

Every Samuel Needs an Eli

by [Pr. Jeff Morlock](#), Director of Vocational Discernment at the [North American Lutheran Seminary](#).



“What do you want to be when you grow up?” It’s a question that youth have been asked since they graduated kindergarten. But in high school, the question becomes a much more pressing issue. In a culture obsessed with both success and control, students are encouraged at earlier and earlier ages to have their futures and career paths completely mapped out. And much of the decision making in this regard revolves around interests, skills, money, and the expectations of others. At the intersection of *“What am I interested in, what am I good at, what will my loved ones approve of, and how much money can I make doing it?”* is the decision to follow one career path over all the others.

What is too often excluded from this equation is *the biblical reality of God’s call. We are called into being, called into relationship with the Lord and His Church*, called to serve, and called into a yet unknown future by One who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who loves us beyond measure. For Christians, then, the primary question that needs to be answered is not, “What do I want to be when I grow up?” but rather, “What is God’s call on my life?”

Every kid in Sunday School has heard the story of young Samuel (1 Samuel 3), to whom the Lord spoke in the middle of the night. Like many of us, Samuel struggled to recognize the voice of the Lord. In fact, it was Samuel’s older and wiser mentor, Eli, who helped Samuel recognize God’s voice and call on his life.

Although he failed to recognize God’s calling at first, Samuel was

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The Value of Internship

by [Pr. Chris Johnson](#), Lutheran CORE Secretary



Over a decade ago I had the pleasure and privilege of being on internship. Internship proved to be a pivotal time in which I figured out – with God’s help and the help of my supervising pastor – what pastoral ministry was about. You learn much in seminary about the ministry but there’s nothing like having boots on the ground. To borrow an image C.S Lewis used about theology in *Mere Christianity*, seminary provides us a map of the ministry. Internship has us visit that map with someone, often times but not always, taking a vicar/intern pastor by the hand, as Virgil did for Dante in *Inferno* or as Beatrice does for Dante in *Paradiso*. It is always our hope and prayer, of course, that for a vicar/intern pastor, their time spent on internship is more of a *paradiso* than an *inferno*!

As I reflect back on my time on internship, there are two big lessons learned that proved beneficial for the last 11 ½ years or so of my ordained ministry. No doubt, other seasoned pastors could add more. For the sake of brevity I’ll keep it to two.

1) The importance of having a place to learn and grow knowing the Lord’s gracious people would bear that burden joyfully. I can only imagine what my first sermons were like. God bless that congregation in St. Paul that endured my meager offerings of the Word. It also is a blessing, perhaps, knowing vicars/intern pastors move on after they have “cut their teeth”! Regardless, when others know you’re a “rookie” in the ministry they cut you a bit of slack. Parish ministry will be the same, at least for the first few years of a call!

2) The importance of having a mentor walk through various ministry challenges: How do I lead a Bible study? What do I say at the funeral home? How do I respond to a confirmation student who says they

don’t believe in Jesus? Why does this congregation worship the way it does? Do I approach someone who needs pastoral counsel or do I let them come to me? Questions like this, “casuistry” as the old Lutherans would call it, are essential to ask. It’s a good thing to have other faithful shepherds after ordination as well. The questions never go away.

I write this to point out the obvious: Internship is crucial for pastoral growth. Though there is no “one size, fits all” model of internship, internship itself is very valuable. At Lutheran CORE we seek to connect congregations in many ways – one of our goals as a NETWORK. At Lutheran CORE, we also are invested in the next generation of pastors for Christ’s Church. So, if you are a pastor, would you be willing to be an internship supervisor? Perhaps we can connect you to someone. If you are a congregational leader, would you consider your congregation a safe place to learn and grow for a fledgling pastor? If so, perhaps we can connect you to a gifted candidate. If you are interested in the ministry, have had some seminary training, and are looking for what the next step is but aren’t sure where to go, perhaps Lutheran CORE can help too.

We recognize that various church bodies already have existing structures to meet this need so this might only apply to LCMC pastors, churches and students. But even if we can only help LCMC brothers and sisters in Christ, for the sake of the harvest of souls, let us know!

Coming Events

- **2023 Pastor’s Conference**—San Antonio, TX—January 31– February 2, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **NEXUS Institute Summer 2023**—Des Moines, IA. July 16-22, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **Pro Ecclesia Conference**—Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD. June 5-7 2023. *Save the date!*
- **ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering**—Phoenix, AZ. July 17-11, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **NALC Lutheran Week 2023**—Oklahoma City, OK. August 7-11, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 23rd Annual Gathering & Convention** — St. Charles, MO. October 1-4, 2023. Details TBD.

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

Does Doctrine Matter?

by [Pr. David Charlton](#), Lutheran CORE Vice President

Does doctrine matter? That is a question that has been asked again and again in the Church. Sometimes, the question is asked because doctrine seems so dry and boring. It seems so much like academic hair splitting. A second reason is because doctrine divides. During the 17th Century, central Europe endured the 30 Years War, leading to the death of up to one-third of the population of Germany. That war was driven by doctrinal differences between Catholics, Lutherans, and the Reformed.

When the war was over, a movement arose called Pietism. Many saw it as a Second Reformation. Pietism emphasized many things that have become part of our common heritage as Christians. The man considered the founder of Pietism, Philip Jacob Spener, made six proposals to improve the life of the Church. One of them was this:

We must beware how we conduct ourselves in religious controversies.

Being at war with one another, either literally or verbally, does little to spread the Gospel. Non-believers are turned away from the Church when they see how divided we are. In particular, when they perceive that Christians are lacking in love for one another, they wonder about the truth of the Gospel. After all, didn't Jesus teach that the greatest commandment was to love God and one another?

That is all true, but it's not so easy to dismiss doctrine. In the Lutheran Church of the 17th Century there was another movement that emphasized doctrine. It is known today as Lutheran Orthodoxy. They spent a great amount of time disputing with Catholics and the Reformed over proper theology. At its best, Orthodoxy was not obsessed with doctrine for its own sake, as if one is saved by having the right answers to abstract theological questions. Rather, Orthodoxy understood that the purpose of doctrine is to preserve the pure preaching of God's Word and the proper administration of the Sacraments.

Why does this matter? Because it is through the Word and the Sacraments that God gives us forgiveness, life and salvation. For instance, there is the question, "Is the Bible the Word of God?" You might be surprised to hear that question. Both the



Pietists and the Orthodox held the Bible in high regard. In fact, Jacob Spener's complaint was that there wasn't enough Bible reading in the Church, particularly among the laity. Meanwhile, Catholics, the Reformed, and Lutherans all agreed that the Bible was the Word of God. They only disagreed on how it should be interpreted.

That is not the case today. In the past year, I have heard an ELCA pastor declare that the Bible is not the Word of God. Instead, he said that Jesus is the only Word of God. The Bible, he said, is a Word *about* God, but it is not the Word *of* God. The reason he did this is that he finds parts of the Bible to be offensive, outmoded, and oppressive. Rather than turning to the Bible on questions of faith and life, he would prefer that we ask ourselves what we think the "real Jesus" would do. In doing this, he drives a wedge between the Jesus of the Bible and the Jesus that we supposedly "know in our hearts."

What does Lutheran doctrine teach? It certainly does teach that Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God. However, it also teaches that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is in and through the Written Word that we encounter the Incarnate Word. In fact, Lutheran doctrine teaches that the Word of God comes to us in three forms: 1) the Incarnate Word, 2) the Written Word, and finally 3) the Preached and Sacramental Word.

This is where doctrine becomes practical, and not only practical, but a matter of life and death. Think of the question of the forgiveness of sins. If your sins

**If your sins are forgiven, you have life and salvation.
If your sins are not forgiven, you will be condemned eternally.**

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Some of the More Common Mistakes Call Committees Should Avoid

by [Pr. Don Brandt](#), *Congregations in Transition*



As CiT Director I have been in a coaching relationship—since 2019—with a large number of call committees. I have now provided at least some level of assistance to twenty-five different call committees; all of them in the LCMC. In addition, I have also been monitoring, online, how an additional twelve to fifteen call committees have been conducting their search for a new pastor. Given what I have learned, I want to offer *examples of the more common mistakes* sometimes made when a call committee is looking for their next pastor.

However, before mentioning these “mistakes,” it is important to acknowledge how incredibly difficult it is—in 2022—to identify and call the “right” pastor. (Let alone making the mistake of looking for the “perfect” pastor.) As just about all of you know by now, given the shortage of available clergy it is a far better time to be a pastor looking for a call than be on a call committee looking for a pastor. Accordingly, it is not my intention to criticize call committees but rather to offer some practical advice as to how to conduct a pastoral search in such a challenging environment. And just how challenging is it? Well just in case you are one of a diminishing number of people who doubts the extent of the current clergy supply shortage, consider these four factors that have created something of a “perfect storm” when it comes to this crisis. First, there is the issue of retiring Boomer pastors; something which all of us are aware of. Next, we have the matter of far fewer seminary graduates than we have retiring pastors. Third, there is the reality that there have been many congregations who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic; whether by decreased in-person worship attendance or internal conflict. And fourth, if all of the above wasn’t challenging enough, we are also experiencing a significant national decline in the number of Americans who identify as Christians.

This last challenge—of a dwindling number of Americans who identify as Christians—was revealed in dramatic fashion just this last September. I found this revelation written in Timothy Dalrymple’s “From the President” column in the September issue of *Christianity Today*. He shared the results of a survey by the Barna organization. According to this study the percentage of Americans who are “practicing Christians” plummeted between 2009 and 2020. “Practicing Christians”, in this case, means they “prioritize their faith” and have attended church within the previous month. In 2009 50% of respondents fit this description. In 2020 only 25%!

Needless to say, all of the above adds to the difficulties that churches in general, and congregations “in transition” in particular, are facing. But having said that, below are some of the more common errors that only *add* to a call committee’s challenges. In other words, these are unnecessary errors that can be easily avoided.

1. Not keeping **prayer** as a central and crucial part of your meetings as a call committee. When a search process has been prolonged and discouraging, group prayer is sometimes missing from call committee agendas. This is a time when prayer is more needed than ever. And not just a cursory prayer by one member of the committee is needed, but a time of prayer when any and all members can participate; sharing not only their hopes but also their concerns.
2. Not creating a **well-written open-position post** for your LCMC or NALC vacancy list. I have become somewhat obsessed with monitoring—daily—the LCMC “Open Positions” list. And I have been doing this now for three years! (I know, a retiree with too much time on his hands.) In those three years I have seen some posts which were thrown together and—compared to the majority of posts—were totally inadequate. Here is the simple rule: When creating your position description, look at the vacancies already posted and *learn* from them regarding how to create the best possible description of your position, your congregation, and your surrounding community.
3. Not **keeping your congregation up-to-date** regarding your work and progress as a call committee. You should have brief, verbal Sunday-morning reports once every four to six weeks, and a brief article in every congregational newsletter. Let the members know you have been working!

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Encuentro 2022— A New Perspective

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

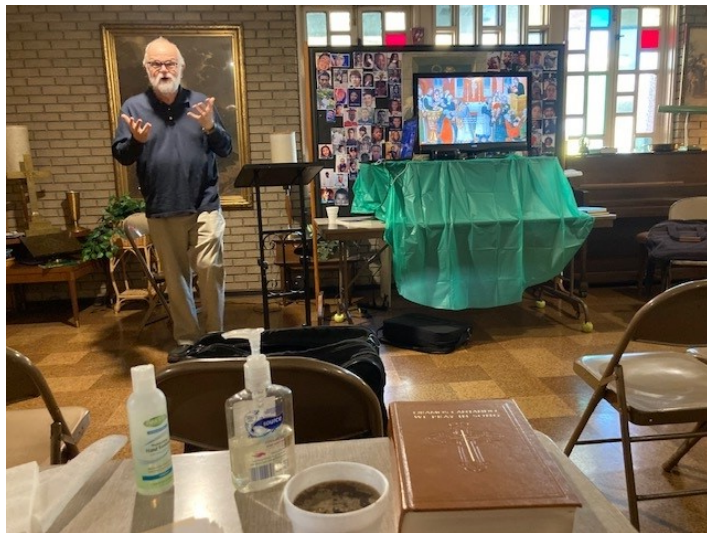
Many thanks to retired ELCA pastor and former Lutheran CORE board member Keith Forni for organizing, and to St. Timothy's Lutheran Church (ELCA) in the Hermosa neighborhood of northwest Chicago for hosting the mid-October, annual gathering called Encuentro. Encuentro is Spanish for "Encounter." This event is co-sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the Bilingual Ministry Resource Center, which is based in Chicago and Joliet, Illinois.

Because of the pandemic this was the first time we were able to hold this event since 2019. We were all glad that we were again able to gather for teaching, worship, fellowship, and exchange of ideas on how we can be engaged in outreach to our diverse neighborhoods, particularly focusing on Spanish-speaking people.

We gave thanks to God as we heard from Pastor Forni regarding how seventy to eighty children and their parents walk by the church each day on their way to and back home from school. Members of the church hand out to the children Spanish language coloring books such as "Questions Kids Ask About God." Local residents were invited to join us for the presentations and the delicious lunch. We remembered the beginnings of significant outreach to the community before the pandemic, and we prayed for a resumption of that response. We recalled how that outreach began with the response of one family, who invited their friends and neighbors, who in turn invited their friends and neighbors, and so on. Outreach and ministry certainly does most effectively happen through relationships.

We were blessed by and learned much from the two keynote presentations by the Rev. Dr. Maxwell Johnson, ELCA pastor and professor of theology at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. His morning presentation was on "Reclaiming the Eucharist and Great Thanksgiving in Contemporary Lutheran Worship."

Dr. Johnson began by mentioning the misunderstanding that certainly has always been my understanding – that liturgy is the work of the people. Instead Dr. Johnson said that Christ is the prime liturgist. He is the one who performs the work on behalf of the people. Liturgy is God's work for us, not our work for God. Our work is our deeds of service after our worship. Dr. Johnson also stressed that right from the beginning the eucharistic meal has always



been central to Christian worship. He gave as an example of worship's being both Word and sacrament Luke's account of when Jesus joined His followers on the road to Emmaus. Jesus interpreted the Scriptures to them (Word) and His presence became known to them in the breaking of the bread (meal).

Dr. Johnson's afternoon presentation was on "The Virgin Mary in Liturgy, Doctrine, and Life." This presentation was particularly timely in light of the enormous impact upon the entire ELCA of spiritual and cultural insensitivities by denominational leaders towards an ELCA Latino mission in Stockton, California in the termination of their mission developer on a day that should have been a time of great celebration for them and the ending of synodical mission support.

Dr. Johnson reminded us that most people today are not naturally going to be looking for a Lutheran church home. Rather, with an increasing number of Latino people in our communities, if we want to intentionally reach our neighbors, including our Latino neighbors, then we need to find a way to embrace their symbols and images. He sees this embrace as including finding a place for Mary within our churches. He shared a very humorous but also a very insightful remark from one bishop – that it only makes sense that it is the mother in a very dysfunctional family who keeps the family together.

Dr. Johnson sees in the appearances of the Virgin to Juan Diego in 1531 the clear message that the Latino community is seen and known by God. While

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Video Ministries—November 2022

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

Each month we feature two videos – the most recent addition to our video book reviews, and a recent addition to our CORE Convictions videos. The CORE Convictions series is designed particularly for those who wish to grow in their knowledge of Biblical teaching and Christian living as well as for those who want to know more about how Lutherans understand the Bible. We also want to provide this resource for those who do not have the opportunity or the option of attending a church where the preaching and teaching is Biblical, orthodox, and confessional.

[Here](#) is a link to our You Tube channel. In the top row you will find recordings from both sets of videos – in the order in which they were posted, beginning with the most recent. In the second row you will find links to the Playlists for both sets of videos. We now have six videos in our CORE Convictions series. Many thanks to retired NALC pastor Tim Hubert for his video on “Interim Ministry.” His video will be featured in January 2023.

This month we want to feature a video book review by Ken Coughlan and a CORE Convictions video by Pastor Jeffray Greene.

Many thanks to Christian apologist Ken Coughlan for his video review of the book, How God Became Jesus. Ken is media director, director of international programs, and staff counsel for Trinity Lutheran Church (NALC) in Joppa, Maryland. A link to his video can be found [here](#).

In 2014 Bart D. Ehrman from the University of North Carolina published a book entitled How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee. His argument is that the earliest Christians did not view Jesus as any kind of divine being. Rather over time the prevailing view of Jesus changed from being merely human to being a lesser divine figure. Ehrman claims that in this change the early Christians were following early Judaism, which allowed for many lesser divine figures. Eventually, by the time we come to the Gospel of John, the view of Jesus changes again from being a lesser divine to being equal with the Father.

Anticipating a strong reaction, the publisher released an advance manuscript to a group of five internationally recognized biblical scholars with traditional views, who wrote a response entitled, How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus’ Divine Nature. These scholars argued that right from the start early Christians saw Jesus as one with the



Father. They fault Ehrman for totally ignoring the major Jewish tenant of a strict monotheism. They also argue on the basis of the earliest Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus’ claim to be able to forgive sins is a claim to be God.

Ken Coughlan urges people to read How God Became Jesus and then bring it to the attention of their congregations, friends, and colleagues so that people will see that there is a better substantiated view than that of Ehrman. If they only read Ehrman’s book, there is a good chance that they will become confused by the fundamentally inaccurate information that can be found within it.

Many thanks to NALC pastor, Dr. Jeffray Greene, for his very illuminating discussion of the question, What does it mean to be confessional? A link to his video can be found [here](#).

Beginning by stating the need for watchmen and for walls to protect the Church from all the streams of error and wickedness that are threatening to invade the Church, Pastor Greene then makes the affirmation that the work of the Lutheran Confessions is to be the walls while our work as the people of God is to be the watchmen. The Confessions were written and carefully constructed so as to keep us from having to start out all over again with each new generation. They are there to keep us from treading down all of the paths which might tempt us. They are there to protect us from all of the ways in which the church is being pillaged today.

Having talked about the role of the Confessions, he then discusses the content of our Lutheran confessional faith, as delineated in the Book of Concord. He has a very interesting way of putting it – God gets all the verbs. God does all the work of salvation. If He did not do it, it would not happen. God alone gets the credit. The action is His. He gives; we receive. Christ did it all for us so that we can receive what is needed.

With the Lutheran Confessions, which were written as a defense of the faith, we do not need to start over and build the walls. Rather the Lord through His saints has already built the walls.

Every Samuel Needs an Eli

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open to the Lord's leading. After learning that it was God who was calling, he responded by saying, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

Are you listening for God's call on your life? Are you open to His leading? You might hear God's call during times of study or silent prayer. You may hear God's call through the proclamation of His Word in a sermon or Bible study, through a petition in the Prayers of the Church, or through the lyrics of a hymn. Or even more likely, you may hear God's call through family, friends, or church members who might say, "You would make a good pastor. Have you ever considered pursuing ordained ministry?"

One of Martin Luther's gifts to the Church was his insistence that all callings are holy. Whether one is gifted and called by God to be a pastor, butcher, baker, or candlestick maker, each calling is equally holy and necessary for human flourishing, and for the building up of the Lord's people. So how does one "hear God's call?"

The first step is to recognize the Holy Spirit's movement in your life. The older and more experienced Eli recognized that the Spirit was speaking to Samuel, and he encouraged Samuel to reply, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Only then could Samuel recognize the Spirit's leading and respond in obedience to the call.

The truth is that most of us need an "Eli" at one time or another in our lives. And most, if not all of us, are also called to be an Eli for others. Being an Eli simply means keeping our eyes open to recognize the gifts of others and staying present to them -- listening, talking, praying, and sharing with them. Finding an answer to every question is not always as necessary as just being a companion as they search and discern.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds he encountered because "they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 9:36). Today there is a critical shortage of shepherds in God's Church. Many congregations are without a called and trained pastor to preach His Word and administer the sacraments. How to explain this shortage? Has God gone silent? Is the Lord no longer speaking?

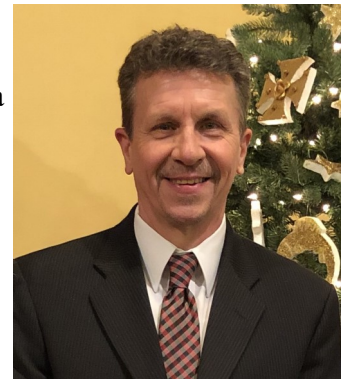
No. In fact, somewhere in our congregations right now is an infant who will be baptized this Sunday, who has a call to ordained ministry. Somewhere in our congregations right now is a fourth grader who has a call to ordained ministry, and who is also the absolute terror of Mrs. So-And-So's Sunday School

Class. Somewhere in our congregations right now is an eighth grader who has a call to ordained ministry. They are about to be confirmed, and they wish their parents would allow them to sleep in on Sundays, because "Church is boring." Somewhere in our congregations right now is a high school sophomore who is preparing to attend the retreat that will change their life and confirm their call to ordained ministry. And somewhere in our congregations is a college student or career person who is running from God's call to ordained ministry or has postponed it to pursue an alternative career path. I know this because each of these people was me at different points in my life.

Thankfully, the Lord strategically placed Eli's in my life. My youth minister, Duane. My Sunday School teacher, Ruth. And my pastor, Reuben. Each of them, and many others, too, played the role of Eli in my life to help me recognize my spiritual gifts, to encourage my discernment of God's call, to listen to my concerns, questions, and objections, and ultimately to walk with me to the "yes" that finally came when I filled out my seminary application.

Friends, there are many, many Samuel's out there today who are called to serve and speak the Word of God, but instead of filling out a seminary application, they are pursuing a path that is more expedient or lucrative. They are pursuing a path that is more in line with the expectations of those around them.

So let me ask you to find your place in this biblical story. Are you a Samuel, knowing that there is a voice speaking to you and calling you to a purpose bigger than your own dreams and desires? Or are you an Eli, called to pay attention to the gifts of those with whom you worship? Called to encourage and walk with those who are or should be discerning God's call to Word and Sacrament ministry? Either way, you are the answer to the crisis we face today in the Church of Jesus, where sheep without a shepherd are "harassed and helpless." Every Samuel needs an Eli. And every Eli can recognize a Samuel with God's help.



Pr. Jeff Morlock

Does Doctrine Matter?

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are forgiven, you have life and salvation. If your sins are not forgiven, you will be condemned eternally. So, how do you know your sins are forgiven? How can you be sure? The answer that Lutheran doctrine gives is that you will know for sure when a Preacher announces to you, “Your sins are forgiven.” You will also know for sure when you are Baptized and when you receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

“But wait a second,” you might say, “how do I know that Preaching, Baptism and Communion do these things?” The answer is very important. You

know because it says so in the Bible. Can a human preacher really announce the forgiveness of my sins? Yes! Go read John 20: 22-23 and Matthew 16:18. Does Baptism really save me? Yes! Go read Mark 16:16 and 1 Peter 3:21. Do I really receive forgiveness, life and salvation in Holy Communion? Yes! Go read Matthew 26:27-28.

It all depends on what we believe about the Bible. If it is God’s Word, then we can be comforted with the knowledge that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. If it is only a human word, we are left to figure it out for ourselves. Lutheran doctrine tells you that you can be confident that the Bible is GOD’S WORD. As the beloved children’s songs says:

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the BIBLE tells me so.

May God give all of us the childlike faith to believe those simple words.

In Christ,

Pastor David Charlton

It all depends on what we believe about the Bible.

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others may look down on them, marginalize and dismiss them, God gives them hope by showing that He cares about them, reaches out to them, and treats them with dignity.

Dr. Johnson quotes from Mary’s Magnificat as he speaks of the appearances of the Virgin to a poor peasant whose people had recently been conquered. “He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant. . . . He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1: 48, 51-53) The appearances to Juan Diego were Gospel – good news for those who had nothing and no reason to hope for good news. Dr. Johnson sees the Latino people’s coming to know God’s liberating power proclaimed in the Magnificat as a gift of the Latino people to the wider church.

Dr. Johnson mentioned two books which he has written or edited which further expand on the themes he was developing – The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist and American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe. He concluded by saying regarding Mary, “Her presence is a sign of welcome (to Latino people); her absence or the forbidding of her would be seen as a sign of rejection.” He then added, “Mary always points us to Jesus, who is the Savior.”



Pastor Keith Forni

Some of the More Common Mistakes ...

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4. Too quickly **assuming you can “get by” with supply preachers over an extended period of time.**

Some call committees, at the beginning of their search, casually dismiss their need for an interim pastor. Instead, assuming that they will find their next “permanent” pastor within a few months, they decide occasional supply preachers will suffice to maintain their congregational ministry. This can be a serious mistake; especially if your vacancy remains unfilled for a year or more.

(Which, more often than not, is the case in 2022.)

The one bright side of **many competent, retiring**

Boomer pastors is that some of them **are open to part-time or full-time work as interim pastors for congregations in transition.**

5. **Organizing too large a call committee.** Two problems with this: The larger your call committee, the more difficult it is to achieve a unanimous decision regarding the candidates you are considering. Also, the larger the committee the more awkward and ineffective initial online interviews become. I believe the ideal size for a call committee is between four and six members.

6. Not **having a quality congregational website up and running when you begin your search.** Prospective applicants, more often than not, expect you to have a website. If you don’t, they might feel they have too little information to make it worth their time to apply for your position.

7. Not **conduct an informal, online background check** before deciding to interview an applicant online. I have sometimes been enlisted by a call committee after they have already interviewed applicants that I, and my other call committees have ruled out as even remotely viable candidates. This is especially important for LCMC congregations, because the LCMC has not vetted most of the individuals listed on their clergy roster.

8. If you are a multiple-pastoral-staff congregation, **not seriously considering your Associate Pastor for your Lead Pastor call.** Given the current national shortage of pastors open to a new call, it would be a mistake to automatically rule out an associate pastor who is already loved and accepted by your congregation.

9. “Settling” and calling the wrong pastor when you already employ—or know of—a competent interim pastor who is available to serve your congregation.

10. Finally, **allowing your search process to drag on beyond 18 to 24 months when you have one or two members qualified and willing to be trained to serve and lead your congregation as part-time lay ministers.**

Allow me to conclude by explaining #10 above. I am convinced that bi-vocational or retired congregational members will, increasingly, be “called on” (pun intended) to serve in pastoral ministry roles. I also believe that this will often be a healthy and positive development, not just a sign of desperation due to a congregation’s inability to find and call a new ordained pastor. Too many churches, in the coming years, will simply close their doors because they can’t find an ordained pastor. Tragically, some of these churches will have one or more members who could and would step up to lead in pastoral roles. If these potential lay ministers do not feel qualified there are now reasonably-priced online seminary courses available in biblical studies, Lutheran theology, and preaching. We must not make the mistake of always assuming only an ordained pastor can lead and serve our congregations.

For more information on this particular lay ministry strategy, click [here](#) to go to my article in the March/2022 issue of the Lutheran CORE newsletter. Or better yet, contact me directly with any questions you might have; at pastor-donbrandt@gmail.com.

CORE Voice Newsletter

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[Kim Smith](#), Editor

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Pro Ecclesia Conference Theme Announced

Friends of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology:

Our conference theme for 2023 is, "Life Together: The Communion of the Saints in a Time of Division and Disease." Both locally and nationally, Christian fellowship has been severely tested by the impact of the pandemic and the heightened tensions of our political and cultural life. 'Social distancing' and virtual worship have eaten into the fellowship within congregations and parishes. Our polarized politics and the 'culture wars' that have accompanied it have severely tested our ability to pursue a common life, not only within our wider society, but within and among our churches. The conference will discuss theologically and pastorally how we address these challenges. We have assembled a range of speakers from different backgrounds: medicine, ethics, New Testament studies, parish ministry, and Theological Studies.

Confirmed speakers include

William Cavanaugh, PhD, Professor of Catholic Studies, DePaul University, Chicago, IL

Rev. Chris Currie, PhD, Pastor/Head of Staff, St. Charles Street Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, LA

Lydia Dugdale, MD, MAR, Associate Professor of Medicine, Columbia University Department of Medicine, New York, NY

Rev. Wesley Hill, PhD, Associate Professor of New Testament, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI

Myles Werntz, PhD, Associate Professor of Theology, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Sondra Wheeler, PhD, Professor Emerita of Christian Ethics, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC

We plan to have our annual banquet, but the banquet speaker has not yet been confirmed. Stay tuned!

The 2023 Pro Ecclesia Conference will be on the "usual" dates, Monday evening, June 5 through Wednesday, June 7, concluding before lunch. We will again be at Loyola University of Maryland in Baltimore, and the banquet will be Tuesday evening.

Registration costs have not been finalized, and we will send an email to those on our email list regarding costs after registration has been opened. For now, this is a "hold the dates" notification.

Please share this freely with friends and colleagues, as we prepare to discuss this very timely topic in our life together as Christians committed to the Great Tradition. I can add others (with their permission of course) to our email list if you send their contact information to me.



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Saved By Grace through Faith

Carl E. Braaten has a new book out via the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. Per ELCA Bishop Hutterer, "Carl Braaten argues for a renewed exploration of what it means to be evangelical, catholic and orthodox through essays and sermons for church festivals and special occasions that hold law and gospel in tension. Exploring the breadth of his life experience

and theological scholarship, he invites readers to consider the foundations of the Lutheran tradition and envision a church that seeks a path to unity around key understandings of justification, confessions and ecclesiology. The reader will be challenged and enlightened by many of his insights about the current state of Lutheranism and the church worldwide." - Bishop Deborah K. Hutterer, Grand Canyon Synod, ELCA

This book is available for \$16 plus postage. Reserve your copy by calling Donna Roche at 607-746-7511. www.alpb.org

