the secular music world and from Christians — many people thought he had lost his mind. Kanye is currently married to Kim Kardashian, a popular reality TV star. They recently split and a divorce appears imminent.

Now why do I bring this up? Why did I entitle this, "Pray for Kanye"? I did so because I have something in common with Kanye. Over the past year or

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Send Me Your (Best) Sermons!

by Cathy Ammlung, Director, former director and secretary of the board of Lutheran CORE

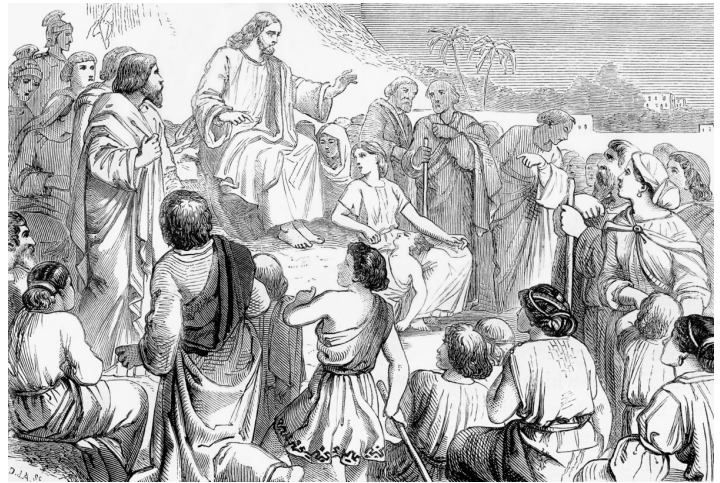
I have a soft spot in my heart for small congregations, congregations of any size in transition, and churches whose isolation and resources make it difficult to field an “emergency fill-in” pastor, much less an interim or called pastor. That’s one reason I compile [hymn suggestions](#) and write [intercessory prayers](#), even though they are widely used by congregations of all sizes and staffing. Churches without a regular pastoral presence have enough to do without crafting prayers, selecting hymns to go with the appointed tests... or figuring out how the Word will be faithfully preached every week. That’s what I want to talk about now.

Yes, there are sermon resources online. They’re hit and miss. They may have great illustrations but lack theological “meat”. They may be unorthodox, at odds with classic Lutheran doctrine, or overly pedantic. The Board of Lutheran CORE hopes to provide a data base of solid, biblically faithful, and doctrinally orthodox sermons for congregations to download when the need arises. Maybe they’re house churches or are facing a long vacancy with few prospects for interim pastoral leadership. Don Brandt and his brilliant [Congregations in Transition \(CiT\)](#) initiative helps address some of the challenges such churches face. Or maybe the pastor took ill on a Saturday night and a supply preacher isn’t available. It’d be a blessing for them to have one place to search for good sermons to use: by Scripture, day in the church year, or topic.

So this is a call for pastors to help out congregations in such situations. I want your sermons! Please email them to cammlung@gmail.com.

Here are some basic criteria:

1. ***When you submit a sermon, make a note at the beginning as to the main Scripture(s) referenced; the day in the church year/lectionary for which it is appropriate; and, if applicable, the general topic. That way we can cross reference sermons so they can be searched in several ways.***
2. Select sermons that you’d entrust to a layperson in your own congregation to preach if you couldn’t be there.
3. No “First-person” sermons. They’re too unique to you.
4. Similarly, be careful about mentioning situations or people that may be specific to your own congregation and difficult to modify to be of more general use. If a person’s situation, however, may be more universally shared, please change names to protect the innocent!



5. Avoid using sermons that feature time-sensitive topics or express specific personal political beliefs. They don’t transport (or age) well.
6. Sermons should be full manuscripts, not notes, lists, or talking points. Please check for, and correct, errors in grammar and spelling!
7. If possible, sermons should take under 15 minutes to preach. Someone else will be using your words, style, and thoughts. That’s harder (mentally and physically), than using their own.
8. I will edit *very lightly*: Grammar, spelling, factual errors, or the stray name of a parishioner (for privacy’s sake). If I think any other edits need to be made, I will ask your permission.
9. Please don’t have your feelings hurt if a sermon doesn’t appear online. It may be a time factor and it’ll show up later. If I think a sermon is simply not suitable for use ***as per the criteria I’ve listed***, I may ask you to either modify it or withdraw it. It does *not* mean I think it’s a bad sermon or you’re a bad preacher!

This is going to take some time to compile, organize, and put online. You can be selecting and submitting topical sermons immediately, as well as sermons from later in Cycle B (2nd half of Pentecost, year of Mark). But also start setting aside, editing, and submitting sermons that can be used in Cycle C (Year of Luke). I will try to give folks a heads-up when more contributions are needed. Again, please send stuff as Word documents to cammlung@gmail.com.

Thank you!

Thank You and a Warm Welcome

by [Kim Smith](#), Editor and President of the Board of Luther-

To quote a famous Lutheran CORE Executive Director, "One of my greatest joys and privileges ... is to be able to work with such an outstanding board of directors. This is a very dedicated group of seven men and women who love the Lord, love the church, and are committed to the work of Lutheran CORE." I completely agree.



As a board, we say a fond farewell to Pr. Cathy Ammlung, Mr. Rob Kittel, and Pr. Keith Forni (left to right above) and thank them for serving as secretary, treasurer and *Encuentro* convener, respectively. Cathy literally used to send the meeting minutes to my inbox *before* I hung up the phone from our teleconferences and she wrote many excellent [articles](#) for Lutheran CORE as well as [hymn suggestions](#) and [prayers](#) of the church. We look forward to her next endeavor for CORE ([sermons](#)). Rob was *always* on top of our financial situation and could be counted on for sage advice and constitutional expertise. We are very happy that he will continue to serve on our financial team. Keith brought his passion for Spanish-English bilingual ministry to the table. He was (and is) always looking for ways to make connections with other Spanish speakers and to highlight positive ELCA programs such as [The Uncle Charlie Program at St. Timothy](#).



The board of Lutheran CORE warmly welcomes our three new directors, Pr. Patti Abel (NALC), Mr. James Speckhard (LCMC), and Pr. K. Craig Moorman (NALC and LCMC). Thank you for joining us on this sometimes crazy journey. Patti will serve as our secretary and Jim as our treasurer. Craig pastors at River's Edge Ministries in Mt. Airy, Maryland and is all about discipleship (for reference see the article by his middle son Jacob, above).

How is this Woke Agenda Working for You?

by [Pr. Steve Shipman](#), Dean, Western Mission District of the Atlantic Mission Region, NALC, former Director of Lutheran CORE

The ELCA has long bragged in its news releases by a tag line reporting how significant it is because of its size. One could cite this as another example of a Theology of Glory, but then 'God's Work Our Hands' sounds rather ostentatious too (not to mention synergistic).

Anyhow, the current tag line reads: "The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.3 million members in more than 8,900 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther."

Compare this to the tagline in the oldest press release I saved, from August 2016:

"The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.7 million members in more than 9,300 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer, Martin Luther."

Since 2021 statistics are not available yet, that means that the ELCA admits to the loss of more than 400,000 members in the four-year period from 2016 through 2020, meaning a hemorrhage of around 80,000 souls per year. The drop of roughly 400 congregations would come out to an average of about 80 per year. And these are "net" figures, after any growth in either category.

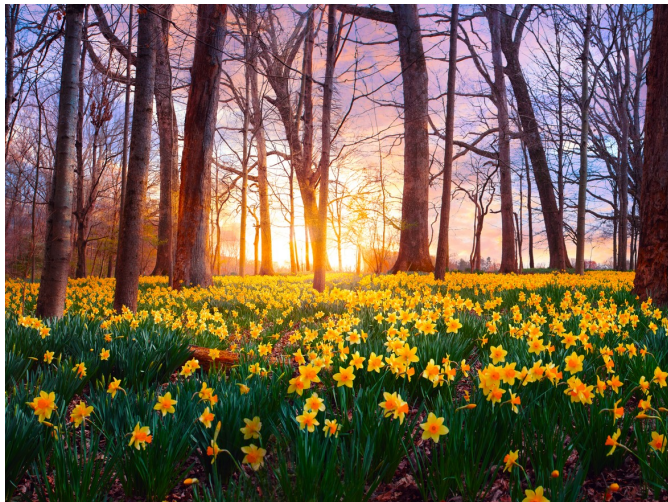
As Dr. Phil might ask, "How is all this inclusiveness working for you?"



CORE's Support to Orthodox ELCA Pastors

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

A while back someone asked how Lutheran CORE supports faithful, confessional, orthodox ELCA pastors who are serving in ELCA congregations. It is a good question. In the March 2019 issue of our newsletter, CORE Voice, I sought to answer that question. Here I will be providing an update to my answer.



First of all, I would again want to say that when I speak of confessional, orthodox ELCA pastors who are serving (or did serve) in ELCA congregations, I am also speaking of myself. I am ELCA rostered. I served the same congregation (first ALC, then ELCA) for forty years before my retirement in June 2014. So I will also be speaking of ways in which Lutheran CORE was of support to me during my years of ministry.

Let me also say at the beginning that we feel that part of our calling as Lutheran CORE is to alert people to ways in which orthodoxy is being threatened in the ELCA. We inform people of how the ELCA is not keeping its promise to honor also the traditional view of marriage and human sexuality. We know that there are many faithful, confessional, orthodox pastors still in the ELCA, and we want to be of support to them in every way that we can. But we also believe that that number is continually diminishing as many of them have retired, are retiring, or soon will retire. Our role is to support those who are working to be faithful in the ELCA, those who have decided that being faithful requires them to leave the ELCA, and those who are in the process of determining how God is calling them to be affiliated.

Having said that, I will now list a number of ways in which CORE seeks to support confessional, orthodox ELCA pastors who are faithfully serving in ELCA congregations.

- Assurance that you are not alone. Connection with many others who share your concerns and are engaged in the same struggles.
- Providing Facebook groups in which you can engage in conversation with like-minded people. We have a private and visible (Facebook terminology) Facebook group that includes pastors, seminarians, and lay people with several different church body affiliations. We also have a private and hidden (again Facebook terminology) Facebook group that is only for ELCA pastors and seminarians. In addition, we have a third Facebook group, the Lutheran CORE Worship Group, where people can post worship services and Bible studies. We also have a MeWe page and group.
- Resources for worship, including [prayers](#) and [hymn suggestions](#).
- [Daily devotionals](#).
- Our annual Encuentro – a day of support, connection, fellowship, inspiration, and resources for those who already are involved and for those who are considering becoming involved in bi-lingual (English-Spanish) or Spanish language ministries.
- Some day you will retire or resign to take another call. Through our [Congregations in Transition](#) ministry initiative we have a group of (mostly retired) Lutheran pastors who have been trained to serve as coaches for congregations who are between pastors who either do not have an interim pastor available to them or do not have the resources for an interim pastor. This ministry also works with pastors still serving in congregations who either already have announced or soon will be announcing their retirement.
- [Clergy Connect](#) – a resource on our website through which congregations that are looking for

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CORE's Support to Orthodox ELCA Pastors

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

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- an orthodox pastor and pastors who are looking for another call can find each other.
- Guidance in evaluating ELCA communications and decisions such as the social statement, “Faith, Sexism, and Justice” and the “Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment,” both of which were approved at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.
 - Assistance for pastors who want to gather examples to communicate to their church leaders of ways in which orthodoxy is being threatened within the ELCA.
 - Articles in our bi-monthly newsletter, [CORE Voice](#), on such [topics](#) as critical race theory, how to share the faith with people who are hostile to the Christian faith, and how to communicate in a way that is relevant to technically sophisticated, younger generations.
 - Representation to ELCA leaders. We have advocated for traditional views in our communications to the presiding bishop and synodical bishops concerning such things as the Supreme Court decision regarding same sex marriage, the choice of keynote speakers for the 2018 youth gathering, and state legislation regarding abortion.
 - Through our sponsoring of the July 11-17, 2021 week of [NEXUS](#) at Grand View University in Des Moines, we are providing a resource for pastors who would like their high school students to attend a week of Bible study, theological reflection, fellowship, involvement in ministry, and challenge to consider attending seminary and become involved in a life of Christian service.
 - On our website an annotated [List of Confessional Resources](#) – books, magazines, ministries, and other resources recommended by other confessional pastors.
 - We have [video book reviews](#), including video reviews of some of the books on the list of confessional resources.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us . . . run with perseverance

the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” (12:1-2) Our goal as Lutheran CORE is to help you look to Jesus and

Video Book Reviews

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

Lutheran CORE continues to provide monthly video reviews of books of interest and importance. Many thanks to David Charlton, ELCA pastor and vice president of our board, for doing this month’s video review. His review is about the book, *The Genius of Luther’s Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* by Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand.

Concerning this book Pastor Charlton writes, “Twenty-first century Lutherans are often confused and conflicted about the place of good works, service to the community, and social justice in the Christian life. Kolb and Arand use Luther’s distinction between the Two Kinds of Righteousness to help us find a way to talk about all those things without losing sight of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in the process.”

These reviews are posted on YouTube. Our YouTube channel, which contains four other reviews, can be found [here](#). Many thanks to Pastor Charlton for having done a previous review, and to LCMC pastor, Chris Johnson; NALC pastor Brett Jenkins; and LCMC pastor Bob Rognlien for making the other reviews.

Our plan is to publish a new video book review during the first week of every month. Many of the books that will be reviewed are described in the List of Confessional Resources on the Seminarians page of our website. That list can be found [here](#).

When you look at a video review for the first time, please click on the Subscribe button. As enough people do that, it will eventually help us to get a channel name that will include our organization’s name.



Grateful Client's Experience with Congregations in Transition

by Ms. Jody Ellingson, former call committee chair and transition team member, American Lutheran Church (LCMC), Long Prairie, Minnesota

It was bittersweet reading our pastor's retirement announcement in the summer of 2019. Pastor Bill had been the pastor at American Lutheran Church for over ten years and was deeply loved by our congregation. We were certainly going to miss him! However, we were also happy for him as he transitioned to the next chapter in his life. In true Pastor Bill fashion, he set our church up for success as he prepared for his own departure. Not only did he give our congregation an entire year's notice before his retirement, he also set us up with [Congregations in Transition \(CiT\)](#).

When I was asked to join the Transition Team (and eventually the Call Committee), I was excited for the new opportunity, but naive about the process. Honestly, up until that point in my life, I had never even heard the terms "call process" or "call committee." I grew up Catholic and Pastor Bill had been my only pastor since joining American Lutheran Church as an adult. "What do you mean we have to find our own pastor? Aren't we just automatically sent a new one once Pastor Bill retires?" Nope! OK, so where do we even begin? Thankfully, we had our CiT coach, Pastor Don Brandt, to guide us through the process.

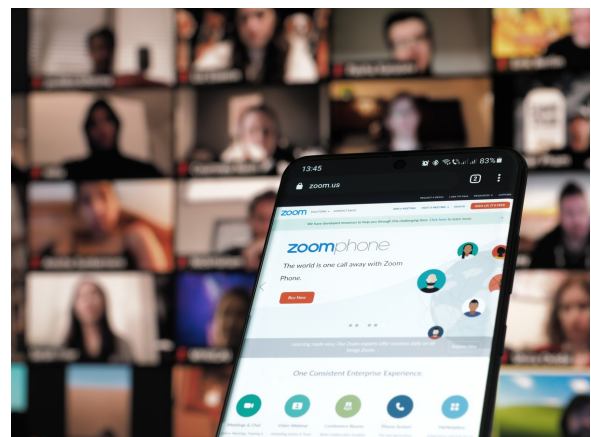
In the fall of 2019, Pastor Don made a trip to American Lutheran Church. He spent the weekend setting us up for a successful transition and call process. We held a meeting open to the congregation where he explained the current pastoral supply situation. We discussed the future of our congregation, including the potential challenges and opportunities facing us during our transition. Pastor Don then met with the Transition Team, where we dove deeper into the unique characteristics and needs of our congregation. Over the next several weeks, the Transition Team held multiple conference calls with Pastor Don. Together, we made a plan to keep all areas of our church ministry functioning during the transition between pastors. We discussed CiT's "Wish List" congregational survey results, which indicated the hopes and concerns of our members moving forward. We also discussed the next steps to take in the call process. The Transition Team then compiled all the information we gathered into a detailed report for the Call Committee and Church Council. Pastor Don also provided specific step by step recommendations for the Call Committee to follow. With all the background work complete, once the Call Committee was formed, we were able to hit

the ground running. *We had already received materials from applicants by the time our Call Committee first met!* Even though, at this point, our scheduled calls with Pastor Don were complete, he still maintained close communication with our Call Committee. He was available via email to answer any questions and to coach us through the call process.

We all remember March of 2020 and the difficulties the country faced as the pandemic brought our lives as we knew them to a halt. As we were in the interview phase of the call process, the shutdown created a whole unique set of circumstances that we had never before encountered. Words cannot express my gratitude for Pastor Don's guidance and patience during this time. His responses and advice were nothing less than thoughtful, thorough, and timely. With CiT's help we were able to overcome hurdles, forge ahead (although there were definitely delays) and find the pastor God already had in mind for our congregation.

Should your congregation face a time of transition and a search for a new pastor, I cannot recommend enough the Congregations in Transition ministry. What an amazing gift for taking an overwhelming transition process and breaking it down to specific, simplified steps. I am so thankful we had CiT to guide us through our transition process!

Note regarding CiT assistance during Covid: As the pandemic is still presenting unique challenges for all of us, *the CiT process is now entirely "at a distance."* This involves Zoom meetings, conference phone calls and on-going email communications with "client" congregations. The good news is that because of this congregations do not have any coach traveling costs to cover. *As a result, the only cost to your congregation is an initial \$175 registration fee paid to Lutheran CORE.*



Embracing the Challenges and Opportunities of Worship in the Digital Age

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



Editor's note: Congregations using music, videos, and other items downloaded from the internet should check on whether they have copyright permission for streaming them over the internet as part of worship services. CCLI and similar licenses often do not grant such permission. Read carefully in the documentation of your license to learn what you do and do not have permission to stream outside the building, or seek legal advice.

I know: The above title is too long. But let's not quibble. This is too important an issue. And many of you reading this can *do something* to address this ministry challenge; hopefully sooner rather than later.

Fundamentally, this is about what is passing for streamed worship services during this pandemic, and how we can do so much better. Because here is the brutal truth: Worship life post-COVID will not be returning to the “normal” we remember before the year 2020. Why? Post-pandemic, in-person worship attendance will, for most congregations, be at least 25% to 40% below what they had in 2019. Too bleak? Well, as the saying goes, “Just wait.” Most congregations — especially those that just launched their online, streamed worship services in 2020 — will find that many of their members have grown too comfortable with the ease and comfort of in-home worship. And for those members who have largely avoided in-person worship since early 2020, it's almost like they've left their congregational community for a one-year (or longer) deployment. As a result, many of them will find it's easier to stay away than it is to return to in-person congregational life and worship.

So what can be done about this? The biggest initial challenge will be to focus on the *mission opportunity* that is before us. Because improving the

quality of your online worship ministry can not only retain members; *it can reach new people with the Gospel*. However, before going over practical ways to improve your online worship ministry, one caveat: It will take a very intentional and on-going effort to motivate online worshipers to grow in their faith. More on that later.

Now for practical suggestions for *improving the quality of your online, streamed worship services*.

Online Worship Music

The first step is to recognize the obvious: That the online worship experience is very different than pre-COVID, in-person worship. I have watched online services from scores of different Lutheran churches over the last year. Some have been inspiring; most have been disappointing. My biggest disappointment has been online *worship music*; especially in the case of small and mid-sized congregations. Disappointing in what way? The lack of quality music. This has been true in respect to both congregational hymns/songs, and performed music such as anthems and solo performances.

Part of the problem here is that with online worship I find myself becoming even *more of a music critic*. With in-person worship not so much; partly because in the case of hymns and songs I am *participating*. With “couch potato” worship I tend to be a passive member of an audience of one. So if I notice the worship vocal team is struggling, or an instrument is slightly out of tune, the music becomes an unfortunate distraction. This critical appraisal also applies to solos; whether vocal or instrumental.

The solution? Only select the songs and hymns that can be done well. Remember that, in the case of online worship, this is essentially a performance for your online audience. So it needs to not only be easy enough for your musicians to do well; it also needs to be of high enough quality — both musically and lyrically — to do at all. For some smaller congregations with a limited number of talented musicians and vocalists available, this might mean less worship music than you offer at your in-person service. So in this case, “less is more.”

However, if you can access Christian music available from the internet for your online service, do so. This can be an invaluable and inspirational resource. If your congregation has the necessary

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Embracing the Challenges and Opportunities of Worship in the Digital Age

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technological capability to access online music videos, contact me. I have specific videos I can recommend.

Worship Liturgies for Online Worship

Move toward a “service of the Word” more than a full musical liturgy. Again, this is because your online worshipers are unlikely to participate in sung responses. The one exception to this principle might be if your liturgist has a solo-quality voice. In that case hearing the chanter sing both call and response portions of the liturgy might still be meaningful to your online worshipers. However, the overall principle is this: Online worshipers are more likely to participate in spoken liturgical responses than those that are sung.

Sermon Message

I have found sermons, by in large, to be effective and meaningful online. Suffice it to say that the great majority of recommendations for what constitutes quality preaching in person also apply to online messages. My one suggestion would be this: For pastors who have the time and energy, you might want to do a video sermon that is specifically crafted for an online audience. Especially post-COVID, the majority of your online worshipers will be very different than most of your in-person attenders. And the biggest difference will be the contrast between those with an unchurched vs. churched background. As an added bonus give different messages for your in-person and online service. You can encourage members to participate in *both* services on a weekly basis.

Communion Practice

It depends. If your congregation is more high-church you might want to offer consecrated elements to be picked up at church in advance. Perhaps you can even offer to deliver the elements to the homes of some members. If your congregation is more low-church, then invite online worshipers to have the elements ready at home so they can participate during that part of the service.

Online Worship and Technology

One final and obvious challenge in regards to providing meaningful online worship is the matter of the technology involved. There is no way to address this with detailed, specific recommendations due to the unique challenges faced by each congregation.

But one important and more general recommendation: Whether it be your video streaming or sound system, only offer what you can do well. In other words, don't let your creativity in worship planning get ahead of what your “systems” and tech volunteers can handle without major glitches or disruptions to the “flow” of your service.

None of the above recommendations address the significant and often overwhelming challenge of actually discipling online worshipers. I will address that in the May issue of this newsletter. (*This article is already long enough.*) My next article will cover, in some detail, the following strategies for discipling online worshipers:

1. in-home, “micro” worship gatherings
2. small group Bible studies
3. one-to-one coaching ministries; online, by phone, or in-person
4. organizing discipleship/accountability triads
5. pastoral care and discipleship

Pro Ecclesia 2021 Conference

by [Pr. Steve Shipman](#), Dean, Western Mission District of the Atlantic Mission Region, NALC

Sponsored by the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
June 7-9 (Monday evening to Wednesday noon)
Loyola University, Baltimore

Confirmed speakers include:

David Cloutier
Piotr Malysz
Marianne Meye Thompson (tentative)
Brent Waters
Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

Topics include:

The Ethics of the Sermon
The Sermon as Both Law and Gospel
Is the Sermon Economically Realistic?
Preaching the Sermon
The Place of the Sermon in Matthew's Gospel

And a special address by CCET board member Michael Root, "Is the Ecumenical Movement Over?"

We are hopeful of having this conference but, of course, there remain COVID uncertainties. Updates will be posted at <https://www.pro-ecclesia.org> where, in due course, registration will also be opened.



Our Thursday Night Group: The Lord Can Do This Anywhere

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different denominations. *The Lord lit a fire under us!* He helped us lay a framework — what seemed to us to be a good model for study. I can remember one specific moment in the parking lot when Ben said something along the lines of “This is where revival begins.” He was right.

While Ben and I were meeting and talking about all these things, ironically my dad and younger brother also felt prompted by the Lord to launch a young adult group; they, too, saw that there was a great need for a post-high school group. So, together we officially launched the Bible study in 2017. My father was integral in its structure and form. Our goal was to be strongly grounded in the Word, Christ-centered, Kingdom-oriented, and mission-focused. Clearly, our backbone is Lutheran, but our young adults come from *many* different denominational backgrounds. We genuinely wanted to witness and experience “*His Kingdom come, and His Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.*”

REM was not designed to be a regular Sunday



morning church. Part of our vision is *calling the Church to be His Church for such a time as this*, with a primary focus on discipling and equipping God’s people so they may be sent out into the world. We actively seek to work with other churches and reach across the denominational divide for the sake of the Kingdom, yet simultaneously retain our Lutheran identity and orthodoxy. We do our best to seek first His Kingdom and Righteousness (Matthew 6:33) and strive for unity in Christ. It is time for the church to live out the prayer of John 17, when Christ prayed for us, His church, and His unblemished Bride:

“I do not pray for these only, but also for those

who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:20-23, RSV)

We need unity in these difficult, divided times. How can the church be effective in evangelism if it is just as divided as the world? Our group is a small scale “experiment” of this unity. We all come from very different backgrounds: Lutheran, Catholic, Nazarene, Baptist, Presbyterian, Non-denominational, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Anglican and others.

My dad helped design and establish our foundational studies. We began with a solid first course of study called [Alpha](#). It was extremely helpful in grounding us in the basic tenets of our faith while fostering an environment in which the Spirit can move easily. The first book we studied was *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. If you’re familiar with Bonhoeffer, you will know he was very much about living in community but not in isolation as the Body of Christ. He faced great evil, like the evil we see today. In the midst of this, he remained steadfast. *Life Together* is a great study in *how* to be the Church. Next, we studied 1 and 2 Peter, then many other books/letters of the Bible.

Our typical Thursday night flow is fellowship, meal, worship and study. We *always* end in prayer. We ask for prayer requests. We encourage and pray for each another.

I am amazed to look back and see what the Lord did with such humble beginnings. The “Thursday Night Group” exists because of God’s sovereign leading — *not* our exceptionally great leadership or dynamic teaching. It’s not about being super high tech or having spectacular multi-media presentations, etc. In other words, *the Lord can do this anywhere*.

So, how did this happen? The Lord’s moving “in and through” the prayer and the fellowship of a few. The Lord gave us a vision. We wrote it down, as my father often quotes from Habakkuk, “*And the Lord answered me: “Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it ...”* (RSV) Once

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Our Thursday Night Group: The Lord Can Do This Anywhere

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the idea formed, we had to take action. Practically speaking, *we had to start reaching out to people*. We reached friends first. From there, it took patience, persistence, and perseverance. In our non-committal culture, it is too easy to avoid groups and events. Gathering this group together involved texting people individually (and consistently) many times. It took “in person” communication and phone conversations. It required countless group texts to even begin to build a base. People came and went, especially during the first two years, so I was constantly adapting. I learned that this is what it means to be organic and fluid in mission work.

We currently average anywhere from 10 to 15 young adults every week. We’ve had over 30, maybe upwards of 40 young adults involved with the group over the span of 3 years. Prepare for the ‘ebb and flow’ of doing life together! We have experienced seasons of growth as well as decline ... and then regrowth. In the beginning, there were many times we would only have 2 or 3 — discouraging! But we kept at it. We peaked one summer averaging 15-20, then our numbers dropped as people went back to school. When we went down to 5 or less, I was again discouraged. It was then that the Lord stirred me up with these words, “*Why do you have this study?*” The answer was to glorify and honor Him! Therefore, if He is present and He is glorified, then it is worth it — whether you have 3 or 300.

Oddly enough, we are currently about half-way through studying the Book of Acts again. This is incredibly helpful as we are facing difficult and disconcerting days. This time we have been very intentional in inviting many pastors/leaders from a variety of denominational backgrounds to guide us through the Book of Acts. I have worked directly with my dad in connecting with these invaluable missional partners and have had only positive experiences. It has taught all of us to respect and stand under the umbrella of the previous generations’ wisdom and teaching. The Holy Spirit has taught us a deeper love for His Kingdom and a greater appreciation for the larger Church by introducing us to the different strengths that come from a variety of denominations within the Body.

In years past, REM has done mission outreach to Baltimore and Frederick, Maryland. We’d like to do more of that, but we ran into some obstacles because of COVID lockdown measures. But over the winter

we made blankets for the homeless. We also gathered some funds to purchase items from *Childfund's Real Gifts Catalog*, an organization which provides families in need with farm animals and clean water. We recently connected with someone at the Frederick Rescue Mission who encouraged us with new ideas on how we can serve as we wait for things to reopen. We are excited about these possibilities and look forward to growing as a community of faith.

We also held a night of prayer and worship on the night of the presidential election. It was a powerful time of communal worship and coming together to seek the Lord's face for the future of our nation. We are still praying and believe that revival is coming to America and that our nation will begin to seek the face of Christ, starting with individuals and small groups. We've been inspired as we read through the Book of Acts — for such a time as this — to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be the Church and to be the hands and feet of Christ. How can we actively make a difference during this time? How can we better be light and salt to those around us? These are challenging questions at any time, but especially now when tensions run high.

Our prayer as a young adult group is that we would have a clear vision of what *God* wants to do during this time. We pray for an extra measure of grace so that He would fill us with courage, passion, and humility so *we* can join *Him* where he is already working. Our hope is that we will see the Spirit move in a powerful way across denominational lines by bringing believers together from all types of backgrounds in His name. May He call the remnant of His people to unite in America and the world.

I have discovered that it's not easy to faithfully document a movement of God. I hope these words encourage you to simply step into it, however small that step may seem. Clearly, this movement is God's not ours. Begin to gather with two or more around His Word and watch to see what God does. *I sincerely believe that what we've done can be replicated around the nation.* My prayer is the Church would arise. I pray each of us would “*keep in step with the Spirit*” (Galatians 5) where He leads ... “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*” (Hebrews 10:23-25) May the Peace of Christ rest on you as we share this life together. Amen.

Pray for Kanye

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so, I have been doing a lot of introspection, analyzing my life and the path that God has set me on. I am a junior in college and plan to go to seminary to become a pastor. My time in university has been quite formative as I transitioned from childhood into adulthood while growing in my faith. I have made decisions that cost me friends because I didn't want to do things or go along with decisions that would jeopardize or go against my faith. It has been quite the perilous journey, but I would have it no other way for, as Paul says in Romans 5:3-5, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (ESV).

What I see in common with Kanye and myself is that Kanye is going through a formative time in his life too and his faith is also under attack. I am certain that his faith is the reason for the criticism that he received for making this gospel album and for the split between him and his wife. Before Kanye converted and made his faith public, he had it all: money, power and a reality TV star wife. To the world, what more could a man desire? His decision to go public with his faith and to step away from making vulgar hip-hop is a decision that could very well jeopardize what the world sees as success.

These "Hands On" lyrics express Kanye's worries and anxieties:

*"Told people God was my mission
What have you been hearin' from the Christians?
They'll be the first one to judge me
Make it feel like nobody love me."*

To feel alone, because people don't like that I am following God, is something that I've felt before and it is quite the agonizing feeling. I found Kanye's plea profound as he rapped, "Somebody pray for me." As someone who has been in his shoes, I can't help but empathize with him.

There has been a lot of controversy surrounding Kanye West and his faith, from the secular world not liking it, calling him crazy, to various Christians criticizing him and calling his faith fake. I think we, the Church, the disciples of Christ, should forget all of that and *do* what Kanye asks of us — pray for him. He is going through an extremely difficult time

and he is at a fork in the road in his walk with God. He could abandon it all, return to the secular world, dance to Satan's tune, do what man thinks is right, or he could persevere and continue to walk with God, even if the world thinks differently, even if it costs him *everything* he had before.

Regardless of what you think of Kanye West, I encourage you to join me in praying for him. Pray that he follows the Lord, uses his fame and popularity to spread the Gospel, and that his heart would be good soil.

I leave you with a verse I find encouraging as a reminder that there is *always* power in prayer. From the second half of James 5:16, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (ESV).

Click [here](#) to read an interview Kanye had regarding his faith and [here](#) to read another article about the controversy created by his album *JESUS IS KING*.

Ever Wonder What Luther Did during the Bubonic Plague?

There is an [ALPB](#) book for that. It's called *Martin Luther: What to Do During an Epidemic and it's available as a PDF book; it will be emailed to you for just \$5.00. Click [here](#) and [here](#) for more information.*

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— Aug 2-6, 2021.

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