

## You Do—I Watch: A Hard Lesson in Fully Releasing the Next Generation into Mission

[Pr. K. Craig Moorman](#), board member of Lutheran CORE and NALC pastor of River's Edge Ministries, Mt. Airy, Maryland



*Editor's Note: River's Edge Ministry (REM), located in Mt. Airy, MD, traveled to Pine Island, FL in January as part of Cross Country Mission (CCM) 2023. Pine Island was devastated by Hurricane Ian in late September 2022. Mary Bates, NALC Disaster Response Coordinator, did the necessary groundwork to find the work sites that matched our team's skillsets. Lutheran CORE's board provided funding that enabled REM to reduce the cost of the trip for the crew. Previous articles about Cross Country Mission and City Mission include [The Potency of Missional Engagement](#), [Igniting Renewal Through Mission](#) and [How City Mission Was Born, Part 1: Katrina, the Unwelcomed Reformer](#).*

As a pastor-mission developer who has served for many decades, I believe we—those who are part of a so-called 'mainline' denominational church body—are facing a hard (and potentially devastating) reality: Who will be leading our churches, especially as a significantly large percentage of clergy retire and many others 'step down' because of discouragement and sheer exhaustion? AND, where is the 'next generation' of pastors and leaders? The intent of this article is not to answer these questions but to simply acknowledge and remember that we, as pastors and leaders of Christ's Church, are called to grapple with such realities and then present hope in the midst of it all. These times press us to consider other, more general questions: "Lord, what are You saying to us?" and "Lord, how should we respond?" I desire to

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## (Per)Mission to Lead

by Ms. Kim Smith, Missional partner with River's Edge Ministries, Lutheran CORE editor, and former board member.



*Editor's Note: River's Edge Ministry (REM) traveled to Pine Island, FL in January as part of Cross Country Mission (CCM) 2023.*

Intergenerational mission has been part of CCM's DNA from the beginning. But I didn't fully understand what that meant until we arrived and were working together at various job sites. Certainly, the crew that travelled to Pine Island in late January ranged in age from 15 to the early 70s, so I mentally checked "intergenerational" off my expectations list. But there was far more to it than that.

When I filled out the volunteer skills assessment, I reluctantly marked most of the construction areas with "Unskilled, no desire to try". There's no doubt that my foot is injured, and that I am well past my roofing days. And my everyday skills weren't applicable to the construction projects critical to the trip. Sure, I could clean up (if that meant dishes), paint (as long as I didn't have to climb ladders or get on the floor). Cooking, check! Then I got down to Spreading the love of Christ, Conversational Ministry and Prayer Ministry. Regrettably I consider myself a work in progress at spreading the love of Christ, so I marked that one as "unskilled, but willing to try." For Conversational Ministry, I chose, "Can do a good job by myself." For Prayer Ministry, I selected, "Have done, but need help." But I fully expected that I'd be in the kitchen most of the time.

River's Edge Ministries sent this message to team members ahead of time, "[T]here will be a need for more pastoral care for the home owners and the people around the neighborhoods. Be prepared to stop and listen to their stories, and pray for them if and when the Spirit leads. Remember we are serving these people. *Our goal is less to 'finish a job' than it is to minister to the people who have experienced this devastation.* Be ready to share the love of Christ to

all we meet. If you feel called to this especially, there will certainly be opportunity to serve in this way."

Each morning our job assignments were written on a white board under the pavilion where we met for meals and most anything that didn't involve cooking, showering, or sleeping. Pastor K. Craig Moorman knows that we (especially those new to this kind of mission work) need to hear "*Expect the unexpected!*" repeatedly. Otherwise ... we might have been flabbergasted to find that the church where we stayed was itself under major construction—including the kitchen!

Each day I was paired with Doreen, a retired nurse practitioner, on the Conversational Ministry team. And at first I found it difficult to shake the mindset that I was doing "nothing" while everyone around us was sweating from their hard labor.

Doreen and I mostly listened to the homeowners, their neighbor, and CCM team members talk. Our homeowners immediately began sharing their lives' sorrows with us and those stories will stick with us. They talked about how they faced death and were able to survive the storm surge that swept over the entire island because their neighbor left them the keys to his two-story house when he evacuated. They told us just how bad it was when they returned to their property. It didn't take long before it became crystal clear that conversational ministry was important to the body of Christ too.

At some point I thought about how much faith it took for the homeowners to let a team come into their partially reconstructed home and tear down its professionally installed blue tarp. Mary Bates, the NALC's disaster response coordinator, had begged them to let us help, but how *do* you let people you don't know come in and rip the roof off of your home without wondering if they will really be back the next day? Could we be trusted to keep our promises?

In the end, the homeowners, neighbors, and the entire team witnessed His Church operating as Jesus intended. Team members hailed from all kinds of



First step—taking the tarp off the main part of the house.

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# How Your Congregation Can Identify, Enlist and Train Part-time Lay Ministers

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



*Note: “This is a ministry resource article for churches that might be interested in the new upcoming CORE ministry called the Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative (CLI). The article below offers a preview of this new ministry. More information about CLI will be available on the Lutheran CORE website after Easter.”*

The current shortage of available pastors in the LCMC and NALC presents a difficult challenge for a great many call committees. This is especially true for smaller churches when their search process has extended beyond 18 to 24 months without success. In fact, such a scenario can result in nothing less than an existential crisis for their congregations. In these situations we are looking not only at burned out and disheartened call committees; we are talking about congregations where their members are beginning to lose hope for their future as a faith community.

Thirty years ago call committees of smaller churches could reasonably take comfort in the conviction that it would “only be a matter of time” before they would be able to “call and install” their next pastor. However, in 2023 this is *not* a reasonable expectation. Why? Because with retiring Boomer pastors—and far fewer seminary graduates—our clergy supply crisis is only growing more dire.

Here is the stark, unvarnished truth: A great many of our smaller vacant churches will never, until the last Boomer pastor retires in 2029 (or shortly thereafter), have much hope of finding a pastor. For these churches there needs to be a “reality check”: As long as they assume their only hope to survive as a congregation is to find that new pastor, it’s only a matter of time before they will have given up on their search

process. At that point discussions will probably begin regarding the possibility of having to close their doors and disband as a faith community.

However, there is an alternative to this scenario; a way to continue ministering to their members and their surrounding community without a resident, full-time pastor to lead them. This alternative is to intentionally transition to a long-term **lay**-led ministry. And this transition would not just be a temporary “stop-gap” plan until they find a pastor to call, but a ministry strategy to continue, as long as necessary, as a vibrant and thriving **lay**-led congregation.

There is now outside assistance available for smaller churches willing to transition from a clergy-dependent ministry model to one built on a foundation of lay leadership. But first, a disclaimer: If your congregation’s in-person worship attendance averages less than 25, and/or you no longer have members who are active retired or younger, this assistance might be “too little too late”. Why? Because this ministry model depends on one, two or three members willing and able to step forward and serve your congregation as part-time lay ministers.

However, if you still have congregational leaders who are active retirees or younger, I encourage you to consider the **Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative** as a way of preparing for an immediate future where your congregation will not only survive, but thrive.

Below are **the steps involved if you decide to transition to a lay-led congregational ministry model. And keep in mind that your “outside” assistance in this process would be a retired Lutheran pastor mentoring and encouraging your part-time lay ministers**—at a distance—as they serve your congregation.

## 1. Identifying the right member (or members) to ask to become a part-time lay minister.

The conversation regarding the “right” person will most often begin within your church council. (And note: The right person might already be serving on your council.) The ideal candidate for this new ministry role should already be recognized, by your members, as a congregational leader; and as a person characterized by both a strong faith and personal integrity. He or she should be someone who comes to mind in the context of your council’s prayers for

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# Feed My Sheep

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

I have appreciated Don Brandt's wisdom and leadership in Lutheran renewal through the years, and I welcomed [his article](#) in the January issue of *CORE Voice*. He accurately diagnoses the biggest single problem that runs through all of our Lutheran denominations in North America — our desperate shortage of pastors. And I almost agree with his proposed solution.

Don points out that even when we had more than enough pastors, there were not nearly enough willing to serve in smaller rural and inner-city settings. He notes that these congregations became training locations for pastors who would move on in a few years to a larger church. This does not provide the stability of leadership a congregation needs to be effective in mission and outreach.

I would add that in our time even larger congregations are having difficulty finding ordained pastors. In my North American Lutheran Church, we were told at our pastors' convocation that some congregations have had profiles posted for a year or more but have received zero interest from pastoral candidates. The ELCA synod I had been a part of recently notified its congregations that because 40% of its churches lack either a called or interim pastor, they no longer have enough supply pastors or authorized lay leaders to provide leadership for these congregations every Sunday.

As an NALC dean, I tell congregations that the total cost of having a pastor (not just the compensation) will approach or involve six figures. Many pastors now serving "full-time" can only do so because their spouses provide insurances and other benefits. Retirements are outpacing ordinations. I don't think we in the NALC are alone in these challenges.

So far Don and I are on the same page. And I fully agree that what we have been doing is not going to provide the pastors we need to lead our congregations in mission in the 21st century. Not only do we not have people who are in a position to take three or four years out of their lives to pursue MDiv degrees (even online), but many of our congregations cannot afford the salaries required to cover living expenses plus student loan debt (which can easily amount to \$50,000 for seminary alone and at least as much for college).

My quibbles with Don are two-fold.

First, and probably minor, he repeats the common misconception that Luther taught something called "the priesthood of all believers." For all that we have



heard this repeated from lecterns and pulpits, Luther taught no such thing. It is actually a 19th Century Calvinist concept. Luther did teach a wonderful understanding of Christian vocation (see the oldie but goodie by Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, Muhlenberg Press, 1957). Whereas the medieval church taught that church vocations were "religious" but others were not, Luther understood that all Christians exercise our Baptism in the world as we love God by serving our neighbors, and that we do so through our variety of callings. These grow out of the Fourth Commandment that establishes the orders and structures of society. Thereby all legitimate callings can be "religious," as long as Christians engage in them out of love for God and neighbor.

Luther also taught that because the bishops refused to ordain pastors for the churches of the Reformation, the princes and magistrates should claim the authority of their Baptism and ordain pastors to serve these churches. This was not a free-for-all. Luther called on legitimate authorities to meet the need, and to do so by ordaining pastors to serve these congregations. More on that later.

In the Augsburg Confession, Article V makes it clear that the "Holy Ministry" is of divine origin, and that it consists in preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. Article XIV insists that nobody is permitted to preach or teach publicly in the churches or administer the sacraments without a "proper call" (*rite vocatus* in Latin, which in the context means "ordained"). The sad reality is that none of our

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## Resisting God's Call

[Pastor Jeff Morlock](#) is Director of Vocational Discernment at the [North American Lutheran Seminary](#). He may be reached at [jeff.morlock@thenals.org](mailto:jeff.morlock@thenals.org).



When God calls a person to a specific task or ministry, resistance is often the first response of the called. Jeremiah claimed that he was too young. Gideon feared he was too weak. Isaiah considered himself too sinful, "a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5 ESV). This resistance to God's call comes from two sources. The first is **a belief that we know better than God what will be required**, and a need to explain to the Almighty why we are not qualified.

Moses had a loving family and a quiet life as a shepherd when God's call came to him in "mid-career," as we might say. From a burning bush came God's vocational call that Moses should go confront Pharaoh and demand the immediate release of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. It's not unusual for God to ask things of His children that seem beyond our competency. But it turns out that the old trite saying is true: "God doesn't call the equipped, He equips the called."

In Moses, we might recognize some of the excuses that we ourselves have used for resisting God's call when it has become clear. *"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?'"* (Exodus 3:13 ESV) One common excuse for resisting God's call is that **I don't have all the answers**. This was my greatest fear when the Lord first called me to study for ordained ministry. I was afraid of not being able to answer every question that my future flock(s) would pose. In Moses' case, his years

as a shepherd had not prepared him to stand up to the wisdom and might of a powerful political leader like Pharaoh.

However, what Moses failed to recognize was that he was *not* the most important factor in God's plan. When we wrongly perceive that God's plan hinges on our abilities, we will fear failure. We will fear embarrassment and the judgment of others. But the Lord God is not impeded by such anxiety. When Moses asks, *"What should I tell them?"* God replies, *"I AM WHO I AM. Say to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you"* (Exodus 3:13-14 ESV).

Moses had to learn that his call had nothing to do with his own ability and everything to do with God's sovereignty! As a pastor, when I consider the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel and teaching God's Word, I often feel unworthy and incompetent. But when I do these things in the awareness that the I AM of the Scriptures is speaking through me, I can be confident that His Word does what it says and accomplishes every purpose for which He sends it.

The second excuse that many of us have in common with Moses is the fear that **people won't accept me**. Moses had a past. Having fled Egypt as an outlaw and a murderer, he could be perceived as not only having broken God's commandment, but as abandoning his own people. His profound sense of inadequacy led Moses to object, *"But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'"* (Exodus 4:1 ESV).

Fear clouds our perspective and makes us dwell on the worst possible outcomes. Fear keeps the focus on the self rather than on the Lord. It magnifies our weakness and underestimates God's power. Thus, God gave Moses two practical demonstrations of His power, first by turning Moses' staff into a snake, and then back again into a staff; and second, by making Moses' hand wither, and then restoring it again. Through these signs, the Lord bolstered Moses' confidence that God Himself would do the work. Similarly, when God chooses you for a particular task or ministry, He will provide all that is necessary and show you the next step you are to take.

Moses, still unconvinced about God's plan, offers a final critique: his speech impediment would

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# The Awaken Project Offers a Gap Year

*By Steven Wagner, Gap Year Director*



*Introduction by Dennis D. Nelson: In this issue we will be featuring The Awaken Project (TAP), a non-profit organization housed on the campus of Mount Carmel Ministries in Alexandria, MN.*

*The last (January 2023) issue of CORE Voice included the first in a series of articles about residential discipleship ministries for young adults. Here is a [link](#) to the article about Faith Greenhouse, which is affiliated with Faith Lutheran Church in Hutchinson, Minnesota.*

The Awaken Project (TAP), a nonprofit organization housed on campus at Mount Carmel Ministries in Alexandria, Minnesota, is pleased to continue to offer an eight month/two semester gap year program for students who are interested in a full or part time career in ministry, seeking to study the Bible on a collegiate level in community, and travel across the United States while engaging with practical ministry opportunities.

Our partnership with Mount Carmel is one of the most crucial aspects of our program. Drawing on Mount Carmel's rich history within the Lutheran Bible Institute, The Awaken Project seeks to draw upon the same spirit that spurred on so many to attend LBI and cultivate that wonderful community for many decades. We believe that young adults who are committed to living, serving, learning, and growing together under the cross are an immensely valuable part of the Body of Christ, and we are committed to providing young adults the opportunity to experience this transformational community life.

The fall semester is primarily Bible classes, taught by independent instructors who join us for a

week at a time and teach one subject for the duration of the week. Other rhythms of the fall include a morning devotional centered around the Moravian Daily Texts, weekly community meals, weekly spiritual formation sessions with mentors, and hangouts with the residential community. The spring semester is when most of our travel occurs. We partner with Quake Events, a national youth conference circuit of events geared toward middle and high school students. Our students attend these events throughout the spring and lead in relational ministry, workshops, and production assistance.

We strive to sponsor a program that sees all students grow in relationship with one another, teachers, mentors, community members, and our Lord, Jesus Christ. A recent alumna of our program, Courtney Corrente, has described her time with TAP as an answer to prayer that she never thought would come to pass, but now can hardly imagine her life without the community she's found through TAP's gap year program. After completing her year with TAP, she was hired onto Mount Carmel's staff as their Communications Coordinator, which has allowed her to gain immediate experience in her fields of study (strategic communications), continue to maintain the community she gained last year, and invest back into this year's cohort of TAP students.



I am expecting that there will be plenty more stories like Courtney's over the years of TAP's gap year program. If you know anyone who has been longing for a community to do life with, who seeks high quality and affordable Biblical education, and who has an itch to travel and serve, The Awaken Project's gap year program can be a wonderful opportunity. Please contact myself, Steven Wagner, at [steven@theawakenprojectmn.com](mailto:steven@theawakenprojectmn.com) if you have any questions or know someone who may benefit immensely from this program.

If you feel led to contribute a tax deductible donation to The Awaken Project, gifts can be sent to The Awaken Project at 800 Mount Carmel Drive NE, Alexandria, Minnesota, 56308.



## Video Ministries—March 2023

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



[Here](#) is a link to our YouTube channel. In the top row you will find both our Video Book Reviews as well as our CORE Convictions Videos on various topics related to Biblical teaching, Lutheran theology, and Christian living. You will find these 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. This month we want to feature a CORE Convictions video by NALC pastor Cathy Ammlung.

### A CRITIQUE OF THE [WWW.ALTLITURGIES.COM](http://WWW.ALTLITURGIES.COM) WORSHIP RE- SOURCE BY CATHY AMMLUNG

[Here](#) is a link to Cathy's video. Many thanks to her for this powerful presentation.

Cathy writes, "A host of 'alternative liturgies' and worship resources are springing up on the internet. These resources provide rationales and examples for decolonizing, upending, and disrupting traditional liturgical theologies, practices, and language. They are based on social justice and intersectionality rhetoric and philosophy. One such resource, called alt.liturgies, comes from a Lutheran perspective and has gained notice and traction. It, as well as other resources such as [www.disruptworshipproject.com](http://www.disruptworshipproject.com), reflects and promulgates a theological and liturgical world-view that seeks to dismantle the (supposed) evils of racism, heteronormativity, ableism, and the like, which infest traditional worship and contribute to the material harm, even genocide, of vulnerable

groups of people.

"I focus my critique of the alt.liturgies website resource centers through the lens of two 'core values' of the North American Lutheran Church: 'Christ Centered' and 'Traditionally Grounded.' I do this because the Great Tradition of the Church has been, and always will be, centered in Jesus Christ, who incorporates wildly diverse, sinful, contentious individuals and factions into his Body, the Church. From there, I explore concerns with a few of the many topics and their sub-headings. My conclusion: however well-intended this resource is as it addresses some legitimate concerns, its fatal flaw is that Christ is not the Center."

## Thank You and a Warm Welcome

The board of directors of Lutheran CORE warmly welcomes Pastor Douglas Schoelles as its newest director! Rev. Dr. Schoelles is an NALC lead pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Ft. Wayne, IN (NALC, Heartland Mission District).



As a board, we say a fond farewell to Ms. Kim Smith. Kim was elected in 2017 and served as board president from late 2018 until January 2023. She continues to serve as one of our web developers and as our newsletter editor.



## Coming Events

- **Pro Ecclesia Conference**—Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD. June 5-7 2023. [Register here!](#)
- **NEXUS Institute Summer 2023**—Des Moines, IA. July 16-22, 2023. Click [here](#).
- **ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering**—Phoenix, AZ. July 17-20, 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/>

## You Do—I Watch ...

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offer at least a glimmer of hope by sharing a hard lesson in fully ‘releasing’ the next generation into leadership.

This ‘hard lesson’ involved laying aside my leadership, unconditionally, and literally watching from afar as the next generation took the reins and completely oversaw a very challenging disaster relief mission which we had been planning for months through Mary Bates, Coordinator of NALC Disaster Response. Though they did all of the work and I watched from 1100 miles away, it was an unexpected blessing to behold and one from which we, I, learned a great deal. In a nutshell, I was sidelined and could not lead this effort called Cross Country Mission: Pine Island, FL because I developed shingles in my right eye. Just days before the scheduled departure from MD on January 29<sup>th</sup>, I was still resolved to be part of this effort. But then my ophthalmologist informed me that if I didn’t stay home and rest, I might lose my eyesight. I listened. I suppose we could’ve cancelled but, instead, we recalibrated our strategy and the next generation stepped fully and willingly into the task before them. Not only did I keep my eyesight but I gained a *greater vision* of how important it is to equip and mobilize the next generation by fully releasing them into leadership roles.



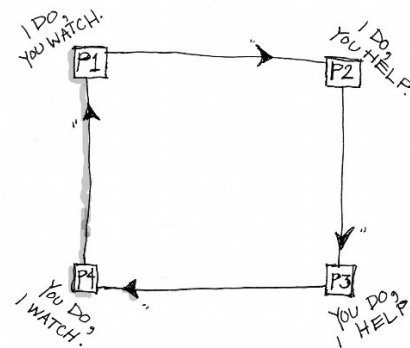
Final push to finish the roof

In this article, I’d like to share a bit, as both father and pastor-mission developer, of how the Lord made a way and used a difficult circumstance for the greater good (cf. Romans 8:28). It’s encouraging to know that there’s well-grounded precedence for such a happening: *“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”* (Isaiah 43:19)

One of the greatest joys in my life has been parenting. As a father for nearly 34 years, it seems that I am still learning the fundamentals of child-rearing. One of them is transitioning from the demanding

commitment of rearing and raising *little ones* to, perhaps, the greater challenge of releasing them into a world beyond the familiarity and comfort of home. It seems that there’s not much difference between our pastoral/shepherding role in ministry and our parenting role. As parents, we are called to eventually release our children into their full potential, giftedness, calling/vocation, and God-ordained destiny, etc. Is ministry any different? As a priest, pastor, shepherd, father/mother of the faith, are we not to release and mobilize our congregants, disciples, etc. into the work of the ministry for the sake of the Kingdom? As I shared in the opening paragraphs of this article, I just experienced this reality, face-to-face, in a very real and practical way, both as a parent *and* as a pastor; especially in terms of more effectively moving a child (or disciple) from a preparatory season of rearing-raising (or equipping) into a fruitful season of releasing (or mobilizing).

A while back, I attended a conference regarding what it means to build a discipling culture—an environment to communicate and pass on the faith—within the local church setting. During that time, a clear and concise model was presented on how to create such a culture. It is one that you may be familiar with and is especially apropos to our present conversation. I believe it’s especially helpful and a simple but highly-effective pedagogical tool in raising up the next generation of leaders. For the sake of clarity, we’ll simply refer to this model as a teaching square.



The “P” in our teaching square represents parenting. Our “progression” in teaching our children is essential as we move from P1 to P4, especially knowing that they are—whether we’re aware of it or not—watching and learning from our words and actions. Again, we can bring out the very best in our kids and release them with a self-assured independence, or we can choose not to take the time to parent our children thoughtfully and wait for a different parent outcome. We could just as easily replace the ‘P’ with a ‘D’ with the

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## You Do—I Watch ...

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emphasis being discipling not parenting. But the teaching square is easier said than done. As pastors and leaders within the Church, one of our great privileges is leading our parishioners into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ while simultaneously equipping and mobilizing them for the work of the ministry ... and the Church's mission. My great confession in this article is that it's been difficult for me—both as a parent and a pastor—to move around the square fluidly. I find myself stumbling around P4 (or D4), YOU DO—I WATCH! But I know it's absolutely essential, especially in raising up and fully releasing the next generation.

I believe you could share a similar story and make a similar confession, but for me it took 'shingles in the eye' for my soul to awaken to the gravity of what's at stake—If our children, the next generation AND/OR our parishioners-disciples are not fully and unconditionally released as missional disciples, then the future of the Church is greatly at risk. Fully releasing means trusting, accepting and expecting that the Lord's already gone before us, making our paths straight and the rough roads smooth (Psalm 5:8), and causing the necessary infrastructure to be built with new (and different) resources, ideas and relationships, etc. It means that we faithfully lead around the teaching square, but then pause (before we stumble) at P4-D4, take a deep breath ... and then completely and unconditionally relinquish our own need to lead and pass the baton into the more-than-competent hands of those we've been faithfully shepherding and discipling, especially the next generation! We should then be able to take a seat, rest, rejoice, and then cheer them on with a loud cry, *YOU DO-I WATCH!* Indeed, it was a joy to watch two of my sons, Jacob and Caleb, and two other young adults enthusiastically take the reins of leadership for *Cross Country Mission: Pine*



Leveling the foundation of a home.



Repairing steps.

Island, FL.

Paralleling many of my own thoughts about leadership in his provocative article, *How Your Congregation Can Identify, Enlist and Train Part-time Ministers*, Pastor Don Brandt writes,

"The current shortage of available pastors in the LCMC and NALC presents a difficult challenge for a great many call committees ... In

fact, such a scenario can result in nothing less than an existential crisis for their congregations." This article is very helpful in at least stimulating a much-needed conversation in which *all leaders and pastors of every congregation* should engage. Though well-intended, addressing such important concerns should not be reserved for just another hierarchically-appointed task force or national staff person. Again, ALL of us should be intensely involved in the discourse because, after all, what happens if we're not able (*or* are unwilling) to enlist others to lead when finding or calling an ordained pastor becomes nigh impossible? This question ties in with my opening questions: Who will be leading our churches, especially as a significantly large percentage of clergy retire and many others 'step down' because of discouragement and sheer exhaustion? AND, *where* is the 'next generation' of pastors and leaders?

Thank you for taking the time to at least consider how we might more effectively release our parishioners, especially the next generation, into the mission field. Because I wasn't able to be part of *Cross Country Mission: Pine Island, FL*, Kim Smith, a missional partner with *River's Edge Ministries* and one who did participate, will tell at least part of the rest of the story of how the work of ministry unfolded. Enjoy her article, *(Per)Mission to Lead* also published in Lutheran CORE's March newsletter. You'll read about how the team stepped up as she and the other 24 co-laborers from many different churches did the work of the ministry. I stood back and watched ... And it was *way more* than good!

*All photographs used in this article were provided by various crew members.*



Kairos time: "What is God saying to you ... and what are you going to do about it?"



It's all about the drywall!



## (Per)Mission to Lead

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churches, but functioned as one joyful body in Christ.

At the close of the first full day, we met in a large prayer circle on the sandy driveway. Doreen told me earlier in the day that she felt like we needed to pray with and for the homeowners and their neighbor ... and she led that prayer—teaching some of us how it's done.

I later realized how much we learned from each other on that trip. It



Out with the old roof.



The new roof nearly complete and putting the old shingles in the dumpster.

needed to be multigenerational. The guys on the roof were mostly 15-35ish. It is not work that most older people can still do. But inside the home, the skilled were teaching the unskilled how to cut, fit, and install insulation and dry-wall. Then they were teaching them how to mud and use paper tape on the seams. A couple of the younger women



You do, I watch.



Insulating the kitchen.

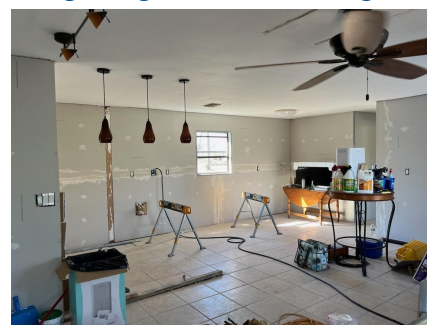
were working “upstairs” that last day too—during that final push to finish the roof on the original part of the house—as promised.



Quick break from drywalling!

I remember hearing the story of a Jewish man who learned to pray by standing next to his father as *he* prayed. That's what we witnessed on Pine Island. People that knew how, did and taught, and the rest of us observed and learned. We did not leave the mission field unchanged; it changed us. It's no wonder, as Pastor Craig wrote in [Igniting Renewal Through Mission](#), that

“exposing [his children] to the mission field” resulted in all five of his [now adult] children having a “deep and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ.” And it's no wonder that his two youngest sons, Jacob and Caleb, and their friends were able to lead that group as if they'd been taught to do so.



Nearly finished now!



Taking time to talk with one of the homeowners at the end of the day.



# How Your Congregation Can Identify, Enlist and Train Part-time Lay Ministers

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guidance, and also when considering biblical texts such as Romans 12:1-8. And this needs to be someone whom the Council ultimately chooses unanimously, not just based on a majority vote.

**2. Enlisting your lay minister (or lay ministers).** This step needs to be done with great care, and while Council members are praying for this person to accept this ministry opportunity. Also, recruitment needs to happen face to face, not over the phone. Ideally, two Council members should present “the ask”, rather than just one. In addition, this individual should be asked to pray about this opportunity over the next few days rather than give an immediate “yes” or “no”. (Of course if you receive an immediate and enthusiastic “Yes!”, don’t argue!) Do not, at this point, get into such details as the average number of hours expected per week, or compensation, or the specific start date. Instead, make clear that if she/he agrees to say yes to this ministry, the Council will simply “make it work” for your new lay minister. In other words, the details of this position will be negotiated based on what is workable for this person. This includes the details of the final “job description”; which will be based on this person’s gifts, abilities and preferences. The overall theme in this enlistment conversation is: “Why we consider *you* to be uniquely qualified for this important ministry role in the life of our congregation.”

**3. Hiring your part-time lay minister(s).** To impress upon your lay minister the importance of this position I suggest a formal job contract. This contract will be worked out **with** your new employee’s input. Some suggestions for your contract: Either this person or the Council can end this agreement with a 30-day notice; and the “average” number of hours per week would be flexible and again determined with your lay minister’s input. (I suggest somewhere between 10 and 20 hours per week.) Make clear that this person will be supervised by and answer to the Council. Your written job description, then, will be written in collaboration with your new employee. When determining the overall structure of this job contract you can find resources online; resources that you will obviously adapt to your specific situation.

**4. Commissioning/Installing your lay minister(s).** It is extremely important your members participate—during a worship service—in this commissioning. Make a “big deal” out of this occasion. *Celebrate* this

event as a congregation. Have a potluck immediately following the service. And have a laying on of hands as part of the commissioning.

**5. Training your lay minister(s).** The good news here is that your lay minister probably already has the gifts to perform most of the responsibilities you negotiated in determining the job description. However, there will undoubtedly be some ministry responsibilities he/she might not feel entirely comfortable with. For example, what if one of the responsibilities is preaching? There are resources available to become more confident in this aspect of ministry. (For example, an online 6-week preaching course.) Contact me or an LCMC staff person for information regarding such resources.

Any costs involved in such resources should be covered by your congregation.

**6. Mentoring for your lay minister(s).** The Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative is designed with the goal of *every congregation having a retired Lutheran pastor to mentor its lay minister(s)*. This mentor would be volunteering for this role and would provide encouragement and counsel for your lay minister(s) by means of a monthly online meeting and/or by phone. In rare cases this mentor might be within driving distance of your church; in which case the monthly meeting could be in-person. If needed, I can assist you in recruiting a mentor who is on the LCMC or NALC rosters.

**7. The matter of pulpit supply.** *This is of course a huge issue in the worship life of your congregation. Because of this fact it would be ideal if one or more of your lay ministers was comfortable in a preaching (or teaching) role. This is especially important if you do not have local (most likely retired) pastors available for pulpit supply. Here is my rule of thumb: You want to avoid, when possible, having lay ministers and other members reading someone else’s sermons. This might be okay on an occasional basis, but should not be a regular, most-Sundays practice. Why? It’s not easy to be invested and engaged emotionally while reading something that you did not write. Again, I suggest one of your lay leaders take an online seminary preaching course as one way to address this matter.*

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## Feed My Sheep

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Lutheran church bodies are observing Article XIV today.

As I see it, the problem is the professionalization of the clergy, which took hold in the 1950's as pastors wanted to have the social status of lawyers, doctors, and others. The Bachelor of Divinity degree was changed to a Masters of Divinity with absolutely no change in the program (a similar thing happened to law degrees), and spiritual qualifications for ministry were largely replaced by academic ones.

It didn't help that the primary requirement to teach in our seminaries was to have an earned PhD degree and not vital parish ministry experience. And with few exceptions PhD degrees could only be secured in religion departments of secular universities, which had no accountability to the "faith once delivered to the saints."

Don proposes that the solution is to have lay-led congregations. My counter-proposal is that we ordain those people in congregations who have the gifts and call for ministry, which includes seeking realistic and reasonable ways to equip them to serve faithfully as pastors to God's people in those places.

Ordination historically is not an academic certification. It involves the Body of Christ discerning God's call on a person, and then gathering to lay hands on that person and pray for them to receive the gifts they need to serve God's people faithfully. Does this communicate some sort of "indelible character"? I do not believe that ordination makes a person spiritually superior or gives them some special powers, but neither dare I say that these prayers are inconsequential. Paul called on Timothy to "stir into flame" the gift he had received through the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

I am not arguing for dumb pastors (although the smart-aleck in me might wonder whether the academic captivity of the churches has alleviated this concern). We were ordaining pastors in North American Lutheranism for 125 years before we had a seminary. Their training and preparation was through mentorship. There is no reason we couldn't have more than one clergy roster, or that we could not establish a system of ongoing mentoring for those unable to pursue the academic track.

I wish we could fill all our pulpits with faithful pastors formed by four-year residential programs in our seminaries. But as is so often the case, the perfect can be the enemy of the good. We need pastors in

many of our congregations right now, not ten or fifteen years from now, and simply working harder at what has not been working fits the classic definition of insanity, if we imagine the results will be any different.

To return to Luther: I believe on the basis of the Augsburg Confession that all God's people deserve and need to be fed with the Word and the Sacraments from properly ordained persons, and that the most important single task of any church judicatory is to provide such pastors for all its congregations. If the judicatory insists on procedures that effectively starve the people in congregations spiritually by denying them Word and Sacrament, perhaps the congregation should adopt Luther's example and, after prayerful discernment and conversation, ordain people within their own fellowship to serve them. I view this as Luther viewed his proposal for the princes and magistrates to ordain as a "last resort" sort of option, and I am sure judicatory officials will not be pleased if congregations take matters into their own hands. The solution is for the officials to find creative ways to feed the lambs of our Lord's flock with the Bread of Life. I suspect that here Don and I come very, very close to agreeing. Such a congregation needs to be prepared to accept discipline from their judicatories. [Here is where LCMC with its contract pastors offers a viable option, although I believe they need policies in place to protect people from abusive clergy.]

God has established the Holy Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and He has given us the task of determining how to structure and organize it in this time and place. The structuring of the Office of the Ministry has changed many times throughout history, and needs to change today. I fully agree with Don that what we are doing has not served us well for many decades and will become an even greater problem as time passes.

The answer is to re-evaluate how we discern that God has called a person to Holy Ministry. Once we make that discernment, after prayer and serious conversation, the solution is to ordain the person. St. Peter would not be acceptable as a pastor in most of our Lutheran churches today. We need to look at God's call and gifts and not merely at academic degrees to determine whom God has chosen to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments in our congregations.

To all decision-makers in our church bodies, our Lord says: "Feed my sheep."



## Resisting God's Call

Continued from [page 5](#)

obviously make him ineligible to serve, since confronting Pharaoh would require public speaking. The excuse here is that **my deficiencies are insurmountable**. But God has a different perspective. *"Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."* (Exodus 4:11-12 ESV).

In the light of God's design for our lives, even disabilities are overcome and transformed. By now, Moses was running out of excuses, so in one last effort to avoid his assignment, he blurts out, "Oh, my Lord, **please send someone else.**" But God didn't let Moses off the hook. Instead, he called Moses' brother Aaron to be his helper and spokesperson. The Lord doesn't need anything "special" from you or me. He definitely doesn't need our advice. But it's easy to get so caught up in our excuses that we miss the entire point of God's call. The Lord wants to accomplish something significant *through* you by doing something significant *in* you. Often part of God's purpose in calling a disciple into a particular assignment or ministry is to grow their faith, so that they learn to trust His provision and depend on His promises.

Lastly, I mentioned that resistance to God's call comes from two sources. The first is a belief that we know better than God what the call will require. And **the second source of resistance is the Evil One**, of whom Jesus said, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10 ESV). Whenever a person gets clarity regarding God's call and is trusting God's promise of abundance, the Enemy will show up to create doubt and raise objections. *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12 ESV).

Therefore, when it comes to God's call at any phase of your life, resistance is good and necessary. But as the apostle James exhorts believers, **the one to be resisted is the devil, so that he might flee from you**. To resist means to withstand, strive against, or oppose in some manner. Most often, this means trusting in the promises of God, as Jesus did when the tempter met him in the desert to challenge both his identity and calling from the Father.

*"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil,*

*and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7). It is in this submitting and resisting that objections are overcome, and you are free to pursue God's call on your life without hesitation.

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## How Your Congregation Can Identify, Enlist and Train Part-time Lay Ministers

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**8. Maintaining your eucharistic ministry.** If you will not typically have an ordained visiting pastor participating in your worship service, be aware that the LCMC allows for designated congregational lay members to preside over the celebration of communion.

Finally, *I believe two or three lay ministers, if available, would be preferable to just one; for four reasons:*

**First**, a team of lay ministers means each person is able to offer encouragement and support to the others on the team.

**Second**, there is the Biblical concept of "different people, different gifts". In other words, with more than one you are more likely to have a lay minister with the appropriate gift for each major ministry responsibility.

**Third**, I think mentoring sessions can be even more helpful when the mentor is having online sessions (e.g., via Zoom) with a group of two or three lay ministers as opposed to an extended phone conversation with just one.

**Fourth**, a team of lay ministers provides a level of accountability that comes with fellow co-workers.

If you have any questions, you may contact me directly. My email is [pastordonbrandt@gmail.com](mailto:pastordonbrandt@gmail.com)

# Summer 2023 Pro Ecclesia Conference

[Pr. Steve Shipman](#), STS, and Executive Director of The Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology (CCET)

Friends of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology:

We are excited to invite you to our [2023 Pro Ecclesia Conference](#) June 5-7, to discuss the very timely topic in this post-Covid era: 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.

If this piques your interest, you can find more information and/or register by clicking [here](#).

Confirmed speakers include:

William Cavanaugh, PhD, De Paul University, Chicago  
Chris Currie, PhD, St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church, New Orleans  
Lydia Dugdale, MD, MAR, Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons, New York  
Wesley Hill, PhD, Western Theological Seminary, Holland MI  
Myles Werntz, PhD, Abilene Christian University, Abilene TX  
Sondra Wheeler, PhD, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC  
And our banquet speaker -- Dr. Joseph Small, former director PCUSA Office of Theology & Worship

Topics include:

The "Little Way": Practices of Faith and Solidarity in a Polarized World  
Everything Different, Everything the Same: A Post-Pandemic Ecclesiology  
The Lost Art of Dying: Reviving Forgotten Wisdom  
The Last Severity, the Last Hope: Ecclesial Crises in Christological Perspective

Reconnecting in a Dis-membered Age: Community, Digital Culture, and Mending the World  
In Absentia: the Risks and Lessons of "Virtual Community"

And our Tuesday evening banquet is back for all registrants, with the opportunity to enjoy the wisdom and experience of our own Joseph Small, a long-time supporter and participant in our conferences.

We suggest that you register early, as it is possible that this conference may exceed the availability of space at Loyola. Registration costs and options are on our [web-site](#). Please note that we have reluctantly added a service fee on refunds because of the costs imposed on us.

As we have for many years, we will be enjoying the hospitality of Loyola University of Maryland in Baltimore. If you don't want to stay in a dormitory, there are many hotels in the North Baltimore/Towson area. Plan to arrive for the first session on Monday evening. The conference concludes before lunch on Wednesday. The only meal included in registration is the Tuesday evening banquet; those staying in the dormitories also will have breakfast included with the room cost.

We hope you can join us in June as we share this conversation on Christian fellowship in these challenging times. Please share this invitation with your friends and colleagues.

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