

How Did It Happen? The ELCA and Community Organizing, Part One

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



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Introduction

A question I am often asked by people is this – How did it happen? How did LGBTQ+ values, priorities, and agenda completely take over the ELCA, and so quickly? The purpose of this article is to show how the principles of community organizing were used most effectively to bring about this change.

The ELCA was formed in 1987 and began functioning as a church body in 1988. At the 2005 Churchwide Assembly traditional values prevailed, though just barely. It was not until 2009 that standards changed, and look at all that has happened since. For nearly twenty-two of the thirty-four years that the ELCA has existed, at least the officially recognized position was more traditional. It has only been during the last twelve years that revisionist views have prevailed. Actually and officially, the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly only gave its blessing to (PALMS) publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same sex relationships. But in reality the ELCA has fully embraced the LGBTQIA+ agenda, values, priorities, and lifestyle. The ELCA has completely marginalized anyone who holds to any other view, and it is charging ahead at such a rapid pace that it makes you wonder whether anything could stop it except a total crash.



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A Review of Think.Believe.Do.

by [Pr. David Charlton](#), Vice-President of the Board of Lutheran CORE

A concerned member of the ELCA contacted me, asking me to do a review of a [new curriculum](#) from Augsburg Fortress's *Sparkhouse*. That curriculum is entitled T.B.D.: Think. Believe. Do. *Sparkhouse* touts it as their newest youth curriculum. A [blogpost](#) describes T.B.D. as

a new small group series that gives students the tools to articulate, investigate, and test out their beliefs on a broad range of topics that connect to their daily lives. However, the goal isn't to come away from each series with a settled idea about the topic. Although they might feel more settled than they did before. Instead, T.B.D. focuses on how students think, not just what they think.

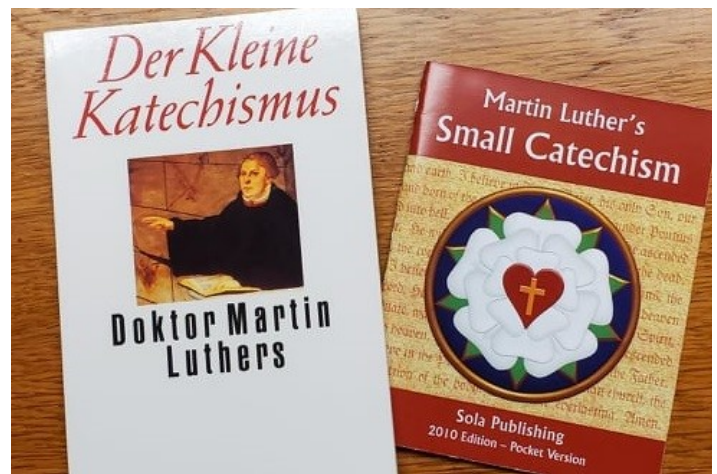
Currently, T.B.D. offers six topical courses on Prayer, Sin, Mission, Salvation, and Bible, broken up into four sessions each. Each session begins with a "Provocative Statement" before moving through three major sections: Think, Believe and Do. After answering a series of thought provoking questions in their journals, students watch a video and reflect on two Bible Passages. Following this, they come up with an honest statement of what they believe as individuals and as a group. Finally, the group brainstorms a low risk way to test out that belief in the following week.

The Video

In the videos that accompany each session, a young person wrestles with questions about the topic of the session. This is very interesting. Like many people today, both young and old, the character in each video turns to the internet, searching for an answer. As you would expect, answers come from all quarters. The internet search yields many quotes from the Bible. Quotes are also given by Luther, Augustine, Calvin, Bonhoeffer, St. Benedict, and other Christian teachers. Others come from more dubious places, like Bart Ehrman and Richard Dawkins. This is what you would expect from an internet search. The character in the video is left with more questions than answers as a result. Pastors and catechists are very familiar with the kind of idiosyncratic views that people develop from their use of the internet.

Values Clarification

The question is where to turn. The answer is more than a little surprising. After pondering challenging statements, watching the video, and looking up two Bible verses, the students are immediately asked to formulate their own responses to the questions. The result is something very similar to the



kind of "values clarification" that was practiced decades ago. It's almost as if the students are told, "You're on your own. The Bible is unclear and unreliable. The Christian tradition is too varied and contradictory. Who's to say what is true. You need to chart your own path."

As a person who grew up in the 1970s, I am quite familiar with this way of teaching. I learned to ask open ended questions and to accept the challenge to decide for myself. Fortunately for me, I had pastors and college professors who pointed me to the answers. (I attended a Lutheran college.) Otherwise, I would have been lost. During my senior year of college, the process of asking open questions and deciding for myself overwhelmed me. I realized that I was drowning in a sea of meaninglessness and purposelessness. In the midst of this, I became acutely aware of my sinfulness. It was then that I turned to the things I had learned from my pastors and professors. In particular, I remembered what I had learned about the Cross and the Resurrection. If I had been left entirely to my own resources, I don't know where I would be.

A Third Resource?

In T.B.D., youth are presented with two resources with which to interpret the Bible: 1) the confusing diversity of answers given by the internet and 2) their own wisdom and the wisdom of their peers. It's too bad that a third resource is not introduced into the discussion, namely, the wisdom of the Creedal and Lutheran tradition of interpreting the Bible. If the person teaching this curriculum is a pastor or a well catechized lay person, T.B.D. might not be harmful. The same would be true if it was used with well catechized youth. As one reads the lesson book and

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Acedia and Appetite

by [Pr. Brett Jenkins](#), NALC Dean of the Northeast Mission District within the Atlantic Mission Region and former member of the Board of Lutheran CORE

As we entered 2022 and I faced the deadline for this article, I found myself struggling with what to write; what topic did I find compelling enough to spend time seriously reflecting upon? What in the Church's life was I passionate enough about at the moment that I thought I could add something substantive to Her discussion and deliberation?

Surprisingly for me, I had trouble identifying that thing. Oh, sure, there was plenty that concerned me, problems around which my thoughts tend to eddy and swirl as I seek some pastoral, theological, philosophical, or practical understanding, strategy, or stance, but what was lacking was the *passion* that typically makes me put pen to paper — or hands to keyboard.

Passion... it is a word with a storied history in the Church. In my first ecclesial job as a youth minister, our church's youth ministry decorated the youth room wall with the words "Faith, Passion, Service." Upon visiting, a colleague commented, "Passion is something I think my youth already have plenty of... I'd think more about discouraging *that*."

But the Church Fathers — the pastors during the Church's greatest period of missionary expansion did not feel that way. C. S. Lewis has introduced many modern Christians to the distinctions between the four Greek words for love through his book *The Four Loves*, and as a result, many Christians think of *storge* (affection), *philia* (friendship), and *eros* (infatuation with the beloved, not necessarily sexual) as immature or degenerate in comparison to the New Testament standard of *agape*, Christ's own self-sacrificial love.

But this is not the way the Church Fathers spoke. They spoke of God's divine *eros* that burned for lost humanity so completely it *agape'd* the world enough to give His only Son... to give Himself. Far from fearing passion, a Church whose largely convert members had drunk deeply of the wine of Roman success, who had tasted fruits imported from every corner of the conquered empire (now redubbed "the civilized world"), who had participated fully in the "good life," the *Pax Romana* for which so many had given their lives in labor or battle, had come to realize that far from their passion being too great, it was too small. This was a Church quite literally world-weary, who would have agreed whole-heartedly with Lewis when he preached in war time,



*"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."*¹

They would have agreed with this because they made a distinction that we post-enlightenment, post-modern, post-truth people, whatever our religious convictions, fail to make. It has been noted by some that we represent "psychological man," products of what Charles Taylor terms in his eponymous book *A Secular Age*. We are people who, however we think of ourselves — straight or gay, *cis*-gendered or trans, conservative or progressive, believing or unbelieving, a sack of meat directed by selfish genes or made in the image of God — we are a people who almost inevitably conceive of our identities as emerging from a murky subconscious that is fundamentally comprised of appetites.

For us, love is almost always conceived of as downstream from appetites in which we are not fundamentally different from animals. I have 1600 hours of C.P.E. to my credit, and I can tell you that while theological conversation is by no means absent

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Intercessory Prayer, Part Two: How to Write Them

by [Pr. Cathy Ammlung](#), Former Secretary of the Board of Lutheran CORE

In my introduction to intercessory prayer, I shared some of its historical background and some of its salient characteristics in the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. I wrote:

*Intercessory prayers have a very long history as the prayers **of** and **by** the whole people of God, the Body of Christ himself. They are the Church praying for the Church, the world, the ruling authorities, and those in any tribulation, distress, or sorrow; for peace, for the propagation of the Gospel; for our enemies; for every manner and estate of humanity; for children and catechumens; for favorable weather and harvest; for deliverance from every affliction, wrath, danger and need; for the faithful departed; and for the salvation of those praying and for all people. Such intercessory prayers as we write and speak ought to be mindful of this long history, and the cloud of witnesses with whom we are praying. They rightly should possess the Roman virtues of terse, simple, elegant directness, and the Eastern virtues of intense devotion, evocative language, and reverence. They ought not to be mini-sermons, private opinions, lectures, or casual, off-the-cuff “Lord I just wanna’s”!*

Now I’ll take you through some of the process by which I compose the weekly intercessory prayers that are distributed to some folks via email and that are also available on the [CORE website](#). I’ll use a concrete example: the prayers for February 27, 2022 – The Transfiguration of Our Lord, Cycle C.

That’s important: *I write prayers that are specific to the season, festival, and cycle of the Church calendar.* You’re not required to focus on these, but the Scripture readings appointed for any Sunday, and the significance of a feast day, will enrich and focus your petitions. The lessons can shape their thrust and phrasing. Additionally, this helps people to intentionally “pray the Scriptures” in their private prayer life, strengthening the connection between corporate and personal prayer.

The hymn selections also provide sources of imagery and language. When people hear a phrase from, say, “Beautiful Savior” in a petition, they see that hymns can be prayed. You’ll see an example of that in a moment.

Congregations use different lectionaries and hymnals. If there are alternative texts, the first is from Sola/LCMS, the second is the ELW/RCL. I’ve left out hymn numbers below.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12: *(The death of Moses after*



God shows him the Promised Land; no one has arisen like Moses, whom God spoke to as a friend, face to face)

RCL/ELW: Exodus 34:29-35: *(The shining face of Moses)*

Psalms 99: *(Exalt the Lord, who spoke to his servants Moses and Aaron in a pillar of cloud. You, Lord, love justice and establish equity; you forgive sin and avenge wrongdoing)*

Hebrews 3:1-6: *(Moses was faithful as a servant in God’s house. Jesus is faithful as the Son)*

RCL/ELW: 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2: *(We look upon the Lord with unveiled faces. Being transfigured from glory unto glory, we put aside shameful practices, commend ourselves to everyone in the sight of God)*

Luke 9:28-36: *(The Transfiguration of our Lord)*

Opening Hymn: *O God Beyond All Praising (Hint, hint, the intercessory prayers for today echo phrases of it.)*

OR Blessing and Honor

Hymn of the Day: *O Wondrous Type!/ O Vision Fair!/ O Wondrous Image, Vision Fair
OR Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory*

Communion Hymns: *How/Tis Good, Lord, to be Here; Beautiful Savior*

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Worship Attendance and Our National Mental Health Crisis

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

I admit my tendency to often base my columns on the insights and observations of *other* writers. No doubt some of you question whether I have any original thoughts, opinions and ideas. The answer is yes I do; on occasion.

However, sometimes I come across an article that I'm convinced needs to be brought to your attention; and the sooner the better. That's definitely the case with the article, in the November, 2021, issue of *Christianity Today*, entitled "Empty Pews Are an American Public Health Crisis." The authors of this article are Tyler Vanderweele and Brenden Case. Vanderweele is director of the Human Flourishing Project at Harvard University, and Case is the associate director of that same program.

The "public health crisis" they are bringing to our attention is the toll decreased in-person worship attendance is taking on American public health. This crisis has been developing over many years. However, the Covid pandemic has, to an alarming degree, contributed, since early 2020, to the severity of this crisis. And it is a crisis in terms of not only mental, emotional and spiritual health, but physical health as well.

One sentence from this article expresses the authors' theme succinctly: "People find their social and personal lives improved — sometimes their lives are even physically saved — when they go to church often."

This article cites recent Barna Group surveys. In 2011, 43% of Americans stated that they attended church weekly. In 2020, this had declined to 29%.

Another quote from the article: "A number of large, well-designed research studies have found that religious service attendance is associated with greater longevity, less depression, less suicide, less smoking, less substance abuse, better cancer and cardiovascular-disease survival, less divorce, greater social support, greater meaning in life, greater life satisfaction, more volunteering, and greater civic engagement."

And more specific to worship attendance: "Our research (at the Harvard University Human Flourishing Project) suggests that religious service attendance specifically, rather than private practices or self-assessed religiosity or spirituality, most powerfully predicts health."

And this: "Our own research indicates that declining religious service attendance accounts for



about 40 percent of the rise in (national) suicide rates over the past 15 years. If the declines in attendance could have been prevented, how many lives could have been saved?"

Another quote: "In sum, there are a number of ways in which religious service attendance might positively influence a person's mental and physical well-being, including providing a network of social support, offering clear moral guidance, and creating relationships of accountability to reinforce positive behavior."

One more recent Barna Group survey indicates the even more immediate crisis that has developed due to the pandemic's impact on worship attendance. They found that about a third of "practicing Christians" have stopped joining in-person worship completely due to the pandemic. And "this group reported higher levels of anxiety and depression than those still worshipping..."

So are there any helpful suggestions for our congregations after reading these demoralizing revelations? Absolutely. Here are three mentioned in this article.

1. "When the present pandemic has passed, it will be important to reestablish face-to-face meetings and services, rather than relying *entirely* on remote alternatives."
2. "This research should challenge the growing number of Americans who self-identify as "spiritual but not religious," or who harbor doubts about organized religion, to consider whether their own spiritual journeys might be better undertaken in a community of like-minded seekers and under the discipline of a

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How Did It Happen?

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How did it happen? Part of the answer can be found in the fact that those who have been driving this are super focused and relentlessly dedicated. Part of the answer can also be found in the image of lily pads on a lake. Let's say that the area of the surface of the lake that is covered by lily pads doubles each year. At first, the amount of increase is small. Then it becomes larger and more noticeable. Eventually lily pads are covering half of the lake. At that point and at that rate how much longer will it take for lily pads to cover the entire lake? One year.

Community Organizing

A more detailed answer can be found in the principles of community organizing and how that methodology has been used extremely effectively by such groups within the Lutheran community as Reconciling Works. Reconciling Works is an organization that since 1974 “has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and community.” Specifically we will be looking at how community organizing is the central approach employed by the Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit (BIC) developed by Reconciling Works in order to change peoples' minds, turn the minority position into the majority position, and thereby take over the church. A link to the Toolkit can be found [here](#).

Community organizing is also the primary approach employed by many other social justice activists – in the secular world as well as in the mainline church – in order to push for social change. It is popular because it works. Its techniques are effective, which is why and how the liberal/progressive movement has been so successful in taking hold of the mainline church and secular society.

Lutherans who hold to a high view of the authority of Scripture need to be aware of this process, so that we might develop and offer an effective response. Our failure to do so is a major reason why we are losing the battle – in the mainline church as well as in the secular world – to the LGBTQ+ agenda and other liberal/progressive concerns.

Texts

Here are some resources that you can use for further study. Fortress Press is “an imprint of 1517 Media.” 1517 Media is “the ministry of publishing of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”

Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit by Reconciling Works

Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing by Dennis A. Jacobsen (Fortress Press)

Faith-Based Organizing by Charles Frederickson, Violetta Lien, Herbert E. Palmer, and Mary Lou Walther (Fortress Press)

Faith-Rooted Organizing by Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel (Fortress Press)

Theological Education

Several ELCA seminaries offer classes and/or training in community organizing as part of the public theology and/or practical theology components of the seminary curriculum. At one ELCA seminary the “public church” curriculum has become the primary organizing principle around which the degree programs are structured. At other ELCA seminaries, efforts have been made and/or are in progress to expand the “public theology” focus, often at the expense of Biblical and confessional theological content. At one ELCA seminary a career in community organizing is one of the possible career pathways that the Master of Theological Studies (M. T. S.) degree leads to and prepares for.

Background

Community organizing methodology was developed by Saul Alinsky, a secular Jewish man, in the late 1930's. Although Alinsky never identified as a socialist and/or a communist, he shared in common with them radical left (for his time) ideology, concern for the poor, and support for working-class communities and labor movements. Alinsky saw the need to fight for specific goals and used the principles and techniques of community organizing to achieve those goals.

Overview

Community organizing relies on two main things – strong relationships and shared values. Community organizers use these two things to change the minds of community members in order to get them to support a cause. In this way they build a coalition of supportive people. They then rally these people together and work together to press for change.

Community organizing begins with the following steps –

- Gather together a small core team of people who are already committed to your cause. These are

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the people who will start the process of pushing for change.

- Gather information about individual people as well as about the community. Build relationships with people. Learn about what they believe and why. Use what you learn to plan your approach. Identify key influencers and supporters who may be assets to your cause.
- Tell stories which evoke sympathy and support for your cause.
- Build common ground with your community (shared values and/or experiences).
- Educate the community in order to bring its members to your side.
- Once the initial prep work has been done, choose a course of action.
 - ⇒ Either a conflict approach, where the people in power are seen as your enemy. *If so, confront them and take them down.*
 - ⇒ Or a consensus approach, where the people in power are seen as people who can change their minds. *If so, convince them to side with you.*

Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit

The Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit from ReconcilingWorks builds upon, and relies upon, the community organizing method. Its approach assumes that there is already support from the leadership (clergy, church council, lay leaders, etc.) and that what needs to be done is to convince the rest of the community – enough to secure a 75% vote for RIC (Reconciling in Christ) status, as required by ReconcilingWorks.

As such, the proposed course of action is similar to the consensus approach. However, normally in community organizing the primary target is people in power (i. e. the clergy). However, in the BIT Toolkit, the primary target is the community at large (i. e. the congregation). The primary target's minds need to be changed in order to accomplish the desired goal.

A **Faith Community Assessment Survey** is taken to evaluate the faith community's current position (s). A link to the survey can be found [here](#). Based upon the results, one of three timelines is suggested –

Cautious, Moderatus, and Adventurous. **The timetable ranges from six years to under one year.** But no matter how long it may take, those working to bring about change are focused and relentless.

Whichever timeline is followed, the process is broken down into eleven steps, and there are six tools that are employed in order to work the process. These steps and tools are described in the Toolkit. Four of the six tools are **Graceful Engagement, One-to-One Visits, Public Storytelling, and Scriptural Engagement**.

Scriptural Engagement

It is interesting – and significant – that the sixth step – **Providing Educational Opportunities** – and the sixth tool – **Scriptural Engagement** – both come so late in the process. Typically, people who hold to a high view of the authority of Scripture would begin by focusing on what the Bible says. But that is not what the BIC Toolkit does. Instead the primary means of building community support are finding shared values – such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and welcome – and then engaging in carefully crafted storytelling in order to evoke sympathy and support for the cause. “Scriptural Engagement” does not actively come into play until the steps that build support from the community have already been completed.

It should not surprise us that “Scriptural Engagement” does not come until late in the process. The Bible does not support what ReconcilingWorks is trying to accomplish. The Scripture passages that are included in the BIC Toolkit include Luke 10:29-37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan), John 4: 4-26 (Jesus and the woman at the well), Matthew 22: 35-40 (the Greatest Commandment), Matthew 26: 51-52 (Peter's cutting off the high priest's servant's ear), and Luke 23: 34 (one of the words of Jesus from the cross.) There is obviously no way that these passages support the LGBTQIA+ agenda. They do not even address LGBTQIA+ issues. No wonder support and agreement must be built in other ways rather than on the clear message of Scripture. **Relying on the principle that feelings are often more important and more powerful than facts** when it comes to convincing people to change their minds, the BIC Toolkit focuses on feelings-based approaches, such as storytelling, rather than on facts-based approaches, such as asking what the Bible says, in order to get people to come on board with the cause.

By the time the “Scriptural Engagement” tool comes into active use, the community's minds and hearts have already been shaped into being LGBTQ+

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affirming. Very little of Scripture is engaged with, and the purpose as well as the message of Scripture is distorted. **The whole of Scripture's message is reduced to three themes –**

- 1. We are called to love God and love our neighbors.**
- 2. It is not our place to judge.**
- 3. Treat others as you would want to be treated.**

Specific passages from Scripture which appear to support these themes are selectively chosen in an effort to demonstrate that these ideas form the fundamental message of Scripture.

Other themes of Scripture – such as sin and our need for God's forgiveness, God's command that we repent of our sins, our need to obey God, and the Bible's instructions regarding holy living - are minimized or avoided entirely.

The prescribed approach to the so-called “clobber passages” (the passages that clearly speak against same-sex sexual behavior) is to avoid them, or else to minimally engage with them only as needed, until the three themes mentioned above are firmly established in the hearts and minds of the community as the primary message of Scripture. Only then are the “clobber passages” engaged with, under the assumption that, if indeed the primary message of Scripture is one of welcome and inclusion, and the “clobber passages” are neither welcoming nor inclusive of LGBTQ+ identified people who are engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, then either we have misunderstood these “clobber passages” or the “clobber passages” must be wrong in some way.

With so little engagement with Scripture, and with what little of Scripture is utilized being so badly misrepresented, people are left with an understanding that is far from biblically sound.

I will be completing this article in my February Letter from the Director. In that second part I will tell more about how the [Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit](#) uses the principles of community organizing to change people's minds and get them on board with the cause. I will also offer several suggestions as to what those with a high view of the authority of Scripture need to do and can do in order to provide a viable, effective, and convincing alternative.

A Review of Think.Believe.Do.

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watches the video, it is easy to identify answers to the questions that are raised.

For instance, in the unit on Prayer, the video character, a young woman, wrestles with the meaning and purpose of prayer. What does the Bible teach? How is one to pray? Does prayer change things? Why pray if God already knows everything? As I watched, I thought to myself, “It's too bad the Lutheran tradition doesn't have a simple but profound explanation of the meaning of prayer; or even better an explanation of the Lord's Prayer.” At one point, the character finds a link to an article on St. Benedict. She decides to download his daily prayer schedule to her calendar, only to be shocked by the notion that it calls for prayer seven times a day. Again, I found myself thinking, “Too bad Luther didn't simplify the seven hours of prayer on behalf of the laity, reducing them to two or three times a day.” At another point, the character does a search for the Ten Commandments, hoping that there is something there about prayer. She concludes that the Ten Commandments are no help, since prayer is not mentioned. As one knows, however, Luther's interpretation of the Second Commandment has a lot to say about prayer.

Unanswered Questions

After reflecting on this curriculum, I am left with a final question. Is the failure to use the catholic and Lutheran tradition a bug or a feature of T.B.D.? In other words, do the developers of T.B.D. assume that teachers and facilitators will make use of the Great Tradition and the Lutheran Confessions? Have they simply forgotten to explicitly remind facilitators of these resources? Or is the intent to encourage students to utilize the widest possible resources, from St. Benedict to Richard Dawkins, to formulate their own system of beliefs? If so, the result will not be formation in the Christian faith, but instead in an eclectic post-Christian form of spirituality.

Ironically, I can remember a time when Augsburg Fortress was criticized for being too Lutheran, too Confessional, too heavy in doctrine. Other publishers, like [Group Publishing](#) and [Youth Specialties](#), were preferred because they were more user friendly, more engaging, and more broadly Evangelical. To see a curriculum that makes such sparse use of the Catechism and the Lutheran Confessions is surprising, and not an improvement.

Intercessory Prayer, Part Two: How to Write Them

by [Pr. Cathy Ammlung](#), Former Secretary of the Board of Lutheran CORE

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Closing Hymn: *In Thee is Gladness* **OR** *Alleluia, Song of Gladness*

That's our "raw material." We also keep in mind those things for which we are commanded to pray: The Church; our persecuted brethren; our community, nation, and world, especially leaders and institutions; our enemies; the sick and all who suffer; our local congregation; proper stewardship of creation; peace, justice, forgiveness, hope, and faith. Additionally, we pray for specific concerns, ranging from local issues to global pandemics. The lectionary may suggest other petitions: marriage, those in prison, farmers, etc. A specific feast day may guide other petitions. Grounding intercessory prayer in these rich resources will prevent us from praying too narrowly for "we, ourselves, and us." Over time, we will lift all manners of people and situations before God.

I begin with a petition which responds to the Scripture/day, and/or thanks and praises God. This sets a theme for what is to come. Next, comes the universal Church; the persecuted Church; and the local congregation. (Here may also be prayers for missionaries, seminaries, raising up new pastors and evangelists; discipleship, etc.) There's a petition for our nation and world; our leaders, in politics and society; and health, peace, and justice among all people. There may be a specific petition for all who stand in harm's way to establish health, safety, justice, and freedom. Something suggested by the Scriptures or the time of year comes next. The needs of all who suffer follow. The final petition entrusts the faithful departed to God's care, asks guidance for our life, and looks to our final redemption. Simple!

Next: how do we phrase each petition? My assisting ministers have (sometimes unknowingly) helped me! They may not have read them beforehand. Convoluted sentences and flowery language can trip them up. I have come to appreciate that Roman virtue of terse, elegant phrases! Here's the prayer for Transfiguration.

Let us draw near to the Light of Christ, offering prayer and supplication on behalf of the Church, the world, and one another.

A brief silence

Reaction to the day/thanks/opening theme: *Father, today we kneel in adoration before the majesty your Son, revealed in his Transfiguration. But sometimes, our devotion grows cold. Sometimes our prayers and*

worship become half-hearted and routine. Sometimes we treat Jesus like a buddy we can call on if we need something from him. Kindle our hearts, minds, and spirits always to worship and obey him with holy fear, deep joy, and fervent love.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Universal Church: *O God beyond all praising, we worship you and adore your glory, revealed in the face of your beloved Son. Grant that your Church listens to his word and holds fast to him in its heavenly calling. Make it bold to preach Christ alone as the way of salvation. Let it proclaim to the whole world his blessings without number and his mercy without end. (Note echoes of hymn, "O God Beyond All Praising" in this and other petitions)*

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Persecuted Church: *Grant to your persecuted people confidence and hope, established through the steadfast obedience of Christ their Lord. Give them grace to triumph through their sufferings and rise to serve you even in the presence of those who trouble them.*

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Local congregation: *Let the radiance of our Beautiful Savior fill the hearts and sanctify the ministries of this congregation. Make our worship into a joyful duty, and our service into a sacrifice of praise. Use us to lead others to Jesus, that with us, they may worship, honor, bless and adore him. (Phrases from O God Beyond All Praising, Beautiful Savior, AND Blessing and Honor! Am I good or what?!)*

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our nation and world, its leaders, and peace among all: *You have appointed your Son as King of creation and Lord of the nations. Teach our leaders to praise your name; to love justice and righteousness; and to seek those things that make for peace. Come to the help of those whose lives are troubled by sorrow and hardship; and draw all people into the glorious and gentle rule of Christ their Savior. (Again, echoes of Beautiful Savior)*

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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Intercessory Prayer, Part Two

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For those who suffer: *We lift our hearts to you on behalf of all whose lives are clouded by any sort of affliction or sorrow, including: {List}. Let the light of Jesus' countenance heal and cheer them. Let all who care for them do so with tenderness and compassion; and grant that together we may praise you for your unending mercies.*

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Remembrance of faithful departed; prayer for guidance and salvation: *O Lord, our Beautiful Savior, those who have died trusting in you now see you face to face. Thank you for that final, best gift! Continue, we pray, to show to us your amazing love. Though we are your unworthy servants, bless us with such good gifts as will sustain us and others in this life. Bring us, in your good time, into the joy you have prepared for all whom you have redeemed. Give us voices there to sing unceasingly, "Glory and honor, praise, adoration, now and forevermore be thine!"*

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

*For all these things, dear Father, and for whatever else you desire for us in your wisdom and compassion, we pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior, Lord, and King. **Amen.***

Because I'm writing for many congregations, often weeks ahead, I expect each user to insert or amend petitions as needed in that setting. Additionally, although these are written, they can be enriched by extemporaneous prayer petitions as the Spirit moves. That leads to my final point: extemporaneous public prayer. Whether you're a pastor, council person, Stephen minister, or a friend responding to a friend, you will be called upon, or be moved, to offer up prayer. This can strike terror in the heart. This is where we ramble, get lost in "Lord I just wanna," or offer advice in the guise of prayer.

Here's where the Romans come to the rescue again! The Roman Church perfected the *collect* (*KOLL-ekt*): a short, pithy, topical prayer form. It's comprised of: Address to God; statement of some divine attribute; petition/request; reason or result of

Collect: Address to God; statement of divine attribute, petition/request; reason/result; conclusion.

request; conclusion.

Think of a short business letter form. Let's compare 2 entities: a letter asking for a donation to an animal shelter, and a collect for a friend who just learned she has cancer.

*Dear John and Nancy,
As fellow animal lovers, I know you're concerned for the plight of homeless pets.*

I'm inviting you to donate nutritious food (dry or canned), or gently-used toys and bedding, during our upcoming Pet Friendship Drive.

This will benefit homeless pets while they're in our care – and they'll be able to take a familiar toy or bed to their forever homes!

Thanking you in advance, I remain your pet-loving friend, George

*Dear Lord Jesus, our beloved Good Physician,
Your heart was moved by compassion by the prayers of sick and hurting people.*

Draw near to my friend Josie. Give her strength and courage, and bless her doctors with wisdom and compassion as she begins this difficult journey.

Provide all that's needed so that she can take each step with confident faith and dauntless hope, knowing you are always with her.

This I pray in your holy and precious Name.

Let the situation guide your "letter." Appeal to the quality in God that addresses your concern. Be brief and honest in your petition. Envision an outcome that's concrete but open-ended. Say thank you, and you're done!

In fact, one way to compose intercessory prayers is to frame them as modified collects. You don't have to include the salutation and sign-off with each petition; leave the former for the first one; and let your final sentence be the sign-off. But it will focus your thoughts and encourage brevity. This format also trains the ear of the hearer to know where you're heading in prayer. That helps them to silently participate in it, or at least to give their "Amen" as hearty assent and not merely hearty relief.

I hope these articles have been helpful as you ponder the place of intercessory prayer in the liturgy, its composition, and its ramifications for all the faithful in their own prayer life.



Acedia and Appetite

Continued from [page 3](#)

from my cohort groups, it must always be respectfully conditional (to make room for disparate, even conflicting convictions), but the psychological theories that form the substance of our didactics are not so much deferred to as referenced in ways that establish their authority. These theories, whether Freudian, Behavioral, Object-Relations, or of some other school, all stipulate appetite (conceived of as need) as fundamental and love as an experience later articulated on the basis of such. Appetite is the water within which we swim, the air we breathe to nourish our sense of self.

This was forcibly brought home to me by my daughter when at age nine she ebulliently showed me one of her bug-eyed Beanie Baby stuffed animals. After waxing eloquent about how much she *loved* it, she paused then thoughtfully added, “but you know, I’m pretty much programmed to feel this way about it because it has big eyes. All mammals are programmed to respond to their babies that way.” As she skipped back merrily to her play, I not only celebrated inwardly that somehow the brute biological “fact” had not diminished her childish joy, but marveled that this Christian homeschooled, thoroughly-churched girl without social media or unsupervised internet access had somehow been catechized so thoroughly by our culture’s tacit view of humanity... I hoped she would not later be seduced by its reductionism, the *storage* of a mother for her child diminished to mere genetic necessity.

The Great Tradition of the Church views humanity very differently, in a way that should not sit peacefully alongside our modern biological and psychological conceptions, as it too often does. If we are truly made in the image of God, the template of our souls is not the paltry desire that modernity stipulates and Kierkegaard lamented. Rather, what is fundamental to our identities is love—a divine *eros* that burns hotter than we can imagine, for “our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29)

The ascetic tradition of the Church cautions us about passion, but in this, it does not mean the passion of love—any of the four loves about which Greek is so articulate in comparison to English. Our elder brothers and sisters in the faith knew well from personal experience that appetite could easily obscure love as the prime mover of the soul, for it offered easier and immediate (albeit temporary and incomplete) satiation of the desire that is one of the many aspects of love. Love desires the beloved, not as a

possession but as simply its object, the sun around which it orbits. A robustly Christian anthropology would see appetite as parasitically imitating love, seeking to consume or possess the thing or person desired, not as the foundation upon which rarified “conceptions” of love would later be built.

The seeds of ascetic Christian spirituality are already evident in 1 Corinthians. There the Apostle Paul states:

²⁴ *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.*

²⁵ *Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.* ²⁶ *So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.* ²⁷ *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*²

We must not let the force of the Apostle’s words here be softened as I have heard too many well-meaning preachers do into weak-kneed warnings, back-handed reassurances that we might not “finish well.” The salvation that is by grace through faith may be lost — we may be *disqualified* — if our appetites convince us that their satiation is the face God’s love takes for us, if our trust in them slowly but decisively supplants our faith in Christ.

The sexuality debates that have riven the Church of late should put a recognizable face on the process, at least for readers of this periodical, but I do not wish to direct this warning toward those who have appetites with which I do not struggle; I need this strong medicine myself, as the consumerism of our unbelieving culture’s annual Christmas bacchanal has brought into sharp focus for me. I say, “brought into sharp focus,” because what I am seeing as I write this reflection is true of me all year around; though I call myself a Christian, though I believe I have faith, the shape of my life (which reflects the shape of my soul) is still largely formed by the unsanctified narratives of our cultural moment. My life is far more driven by appetite than I would care to admit on most days. I too often shop for new theological books rather than re-read those in my library whose arguments I have digested but whose wisdom eludes me in the daily practice of Christian discipleship. I too often tune-in to pedagogic YouTube videos rather than practice my guitar. I too often numb the pain of a day in which I have dealt with the tragic consequences of life in a world ruled by the power of death and the devil or the sinful choices of people who know better with a scotch or a mindless movie than with prayer and time with the Great Physician who alone can heal my infirmities. Too often, my appetites direct my activity rather than my faith.

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Acedia and Appetite

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In that last sentence, I nearly wrote, “my appetites dictate my activity.” The great hope we have — the promise of discipleship and evangelical freedom — is that I used the proper verb, and that with the help of the Holy Spirit, our history need not be our destiny. To be sure, “we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves,” but while we are bound, Christ is not and He may direct us differently.

I am coming to believe we focus so much on what we are saved from that we too often neglect what we are saved *for*. The 2007 film *Amazing Grace* about the life of William Wilberforce begins with his motion to abolish slavery being defeated on the floor of the British Parliament because some of those who had promised to vote for it were given tickets to the Comic Opera by his opposition. The modern equivalent would be binge-watching a Netflix series when, led by the Spirit through our faith, we should be praying, consoling someone, enjoying time with a friend, reading Scripture or similarly engaged. How many key moments have each of us missed when, through Jesus Christ, God had a Spirit-led motion upon the floor of our lives? Appetites distract, dim, and partially satisfy, making us forget — and so fail to enjoy — the promise of the freedom for which we were saved.

The *acedia*, the sloth, the deadly sin of passionlessness with which I began this little reflection is a sign to me that I have been too much with my appetites, that they have been directing me in spiritually unhealthy ways, leading me to seek satisfaction too often on the penultimate rather than the ultimate. I generally love the Christmas season, but this year for the first time I found myself discontented and eager for Twelfth Night to arrive so we could begin the process of undecorating. This year, for the first time I understood in my bones the words of the twentieth century theologian who said, “the only time I don’t feel like a hypocrite is when I am in liturgy.”

The feast of Christmas is over, and I am ready for the fasting of Lent to begin, not because I cannot bear to feast, but so that the joy of feasting — dining with Our Lord — may return.

¹C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*

²1 Corinthians 9:24–27 (ESV)

Worship Attendance and ...

Continued from [page 5](#)

tried and tested tradition of belief and practice.”

3. “Finally, this research has implications on a more individual level. For the roughly half of all Americans who do believe in God but do not regularly attend services, the relationship between service attendance and health may constitute an invitation back to communal religious life.”

And my suggestion? Perhaps read this article again, and while doing so ask yourself how these insights can guide your congregation’s ministry planning for 2022.

“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 10:24-25, ESV)

Life Conference and March for Life!

The NALC’s Annual Life Conference will be held on January 20, 2022, in Culpeper, VA. Bp. Dan Selbo will preach and preside; the topic is “The Science of Life.” Speakers include Dr. Roy Schwarz, M.D., Dr. Donna Harrison, M.D., and the Rev. Dr. Dennis Di Mauro. Click [here](#) for more information about this event. Culpeper is located 70 miles from Washington, D.C.



The National March for Life in Washington, D.C., will take place on January 21, 2022. It begins with a prayer service at the DAR Constitution Hall. This year’s theme is “Equality Begins in the WOMB.” Information about all the events taking place that day can be found [here](#). Lutherans will be attending!

Coming Events

- **NALC Life Conference** - Culpeper, VA - January 20, 2022. Click [here](#). See [Flyer](#).
- **2022 March for Life** - Washington, DC - January 21, 2022. Click [here](#). See [Blurb](#).
- **NALC Pastor's Conference** - Orlando, February 15-17, 2022. Click [here](#).

More events: <http://lutherancore.website/events/>

Video Book Reviews — “Ethics” by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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 NALC pastor Jeffray Greene for giving us a video review of the book *Ethics* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. According to Pastor Greene, “The thoughts are profound and will cause you to think on a different level.” Pastor Greene acknowledges that “it is not an easy read,” and this is the third time he has read it, but he shares that “if you allow it to be digested, it will help you to further shape the understanding and wisdom that God gives through Scripture.”

Bonhoeffer was a deep thinker who struggled with the good and evil which surrounded him. His was a keen mind which wrestled with the horrific realities which the twentieth century produced. Unlike many of his fellow citizens, he was fully aware of the atrocities of the Holocaust and the decadence of the Nazi regime. After lengthy incarceration and concentration camp privation, he was executed by the Nazis on April 9, 1945, just days before the Allied liberation.

While wrestling with these things in the privation caused by a tyrannical and self-destructive regime, Bonhoeffer did not focus on what he saw around him with eyes that judged the evil. Rather he focused on the goodness of God, which calls us to live according to the Lord’s purposes. Pastor Greene concludes, “To do so is what ethics is all about.”

This review, as well as fourteen others, have been posted on our YouTube channel. A link to the channel can be found [here](#).



Pro Ecclesia 2022 Conference

Mixed Blessings: The Theologians Who Shaped Us

June 6-8 (Monday evening - Wednesday at noon)

Confirmed speakers

Frederick Bauerschmidt, Loyola University Maryland, on “The Dumb Ox in the Room: Reckoning with Aquinas’ Legacy”

Phillip Cary, Eastern University, on “Not Quite What Any of Us Want Him to Be: On Augustine”

Carolyn Chau, King’s University College at Western University, on “The Gains and Losses of Charles Taylor: Where Taylor’s Moral Ontology Gets Us”

David Luy, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, on “The Place of Christology in Dogmatic Theology: A Critical Engagement with Wolfhart Pannenberg”

Charles Raith, Ascension Health, on “How My Mind Changed on Infant Baptism”

Amy Schiffrin, North American Lutheran Seminary/Trinity School for Ministry, “On Luther.”

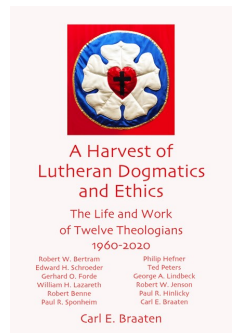
Questions? Email us at info@pro-ecclesia.org. Register [here](#).

The ALPB’s Latest Braaten Book

From the keyboard of Carl E. Braaten:

The history of theology is like a bucket brigade; each generation passes on a bucket of theology received from the previous one, advancing, modifying, or even rejecting what they learned from their teachers. ... The unavoidable question is: what is the current generation of Lutheran theologians doing to pass on what they have received? What will they find worth retaining and promoting? Or, will they start all over again, as it were from scratch, leaving the massive theological legacy of their predecessors to remain dormant or dead? What is the future of Lutheran theology in America?

Order a copy of *A Harvest of Lutheran Dogmatics and Ethics* for only \$18 from the [American Lutheran Publishing Bureau \(ALPB\)](#). Click [here](#).



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