

## Did Jesus Die For Our Sins?

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



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- Working Out Differences Could Have Saved Millions
- Biblically Sound Answers to LGBTQ+ Questions
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I am very grateful for all the people who expressed deep concern over the movement I described in my April letter from the director to “cancel” the Gospel of John and remove John 18-19 from the lectionary readings for Holy Week, because of the claim that they foster anti-Semitism. A link to that letter can be found [here](#).

In that same article I mentioned an even deeper concern – a movement not just to cancel the passion narrative in John, but to “cancel” the passion. There are many within the ELCA and other liberal/progressive, mainline denominations who reject the teaching that Jesus died for our sins. Instead they make Good Friday into the supreme example of Jesus’ bold political protest against the Roman empire, even unto death. And they believe that now we need to join in the work of dismantling empires and all other oppressive, political and social power structures.

One pastor wrote, “Empire killed Jesus for being a good rabbi, telling the truth, and therefore was a threat to the power structure.” Unfortunately, many agree.

Another pastor offers the following rewrite of two verses of the hymn, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.”

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## What's Next for the Pro-Life Movement?

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

Pro-life folks are celebrating the strong probability that the Supreme Court will overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which as even the late Justice Ginsburg acknowledged was too far-reaching and too sweeping. While she and I disagree on the outcome we desire, I affirm with her that any reforms to abortion regulations (and they were needed in 1973) should have involved legislative processes along with judicial ones (I would say legislative instead of judicial decrees).

But before we party too heartily, this is far from the end of debates over issues of abortion (or other matters regarding the sanctity of life). As Churchill said after the Battle of El Alamein, “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, it will not end abortions in this country, but it will create hundreds of new challenges as the debates move where I believe they should always have been, to the Congress and the legislatures of the various states. And my sense is that most of us are not equipped to accomplish what is needed — to change hearts and minds of those who genuinely believe the debate is about “women’s rights” or “women’s health care.”

The reality is that over the past 50 years, the same arguments have been repeated (ad nauseam, I might add), by those on both sides. Some folks are persuaded by one set of arguments and some by the other. But there is no attempt to find a reasonable place most of us can move beyond our slogans to look for common ground.

As I see the various memes on my Facebook feed, folks are lobbing slogans and in some cases hysterical screeds that have no chance of persuading anybody to look at the matter differently. No, the next step is not to ban interracial marriages (I have actually seen posts to that effect), and no, it is not the end of abortions in America. [As an aside, those who laugh at believers in some massive Q conspiracy seem to be susceptible to their own conspiracy theories.]

A story: Way back in 1984, I was a delegate to the convention of the Lutheran Church in America in Toronto. My bishop assigned us to attend various workshops, and perhaps mischievously and perhaps



wisely he sent me to one on the topic of abortion. The room was filled with pro-choice folks. My friends will be amazed that I kept a low profile, and once those gathered realized that the place was “safe,” they started sharing their dismay at the huge number of abortions being performed. Finally I went to a microphone, identified my position, and suggested that we had more in common than it appeared. A reporter for UPI even interviewed me afterwards, and the conversation became much more constructive.

We who are pro-life need to take seriously that many of those holding a pro-choice position are uncomfortable with the death of babies. And we should be uncomfortable with some of the rhetoric on our side which leads people to believe that we have no concern for very difficult decisions women and doctors sometimes need to make on terminating a pregnancy. Burn me at the stake if you wish, but there are times when an abortion may be a responsible decision. I believe this should be rare, but even the Roman Catholic Church permits abortion of an ectopic pregnancy.

Another story: When my mother learned of my pro-life views, she said, “There is something you need to know.” In 1948 she was in renal failure at Geisinger Hospital as she was carrying me, and the doctors told my father they couldn’t save both of us. He told them to “save the baby,” and in his best military veteran’s style would add later, “I don’t know what I would have done with a [bleep] baby.” Now as it turned out, my mother outlived my father by a quarter of a century, and I am still journeying around the sun 74 years later. My mother never had any doubts or reservations about the decision my father made; had she been able, she would have made the

*As is so often  
true, the  
perfect can be  
the enemy of  
the good.*

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# The Trials, Tribulations and Challenges Facing Pastors in 2022

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

I have been a subscriber to *Christianity Today* since the early 1980's. I have always appreciated the quality and Biblical orthodoxy of its articles. Recently both the CT magazine May/June issue, and its quarterly supplement "CT Pastors", focused on the current challenges facing congregational pastors in the U.S. These challenges include both increased internal congregational conflict and decreasing worship attendance. One result of these challenges has been a great many "burned out", discouraged clergy.

Regarding internal conflict within the Body of Christ, the "CT Pastors" editor, Kelli Trujillo, quoted Clement's letter to the church of Corinth in 96 AD. "Have we reached such a height of madness as to forget that we are members of one another?" Well in some U.S. congregations, especially since early 2020, the answer is apparently an emphatic "yes".

There is no doubt some comfort in knowing there has always been some level of internal conflict and disunity in the life of the church. However, many pastors are saying that the last few years have been, by far, the most difficult years of their ministries. One pastor, who was interviewed for the CT article, "Emptied Out", described what he has experienced in his last two years of ministry in one word: "Excruciating".

Scott Thumma, director of the Hartford University's Institute for Religion Research, recently surveyed pastors. His survey found that two-thirds considered 2020 "the hardest year in their ministry experience." From CT managing editor Andy Olsen: "The past few years of social and political upheaval have taken a particular toll on ministers. Countless churches are threatened by an epidemic of pastoral burnout."

So what are some of the causes contributing to both congregational conflict and frustrated, discouraged pastors? At least two immediately come to mind.

1. Not surprisingly one cause has been **pandemic-related ministry challenges since early 2020**. An additional quote, this one from CT writer Kyle Rohane: "The digitization of church services, sped along by the pandemic, has twisted the knife" when it comes to member dissatisfaction with their pastors. "Since the pandemic, the debate over in-person versus impersonal preaching has been complicated considerably. For the first time, due to the recent proliferation of live-streamed and recorded services, local pastors are in stiff competition with obscure preach-



ers from other states." Kelly Kopic, writing in her "CT Pastors" article, said: "The long COVID-19 pandemic has increased the difficulties for many (churches), resulting in less church involvement and more mental health challenges, less relational connection and more political polarization." On a personal note, I know of two pastors—both serving smaller congregations—who have each had five or six active couples angrily leave their churches in the last two years. Oddly enough, in one church it was because the pastor followed state guidelines regarding in-person worship and masks, while in the other church the couples left because that pastor did *not* strictly follow those same state guidelines. A classic "lose-lose" scenario.

2. A second cause contributing to both congregational disunity and pastor "burn out" is an **accelerated decline in worship attendance**. While the pandemic contributed to this decline for most churches, the majority of these congregations were unfortunately already in decline *before* 2020. A 20-year study from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research found that small churches (100 or fewer in weekly attendance) now make up 70 percent of US congregations. According to one "CT Pastors" article, "The median crowd at church on a Sunday morning is half what it was 20 years ago. In 2000, the median worship attendance at US congregations was 137; now it's down to 65." My own observation, after consulting with hundreds of pastors and congregational leaders over the last 30 years, is that congregational decline

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# Resources for Ministry to LGBTQ+ Identified Persons

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

In the January 2022 issue of CORE Voice and the February 2022 letter from the director I had a two-part article entitled, “How Did It Happen?”, in which I explained how groups such as Reconciling Works have made use of the principles of community organizing so that they have been able to completely take over the ELCA with their LGBTQ+ values, priorities, and agenda. A link to the article in the newsletter can be found [here](#). A link to the letter from the director can be found [here](#).

At the end of the second part I described the need for resources for parents, church leaders, and LGBTQ+ identified persons which are Biblically sound, scientifically based, and compassionate in their approach to matters pertaining to same-sex attraction and gender identity, and more broadly relating to sexuality and gender.

Next month – June – the LGBTQ+ community will be celebrating Pride Month. In anticipation of that event Lutheran CORE has gathered a list of resources that will provide Biblically sound and compassionate answers to such questions as, “What do I do if I am gay?” and “What should I do now that my child or friend has come out as gay?”

We began the task of developing this list with the clear understanding that the Bible does not allow for same-sex sexual activity and/or misrepresenting one’s biological sex. No resource that takes an LGBTQ+ affirming point of view would be included unless in that resource the LGBTQ+ affirming point of view is in dialogue with the traditional point of view regarding sexuality.

The goal in providing this list is to reach LGBTQ+ persons for Christ, to acknowledge their struggles with same-sex attraction and/or gender dysphoria, and to help them find a healthy way forward and assist them in their efforts to live biblically.

We do not believe that the Bible promises that same-sex attraction and/or gender dysphoria will disappear if only we will \_\_\_\_\_. Rather we are reminded of how God did not remove Paul’s thorn in the flesh (whatever it might have been) in spite of his fervent prayers (2 Corinthians 12: 7-10), and we understand that the Christian life – this side of heaven – is a constant struggle between the flesh and the spirit, as Paul describes in Romans 7.

The goal is to help same-sex attracted persons live according to a Biblical sexual ethic. We acknowledge that some will choose to live a celibate



life. Some will marry a person of the opposite sex even though they still struggle with same-sex attractions.

When working with transgender identified persons, regardless of the initial stance taken on identity markers, the end goal is to help them accept their biological sex.

We commend these resources to you, and we pray that they will help all of us live in the spirit of what the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans –

“I appeal to you, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12: 1-2)

Click [here](#) to access a list of Resources For Ministry to LGBTQ+ Identified Persons.

## CORE Voice Newsletter

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call 1-888-810-4180

## Weekly Bible Studies on the Lectionary Readings

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



One of the goals and purposes of Lutheran CORE is to provide resources for confessing Lutherans. On our website we have daily devotionals as well as suggestions for hymns, Scriptures, and prayers related to the themes for each Sunday. Here are links to these resources.

- [Daily devotionals](#)
- [Scriptures and hymns suggestions](#)
- [Prayers of the church](#)

A new resource that is now available is a Bible study that I am doing each week based upon the lectionary readings for the following Sunday. The resource includes a twenty-five-to-thirty-minute video and a two-page study guide. A new one is available each Tuesday and is dated on Wednesday, because that is when the church where they are recorded posts them.

Many thanks to Living Water, an ELCA congregation in Scottsdale, Arizona, where my wife and I are members and where the studies are recorded. Many thanks also to Shepherd of the Hills, an LCMC congregation in Fountain Hills, Arizona, for permission to provide a [link](#) to their website where the videos and study guides are posted.

It is a great joy and privilege for me to be able to provide these studies, and I am very happy whenever anyone finds them helpful.

## Video Book Reviews—“Martin Luther’s Theology of Beauty”

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 Maurice Lee, NALC pastor and theologian, for doing a review of Mark Mattes’ book, [Martin Luther’s Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal](#). Dr. Mattes is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Grand View University in Des Moines.

Dr. Lee begins by referring to Dr. Mattes’ “astonishingly prolific and insightful scholarship over many years.” He then goes on to mention how Luther would have come to a conclusion similar to that of the philosophical tradition — that truth, goodness, and beauty are closely interconnected — but *only* on the basis of his rigorously Christological perspective, in that we can rightly see truth, goodness, and beauty *only* in the light of Christ crucified and risen.

Luther and the Lutheran tradition did not remove music and the visual arts from the church. In fact, Luther’s praise for music was second only to his praise for the Word of God. This deep appreciation for beauty was in line with Luther’s understanding that God’s Word comes through earthly, physical, and bodily means. The finite is capable of bearing the infinite. The body and earthly things can be channels of grace when appropriated by the Word of God.

[This review](#), as well as 18 others, has been posted on our YouTube channel. A link to the channel can be found [here](#).

### PLAYLIST

If you would like to watch Lutheran CORE’s playlist of all of our video book reviews, click [here](#), then scroll down and start the video by selecting the play button or click on the three vertical lines near the top right of the first video to select a new video from the list that will pop up.



## Did Jesus Die For Our ...

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### **Verse 2 –**

What you, dear Jesus, suffered casts light upon our way,

We see the cost of loving and living for the day  
When all God's children flourish in justice and in peace,  
When hungry mouths will be fed and warring ways will cease.

### **Verse 3 –**

What language shall I borrow to thank you, dearest friend;  
For this your selfless living, your love that did not bend?  
May my life bless all people, may my love bring you praise,  
That all might share God's blessing, that all would know God's grace.

According to this approach, I do not need a Savior to die in my place, forgive my sins, break the power of sin, and defeat the great enemy death. Rather I just need to be inspired and motivated to join in the effort to oppose all oppressive power structures.

But the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus died for our sins.

In 1 Corinthians 15: 3-4 the apostle Paul emphatically states, "For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day." Paul clearly states that not only did Jesus die for our sins, but also that that teaching is "of first importance."

Revelation 1: 5 – part of the second reading for the second Sunday of Easter – says, "To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood." First John 2: 2 describes Jesus as "the atoning sacrifice for our sins." In John 1: 29 John the Baptist calls Jesus "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Is there any way to interpret that verse except to say that John is comparing Jesus with the Old Testament lambs upon whom the sins of the Israelites were laid and who died in their place? Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, "He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5: 21).

Now certainly there are many additional ways to describe the saving work of Jesus. He came to seek the lost (Luke 19: 10). He rejoices when He finds us and when we come home (Luke 15). He forgives,

restores, and gives power for new living (John 8: 3-11).

I think one of the best passages for describing the rich variety of ways in which God has acted in Jesus can be found in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

We were buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God (v. 12).

When we were dead in trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ, when he forgave us all our trespasses (v. 13).

He erased the record that stood against us with its legal demands (v. 14).

He set this aside by nailing it to the cross (v. 14).

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and triumphed over them (v. 15). (Based upon my reading of Ephesians 6, I am certain that Paul meant the spiritual powers of evil, not the political powers of Rome.)

He made us alive. The charges against us were dropped. The powers of evil were defeated. All this Jesus did through the cross and the resurrection. And that is a whole lot more than just calling on us to join with Him in His struggle against oppressive political and social power structures.

Those who reject the teaching that Jesus as God the Son died for our sins do so because they claim that that teaching makes God the Father into a cruel, vindictive child abuser.

I would reply that rejecting the teaching that Jesus died for our sins is missing the whole point of the seriousness of our sins and the depth of God's love. Romans 6: 23 clearly says that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." It is not that the Father inflicted His wrath upon the Son in order to satisfy the anger that He felt towards us. Instead in giving His Son, God out of His great love for us gave Himself. He Himself paid the price for us. He satisfied His own requirements of justice. And He won the victory over death and the power and penalty of sin.

But how widespread is it in the ELCA to reject the teaching that Jesus died for our sins? I am not aware of any official doctrinal statement that has been approved by the ELCA Church Council, the Conference of Bishops, and/or a Churchwide Assembly which says, "We no longer believe that Jesus died for our sins." But evidence of how widespread this belief is is abundant, and it seems to be growing. Here are some examples. I will begin with two more extreme examples.

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## Did Jesus Die For Our ...

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1.

Illustrated Ministry is a curriculum company whose faith formation resources are popular among many in the mainline denominations, including the ELCA. [Here](#) is a link to an Easter resource.

This resource describes itself in this way. “This script outlines the way in which Jesus upended corrupt systems of power. Because of his power, popularity, and message, those systems retaliated.” It also says, “The good news of Jesus is often bad news for those who would like to accumulate power over others. But in the end, death was not the end of Jesus! We witness how Jesus lives. His message of love and justice gives us hope.” Did you get that? Jesus dies only because he “upended corrupt systems of power.” It is not that our sins need to be and are forgiven. Rather we are to go and do likewise.

2.

Daneen Akers, author of the highly popular progressive/liberal curriculum, “Holy Troublemakers,” is another person who believes and who spreads the belief that Jesus died because he upset the status quo. [Here](#) is a link to her article.

In this article she quotes another person as saying, “Jesus’ death was an interruption in his ministry, not the point of it. His message of love-your-enemies, the last-shall-be-first, and God’s-realm-is-for-all was deeply threatening to the status quo. So he was executed by the state as a cautionary tale for those who would follow his teachings. This is why Jesus died: His teachings upset powerful hierarchies and status quos, so he was executed by the state. The good news is that death and violence didn’t have the last word. It’s a love-ultimately-wins story.”

Many of the books in the picture in the article are published by Augsburg Fortress and/or are assigned or recommended as texts in ELCA seminaries.

But some might say, But that does not mean that anyone in a leadership position in the ELCA is saying anything like that. Is anything like that being said by anyone who would officially represent the ELCA? Here are three examples.

1.

[Here](#) is a blog post from the Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston Largen, president of Wartburg Seminary, in which she condemns Isaiah 53 as “abusive” in theology.

2.

[Here](#) is a Huffington Post editorial by the Rev.

Dr. David Lose, former president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and author of “Making Sense of the Cross” (published by Augsburg Fortress). Dr. Lose also condemns “Christ died for our sins” as abusive theology.

3.

[Here](#) is a video from the “Animate: Faith” curriculum, published by Augsburg Fortress, in which famed ELCA pastor and public theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber condemns the idea that Christ died for our sins as divine child abuse.

I do not hear what Drs. Largen and Lose, and Pastor Bolz-Weber are saying as going as far as Illustrated Ministry and Holy Troublemakers are going in totally reinterpreting the life, death, and ministry of Jesus, but I also know that things never stay where they are now. What is extreme now will soon become norm. There is nothing about the ELCA that would tell me that the ELCA is able to go “just a little bit off base” without soon being “very far off base.” Especially if more popular and accessible materials like those from Illustrated Ministry and Holy Troublemakers, and the content of books which are assigned as seminary texts, have a far greater influence on the average person and seminary students/future pastors than the writings of current and former seminary presidents.

God is not a cosmic child abuser. God is not wrathful and vengeful and anxious to take out on Jesus the anger He feels towards us. But the Scriptures are very clear in teaching that Jesus died for our sins. Any theology of what Jesus did on the cross must take that clear teaching into account in order to remain faithful to the Bible.

There are many things that these people are saying that we need to hear, such as -

- The cross is God’s greatest expression of love rather than an expression of God’s wrath.
- The cross shows that when humans do their worst, God can bring about His best.
- The cross shows that God is with us in all of our suffering.
- God is on the side of those who are the victims of the abuse of power, rather than on the side of the abusers of power.

From the cross Jesus cried, “It is finished.” He did say that those who wish to follow Him must take up their cross. But from the cross He did not cry, “Go and do likewise.”

## What's Next for the Pro-Life ...

Continued from [page 2](#)

same one. But looking back (I hope with gratitude and humility) I do not believe my father could have been condemned had he chosen the opposite. Oh, and this was 25 years before *Roe v. Wade* but abortion would have been an option.

I have been told that after *Roe v. Wade*, Senator (and Lutheran) Mark Hatfield was prepared to introduce a human life amendment which probably could have passed. The problem was that some pro-life advocates wanted an absolute prohibition, and others wanted to include exceptions (rape, incest, preserving the life of the mother). Sen. Hatfield knew that he would not have enough votes if either group voted against it, so he told the groups to work out their differences and give him a bill they could all support. Sadly, that never happened, and millions of lives have been sacrificed. As is so often true, the perfect can be the enemy of the good.

We who are pro-life will never win the victories that matter in congress and state legislatures unless we are prepared to address the legitimate concerns of the large number of people who really are “pro-choice” and not simply “pro-abortion.” There are absolutists on both sides, and all they do in either case is radicalize the other side. Again, Justice Ginsburg recognized that *Roe v. Wade* empowered the pro-life movement (and I suspect, bears much of the responsibility for the ugliness of the political wars wracking our nation right now).

So I would challenge my pro-life friends — Tone down the rhetoric! Listen to the legitimate concerns of those persuaded by the pro-choice arguments. Take seriously the genuine compassion they feel toward women in crisis pregnancies. Be prepared gently to respond to the lies which are widely believed, such as that pro-life people don't care about the child after it is born. And show by your actions that you do care! The narrative spread by the media and the abortion advocates is that we are a bunch of hateful fanatics (mostly males) who want to oppress women by forcing our narrow religious doctrines on them. You and I know that isn't true, but sometimes we let ourselves get carried away in the heat of argument.

If in fact the Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, our work will just begin. Are we prepared to engage in the hard work of speaking and acting in ways that might change the hearts and minds of those who disagree with us? Are we prepared to listen more than to argue? The lives of thousands, maybe millions of human beings will depend on our answer.

## Pro Ecclesia Conference

by [Pr. Steve Shipman](#), STS, CCET Executive Director

This year a group of ecumenical scholars will reflect on the Christian figures from past times who have most greatly influenced them in a positive way and ask the question, "What did these teachers get wrong in the light of what they got right?"



### Confirmed speakers

- Frederick Bauerschmidt, Loyola University Maryland, on “The Dumb Ox in the Room: Reckoning with **Aquinas**’s 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 “Between Form and Norm: Assessing the Evangelizing Potential of **Balthasar**’s Theology”
- 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**.”

The conference will again be at Loyola University of Maryland in Baltimore, and will begin in the evening of Monday, June 6, 2022, and end before lunchtime on Wednesday, June 8.

You can find full information regarding the speakers and the link to register on our website ([click here](#)).

Our annual banquet will be held Tuesday night; we will ask for an additional voluntary donation for the cost of the meal.

We encourage you to register and to share [this link](#) with others who might be interested. You can register online by credit card, or print out the form and mail us a check. Please contact me if you have any questions.



# The Trials, Tribulations and Challenges Facing Pastors ...

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often increases the likelihood of internal conflict, and directly contributes to the discouragement and stress experienced by pastors.

Not surprisingly, these ministry challenges are contributing to many pastors re-evaluating how long they want to remain in the ministry. From writer Kyle Rohane: "What's unusual about our current situation, is the sheer number of pastors wanting to leave ministry simultaneously throughout the US and across demographics and traditions." He also writes, "The aging of American pastors is a well-established phenomenon. Baby boomers have stayed in ministry longer than expected, and we should expect to see a natural rise in retirements as they finally transition out of lead roles. *But the pressures of the past two years could cause many to retire early.*" (Emphasis mine) Even more specific to our immediate challenges, author and pastor Dane Ortlund tweeted, "A tidal wave of pastor resignations is coming in 2022." And one last quote from Kyle Rohane: "A nationwide pastor shortage could be a death knell for many smaller churches."

So what can be done; whether at the direction of pastors or lay leaders? To begin with, there needs to be awareness that a significant percentage of serving pastors are dealing with an "affirmation deficit". Given the realities of pastoral ministry since early 2020, a pastoral support group is more needed than ever in congregational life. (And this is at least one group of lay leaders that should be hand-picked by the pastor.) Given the current clergy supply crisis, I can state unequivocally that you do *not* want your current pastor to be retiring or leaving sooner than necessary. This is a good time for lay leaders to step up and provide emotional and spiritual encouragement for their pastors.

In addition, pastors and lay leaders alike need to address the issue of congregational unity. Granted, this might be more challenging now than it would have been a few years ago. However, this makes it that much more urgent and necessary. Kelly Kavic writes, "When things are especially challenging for church leaders, it can be hard to even see the good that has been given, because we feel overwhelmed by the hardships and disappointments. Maybe we need encouragement to look again with grace...Jesus promises to meet us in and through his imperfect people...Our confidence is not in our faithfulness but in God's. God knows our limits better than we do, so by loving others well, limits and all, we participate in

God's work without being crushed by it."

To end this column, here is one specific and particularly practical suggestion that can contribute to congregational unity. It was hi-lighted in Ike Miller's article (in "CT Pastors") entitled, "The Myth of Thick Skin". The subtitle to this article is "The surprising cure to painful criticism: Invite more feedback". The concept is straightforward. Congregations need regular, healthy ways for members to voice their concerns to lay leaders. And these listening sessions need to be done without the pastor present. The lay leaders — perhaps those who are also in the pastoral support group — take notes during these listening sessions; notes that will be passed on to the pastor while not revealing the individual "source". In these "listening sessions" disgruntled and/or concerned members can be heard without being challenged. Additionally, the pastor can learn of their concerns in a manner where he or she is less likely to feel unfairly and personally criticized. A final quote from Ike Miller:

*"However tempting it may seem, the secret to dealing with criticism as pastors isn't to avoid it or hear less of it. The secret to handling criticism well is to create channels and practices that allow for more of it, but in healthier ways...Healthy feedback tools provide less-personal pathways for this communication to take place so that we, as leaders, can remain humble, teachable, and receptive to wise counsel without being destroyed by the emotional blows that often accompany it."*

## Coming Events

- **Pro Ecclesia Conference** - Baltimore, MD - June 6-8, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **The NEXUS Institute** - Des Moines, IA - June 12-18, 2022. Click [here](#) to register.
- **LCMC Youth Event** - Des Moines, IA - July 19-22, 2022. Click [here](#) to register.
- **2022 NALC Convocation** - Online - August 5-6, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **ELCA Churchwide Assembly** - August 8-13, 2022. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 22nd Annual Gathering & Convention**—Lakeville, MD—October 2-5, 2022. Click [here](#).

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