

You Can't Have God's Kin-dom Without God's Kingdom

by [Pr. Kevin Haug](#), ELCA Pastor in Texas



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- Why not the NALC?
- Jesus said to make disciples, not dismantle racism
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With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? –Mark 4:30

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness* with our spirit that we are children of God. –Romans 8:15-16

The first time I read the phrase “kin-dom of God,” I rolled my eyes. It looked to be another attempt to make Christian terminology politically correct—something I have a personal aversion to. So, when I was asked to write a piece on this particular phrase and its usage, particularly amongst progressive Christian circles, I thought I now had an opportunity to academically hammer the phrase.

However, after research, I have become a little more sympathetic to the term. Although, as the title indicates, there is no “kin-dom” of God without the Kingdom of God. Explanation is in order.

The Origins of Kin-dom

Multiple sources trace the origin of “kin-dom” to Georgene Wilson, a Franciscan nun, who spoke it to her friend, *mujerista* theologian, Ada María Isasi-Díaz.¹ Isasi-Díaz then incorporated it into her theological framework and wrote about it in her work “Kin-dom of God: A Mujerista Proposal.”² Unfortunately, I was unable to find this primary work

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Once You Know the Makeup, You Know the Outcome – Part Two

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



In the September 2023 issue of CORE Voice I gave an analysis of the expected outcome from the ELCA’s Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church. After reading the biographical paragraphs for the thirty-five members, I described the certain end result of their work. [Here](#) is a link to my analysis, which I entitled “Once You Know the Makeup, You Know the Outcome.”

Based on who was chosen by the Church Council to be a part of the Commission, I listed four things that are certain to characterize the Renewed Lutheran Church – social justice activism as the main mission and purpose for the church, an ever-diminishing role for men, LGBTQ+ activism, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as the primary value system for the church. At the end of that article I said that I would keep you informed as the Commission continues to do its work.

The Commission met electronically September 21-22. A link to a description of their meeting can be found [here](#). The work of the Commission is as predicted. After all, “Once You Know the Makeup, You Know the Outcome.”

The first thing to note in that report is a phrase in the resolution passed by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly which directed the Church Council to establish the Commission. The phrase is “being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism.” Those words are the only place where the resolution gets specific in defining what is to be the central mission and top priority of the Renewed Lutheran Church – dismantling racism.

Now certainly racism is wrong. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. God does not love just one race or ethnic group of people. In the Great

Commission of Matthew 28: 19, Jesus said that we are to make disciples of all nations, not that we are to dismantle racism. In His final words to His disciples before ascending into heaven, Jesus told His followers that they are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8). Jesus does not say that we are to make our number one priority dismantling racism.

The second item of interest to note is who are the three people who were invited to join the meeting as staff resource persons to inform the Commission concerning specific issues.

Judith Roberts, ELCA Program Director for Racial Justice, who told about the efforts of the task force on “Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.”

Pastor Nicolette Peñaranda, Program Director of African Descent Ministries, who described the barriers that clergy and congregations of African Descent face in the ELCA.

Vance Blackfox, ELCA Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, who spoke of the ongoing efforts to heal the broken relationship between the Indigenous community and the ELCA.

A couple years ago I sent an email to the recently appointed assistant to the bishop for authentic diversity for the synod in which I was rostered before I retired. I wrote, “As an older, white, cisgender male, I am a part of a marginalized group. In the spirit of authentic diversity, what kind of ministry will you be offering people like me?” As expected, I never received a response.

I find it interesting that the Commission is concerned about barriers that clergy and congregations of African Descent face. They show no concern at all for the barriers that seminarians, pastors, and congregations with traditional views face.

And I find it interesting that the ELCA is concerned to “heal the broken relationship” between itself and the Indigenous community. But it has absolutely no concern or interest to heal the broken relationship between itself and pastors, congregations, and lay people with traditional views, even though we also are people who have experienced broken promises, congregational leaders being removed, and church properties being taken over under the guise of S13.24 in the model constitution for synods.

In the spirit of “Once you know the makeup, you know the outcome,” we will continue to keep you informed.

Mission Under Accompaniment

by [Mr. Spencer Wentland](#), former missionary to Japan

Director's Note: Spencer Wentland is uniquely qualified to write this article analyzing the ELCA's concept of global mission as accompaniment rather than evangelism – as responding to requests for help from indigenous churches rather than being concerned to share the message of Jesus with unreached peoples. Spencer is a member of our young adult group, which meets via zoom about once a month for fellowship and support. He is passionate about reaching people who do not know Jesus. He has much international experience, including studying and serving in a discipleship community in Denmark. He has served as an ELCA lay missionary in Japan and has written on the theology of global mission of different Christian groups.

The ELCA defines accompaniment as “... walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality” (Global Mission, emphasis in original). Although often portrayed as a biblical theology coming out of the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, it is strongly influenced by and rooted in liberation theology. My immediate concern with it, as a heuristic to the what and where of mission, is that it is antithetical to the Pauline priority on unreached places.

The Apostle Paul emphasized not building on another's foundation but to establish the Church where it does not exist. Combined with Jesus' teaching that the Gospel must be preached in all nations (Gk. *ethnos*, often understood as ethnolinguistic people groups by many missiologists) and then the end will come, there has been a strong emphasis on sending missionaries to work amongst unreached and unengaged people groups.

While working as an ELCA missionary, I heard about experienced mission personnel being sent home while the Japanese Evangelical Lutheran Church was told how they were going to become less dependent on the ELCA. In the name of being post-colonial, it was an ironically patronizing execution of implementing an accompaniment model.

Accompaniment is actually very good in shaping how we do mission. We should not ignore the presence and work of indigenous Lutherans. If consistent with the values of accompaniment, it's a good way to think about working together in the larger context of God's mission. It reminds us that the task of mission must be informed by the catholicity of the Church as well as its apostolic nature. It also informs us to do mission in the pattern and practice of Christ himself who is Immanuel.



The problems with accompaniment are when it determines what the content of mission is and where it is done. When applied to the what of mission, it frames the whole task into a ministry of presence. This collapses into the problem that when everything is mission, nothing is mission. The primary task of establishing the Church in unreached places, making disciples and evangelical mission is diminished into almost oblivion by tasks being determined by the partner denomination. True accompaniment would involve both churches determining the content of mission work in the light of both Scripture and context. Working together is key, not completely abrogating task criteria to the partner church.

The ELCA's requirement that pre-existing Lutheran churches request the ELCA to send missionaries (an effort in being post-colonial) assures that no missionaries will ever be sent to unengaged people groups. The Japanese are the second largest unreached people group, so there is an odd and good anomaly that work is going on there. During my missionary orientation, I asked if someone had a vision like Paul of a man from Macedonia, saying come here, would that qualify a call (Acts 16)? Is the Holy Spirit leading with the Word, or are we reducing the idea of being spirit-led to a democratized principle of the external call coming through partner churches?

In conclusion, accompaniment is a mixed bag. It's great for the how of mission, and it is a true gift. However, it needs to be understood in the larger context of the ELCA's constitution and statement of faith, including its responsibility to work for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. To do this, the primary tasks need to be strategic partnership for the purposes of mission development/evangelical mission and a willingness to send people to places where no Christians, let alone Lutherans, exist.

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Training Disciple-Makers

by [Pr. Dean Rostad](#), President of CLBI

Director's Note: We wish God's blessings upon Dean Rostad, president, and the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute. This is the third of a series of three articles about various residential discipleship ministries for young adults. We began in January by featuring [Faith Greenhouse](#), connected with Faith Lutheran Church (LCMC) in Hutchinson, Minnesota. We continued in March with the [Awaken Project \(TAP\)](#). TAP is a non-profit organization housed on the campus of Mt. Carmel Ministries in Alexandria, Minnesota. We thank God for these ministries and pray for them as they work to raise up a whole new generation of followers of Jesus and leaders in the Church.



“...take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan...” Joshua 4:3

After 40 years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites were about to experience God's saving work in a profound way - walking through the parted (piled-up) Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. So that this God event would never be forgotten, God instructed them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan. These rocks of remembrance were to become physical pointers to God's saving action in their lives. God never wants us to forget how He has moved in our lives.

My name is Dean Rostad and I have the privilege of serving as the President of the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute (CLBI) in Camrose, Alberta. CLBI is a campus-based Bible college through which 1000s of young adults have been trained to become disciple-makers in their churches, neighborhoods, and professions. In 2023, CLBI's vibrant discipling community comprises 45 students, staff and committed volunteers. Just as Jesus disciplined along the road, around the table and in the community, we also do. Our students experience a different Bible class each week taught by high-caliber instructors from all over North America and beyond. Some weeks learning is off campus through inner-city ministry experiences, canoeing/hiking in the mountains, or serving cross-culturally. Each student is disciplined one-on-one and is part of a rich weekly discipleship group that meets in a staff home. All of this is done to help CLBI achieve its mission of discipling young adults in the



way of Jesus and equipping them for a life of mission in their vocations (be that as a pastor, baker or candlestick maker). I never know how Jesus is going to make a profound impact in our students' lives, but I am completely confident that He always will.

When I ask alumni how God impacted their life while they were at CLBI (aka their rock of remembrance from the Jordan), the answers are incredibly varied: their faith took three steps deeper in Romans class, while being disciplined by a staff member, they realized that they needed to stop trying to prove themselves to God and others and simply rest in the gospel, a late-night conversation in the dorm led them to finally forgive someone, a cross-cultural ministry experience awakened a calling within them to bring the gospel to those who have never heard it, when they discovered they had found the spiritual family they had longed for. These are all significant transformational rocks of remembrance.

Currently, two members of the CLBI community are in online seminary studies with the Institute of Lutheran Theology. Both had no intention of going into pastoral ministry when they first came to CLBI. Once again, I love watching how Jesus changes the trajectory of people's lives.

Since 1932 Jesus has been changing lives through this school. Please pray with me that God will continue to raise up all of the students and donors needed to ensure that current and future generations will have the opportunity to encounter Jesus in this holy place. For American students, the complete cost for eight months is just over \$10,000 USD. That even includes a January trip to San Pedro, California for our students to connect with another Lutheran discipling community. To learn more about this incredible jewel of a school, visit clbi.edu.

What is your “rock of remembrance”? What is your significant God experience that marked a new trajectory for your life?

Sincerely Pastor Dean Rostad

CLBI President

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Rest, Inc.

by [Pr. K. Craig Moorman](#) Lutheran CORE Board Member



Part I: A Gift of Restoration, Resilience, and Prophetic Perspective

Dear Friends—

We were in the middle of our first vacation ‘Out West’, somewhere between Colorado Springs, CO, and Yellowstone Park, WY, when my wife asked in a surprisingly calm voice, “So, what does happen when the pop-up mechanism of a pop-up trailer doesn’t pop?” Just minutes before I had explained that there was a high degree of probability that the lifting system on our trailer had broken. All I can say is that it was a most fascinating time with five kids. I only wish we had brought the dog and a couple of cats to make it more magical! Anyway, it was wonderful but not necessarily restful. You’ve probably had at least one of those vacations in your lifetime; you return home in desperate need of rest.

I’d like to address the topic of ‘rest’ in light of Jesus’ gracious appeal in Matthew 11 and how we can more fluidly incorporate rest into our lives. Why is rest (aside from sleeping) an essential but often missing ingredient in our daily schedules? I would say that without it—REST—we are much less effective in how we go about the work of ministry.

Are you presently resting from a place of work, or working from a place of rest? Perhaps we are relying more on our own efforts, programs, and plans than spending much-needed and regular time in the quiet place of abiding and rest. Clearly, Jesus’ ministry was rooted in and flowed from a place of silence and solitude, thus being still in seeking His Father’s directive (cf. Matthew 4:1-11, 14:23, 16:36-46, 17:1-9; Mark 6:31; Luke 5:16,6:12; and many more scriptural references). Jesus’ daily ‘schedule’ reflected a pattern of rest/retreat ... and then an advance with the work

of ministry/the Kingdom. I know there have been many occasions when, thankfully, dear ones (i.e., my wife, etc.) have lovingly challenged me to stop striving with my own agenda and energy and just rest.

Jesus provides interesting insight on this topic of rest and the power it holds: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mt. 11:28-30) Although this is one of the most familiar texts in the New Testament and there are two references to rest in these verses alone, it seems that we are hesitant to embrace Jesus’ very tender and attractive words! We all know that statistics will clearly expose this reality, but who needs statistics when we experience it first-hand?

Yet, ironically, rest may be the very thing that Jesus desires for His listeners—and that through rest many blessings will come. It is a gift. But, like Paul, we find ourselves torn and often caught in our own humanity, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Romans 7:15)

Part of the blessings of rest, and what I desire to leave with you, is both invitation and challenge. Please know that I do this as a sometimes weary but hopeful brother and colleague in Christ. The invitation is to simply embrace Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:28-30 ... and rest ... knowing that His rest will bring you many unexpected graces, including the gift of restoration of your soul, resilience for the long-haul, and prophetic perspective in discerning the ‘spirit of the age’ (Ephesians 2:1-3). The challenge is to incorporate a regular pattern of rest—and Sabbath-taking—in our restless, relentless, and demanding worlds!

If we can integrate daily encounters with rest into our schedules, and thereby establish rest as a predictable pattern in our daily routine, then will we not hear God more easily and trust His leading more readily? Doesn’t this become an intentional act of resting our faith on His Grace, being released of so much work (which can become works/law; Romans 4:16 & 5:2)?

Out of this wellspring of Rest, Inc., may you experience an early springtime of the soul! When the care of your own life is established in rest, then the privileged work of ministry (i.e., disciple-making, missional outreach, etc.) will flourish. I hope to address this in Part II of Rest, Inc.

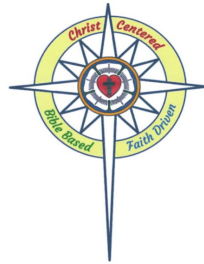
In Christ,

K. Craig Moorman

In Faith

by Pr. Franklin J. Gore, Pastor of Epiphany Lutheran Church, Pensacola, Florida

"We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing." 2 Thessalonians 1:3



The congregation of St. Paul located in Pensacola, Florida began the discernment process of leaving the ELCA in 2018. We had the 2nd vote to leave the Florida-Bahamas (FB) Synod of the ELCA in 2019. We expected some challenges in leaving because of the small group of members who wanted to remain in the ELCA. The congregation voted with a super-majority to leave the FB Synod. St. Paul applied to and joined the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) in 2020. Shortly after being received into the NALC, the congregation council received a letter from the FB Synod informing us that we could not leave.

The congregation council of that period were faithful in their commitment to Christ. They had a strength in faith that was unwavering. It proved to be a blessing for us as the FB Synod attempted to stop the people of God from leaving. To resolve the issue of St. Paul leaving the ELCA, the congregation council filed a motion in court. This was to maintain our rights to the building and the financials of St. Paul. During the legal process, letters with false statements were sent to the church members of St. Paul (NALC). Slanderous statements were made against the council and me. The ugliness of letters from the FB Synod showed a lack of Christian love for others and did not speak the truth of the intentions within the ELCA. The object of the ELCA was and I believe still is to "suppress the truth" of what they are doing or what they have done. We had suggested that the majority (us) and the minority (them) could share the building. But that was met with another ugly response. The Bishop of the FB Synod stated in words like these: Any other denomination but the NALC would have been okay. But not the NALC.

Eventually after many legal disputes the FB Synod Bishop filed a summary of judgment with the claim of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Taking the matter away from the civil court and giving it back to the FB Synod to make the final determination. The ruling gave our building, bank accounts, and endowment funds to the FB Synod and the small group of people who wanted to stay in the ELCA.

This could have been crushing for us if it were not for "faith." Instead, the ruling of the judge based

on the ecclesiastical hierarchy was freeing! Shortly after we lost everything to the ruling, God founded a new name for us. Led by the Spirit, Epiphany Lutheran Church became our new name. In 2021 we sought and found a new location for worship. I was introduced to Rabbi Tokajer in September and we began worshipping at the Synagogue on Nov. 7, 2021.

In faith we left the building in Pensacola for a new beginning. With our vision clear and our faith steadfast in Christ, we began rebuilding and evangelizing for God's church in the new location. With little financial stability we stepped out. In our faith journey, we didn't think about what was lost. Instead, we recognized how much God was providing.

I encourage pastors discerning their call to contact the General Secretary of the NALC. The threats from the ELCA that place fear into individual pastors is nothing more than evil. If you want to remain faithful to the Word of God, I encourage you to place your assurance in Christ not the ELCA. The letters I received informed me that I was nothing without their endorsement. The ELCA didn't call me into ministry. God called me into the ministry of Word and Sacrament. What about my pension and medical benefits? Have faith! As God is my witness, this question came to my mind too. It was a fleeting thought as I discerned the call to serve in faithfulness.

In March of 2023 I spoke to the congregation about our faith walk. I referred to the summary of judgment and the loss of our assets and property. I said, "We lost everything for the sake of Christ." It is in this loss that we found out just how strong and faith filled we were. As I've said many times, "It's easy to have faith when everything is going well in your life." With the help of God, we've grown in number, in spirit, and in faithfulness. Like the letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, we lift up the church and all those who continue their journey in "faith." We share the love of Christ with new believers and all visitors at Epiphany Pensacola. All are welcome to experience the love and joy of Christ in worship.

As I am writing this article it just dawned on me that on Nov. 7, 2023, when we break ground on a new church building it will be our 2nd anniversary of this new start congregation in Pensacola, Florida. God has blessed us with generous financial support for the church property. The mission and ministry have been financially supported by several NALC churches. We've received domestic mission partnerships from other NALC churches. The congregation has grown, and the people of God have been generous in supporting the mission and ministry of Christ. Losing everything for the sake of the Gospel has been transformational to the members of Epiphany Pensacola.

Churches Without Pastors

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

In the September CORE Voice, I reflected on my time as the pastor of a mission congregation. My question was whether the Lutheran Church is prepared for a time when many, if not most, congregations do not own property. This month, I want to ask a similar question: What are we prepared to do to help congregations without pastors?

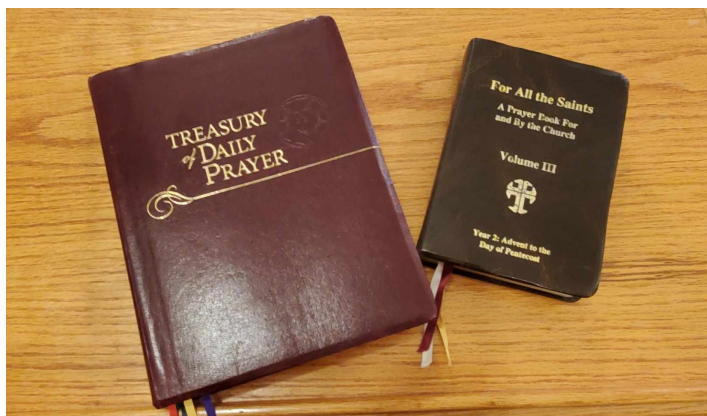
For at least the last decade, the Lutheran Church has been facing a double crisis. The first part of that crisis is that there are fewer pastors to fill the needs of congregations. The second part is that more and more congregations are too small to afford to call a pastor. What can be done about this crisis?

Two proposals have been discussed in CORE Voice in recent months. One is to train lay ministers to fill the need. The other is to change the path to ordination. Requiring a person to receive a four year master's degree, as well as acquiring tens of thousands of dollars of debt in the process, is impractical. Rather than training lay-ministers to serve in congregations, it is argued, we should train people who will be ordained upon receiving a call from a congregation.

That is an important debate, but I don't want us to be distracted from an option that can be implemented in the meantime. My proposal is simple, but often overlooked. That is to encourage lay people in small congregations, or people hoping to form a congregation, to do what lay people are already permitted to do. Namely, we should encourage them to pray together, gather for Bible study, read the Catechism, visit the sick, care for the hungry, and so forth.

In particular, one question is what to do when there is no pastor to lead corporate worship. The solution, in my opinion, is found in the hymnal. Let's take the venerable *Lutheran Book of Worship* as an example. There are at least six services in that hymnal that do not need to be led by an ordained pastor. They are the Service of the Word, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Compline, Responsive Prayer 1 and Responsive Prayer 2. All of these may be led by a lay person. (The *Lutheran Service Book* has even more options.)

In addition, the three settings for Holy Communion can be altered in such a way that they can be led by one or more lay persons. First of all, each setting offers an option of omitting the second half of the service, Holy Communion. The Service of the Word is what remains. The Greeting and Benediction also



need to be altered, but apart from that, the rest of the service remains.

Since the focus would be on the Word and prayer, full use of the Sunday and the Daily Lectionaries would be ideal. Congregations would be encouraged to take time to meditate on the lessons, as the hymnal suggests. Too often, in our rush to finish worship in one hour, we fail to allow enough time for people to do this. In this case, however, there would be an opportunity to renew that practice.

The next question would have to do with the sermon. There are so many resources that I cannot name them all. Instead, I will focus on just two at this time. The first resource is [For All the Saints](#), published by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. The second is the [Treasury of Daily Prayer](#), published by Concordia Publishing House. *For All the Saints* follows the two-year daily lectionary found in the Lutheran Book of Worship. In four volumes, it contains a prayer of the day, an Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel for each day, plus all 150 Psalms. In addition, however, there is a Writing for each day that relates to and helps interpret the lessons for the day. In a prayer service, this Writing could serve as a sermon.

Finally, what could we do to help? Imagine a group of de-churched Lutherans wanting to form a congregation. We could gather used LBWs, or other hymnals, and ship them to the congregation. Then, through donations, we could purchase a set of *For All the Saints*, or a copy of Treasury of Daily Prayer, for their use. Individuals could be encouraged to follow the daily lectionary at home, even purchasing a copy of For All the Saints or Treasury of Daily Prayer if they choose. (Online and digital resources are also available.) What would it be like for a group of people to worship together or alone for a year using these wonderful resources?

Ingrate Faith

By [Pr. Douglas Schoelles](#), Lutheran CORE Board Member



“You’re welcome.” Joy comes from saying those words to someone who recognizes and thanks you for an act of service or kindness. When you perform such gracious acts to express respect, kindness and even love, you hope your service will bless the other person. So, when the recipient of your kind service is oblivious or seems entitled, you might say sarcastically, “You’re welcome!”

Ingratitude is an ugly behavior of people who think they are entitled. Ungrateful miscreants are ever present irritants in our contemporary culture causing much friction. I can understand how secular unbelievers are trained by hyper-consumerism to be lousy ingrates.

But I scratch my head explaining Christians who have an ingrate faith. Ingrate faith is an entitlement that God owes you. Ingrate faith is not joyous for God’s work of redemption. Ingrate faith is selfish with a hardened heart and a stubborn mind.

What in your life is not a gift from God? Can you say you have real faith if you are ungrateful to God who blesses your every moment, redeems you from sin and death and bestows every spiritual blessing? I know people the LORD has rescued personally or a loved one from death, yet they are not moved to give thanks. Not thanking God emerges out from a darkened, foolish heart (Rom 1:21). So, if you take the blessings of God for granted you are an ingrate to God. Since God created us and we owe him everything, if we simply "live a good life" for ourselves and we do not live for Him, it is not enough. We are not just spiritual ingrates; we are bona fide ingrates.

If you feel slighted when someone takes your kindness for granted, how does God look upon those who do not give thanks. So, when God gives in our lives, repeatedly how do we remain silent (1 Cor

15:57). Ingratitude is the opposite of the spiritual gift of gratitude or thankfulness.

How do Christians become grateful people? By the work of the Spirit, gratitude arises from faith in the redemption Christ bought so precious for us. Faith marked by gratitude and thankfulness creates joy within us.

Gratitude is a blessing that comes through faith from the LORD. We joyfully thank God who made us his people to live in his kingdom of light (Col 1:12). I am grateful because God delivers me from sin to live a new life through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:25, 2 Cor 2:14)

The funny thing is that gratitude is seriously good for us. Grateful people have better heart health, a boosted immune system, less depressed mood, less fatigue, and they sleep better. Gratitude has the opposite effect of stress. Another study found a simple key to happy and lasting marriage is regularly expressing gratitude. Teenagers who are grateful have higher grades, are less envious, depressed, and materialistic and are more satisfied with their lives.

What does grateful faith look like? Thankfulness expressed in worship (Heb 12:28). As Christians, our lives of faith are to be characterized by thankfulness (Col 3:15-17, 1 Thess 5:18). Rejoicing and praise mark a grateful faith, a grateful Christian (Eph 5:20). We are singing to God with gratitude in our hearts for his victory in our lives (Col 3:16). At the center of our worship is the thanksgiving meal for Christ’s sacrificial cross. Our communion meal is called Eucharist in the Greek meaning “thanksgiving”.

If you are an ingrate to God, you are not living in true faith. Come know blessings of your generous God, give thanks to the LORD who blesses you.

“May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father” (Col 1:11–12).

Pastor Douglas

CORE Voice Newsletter

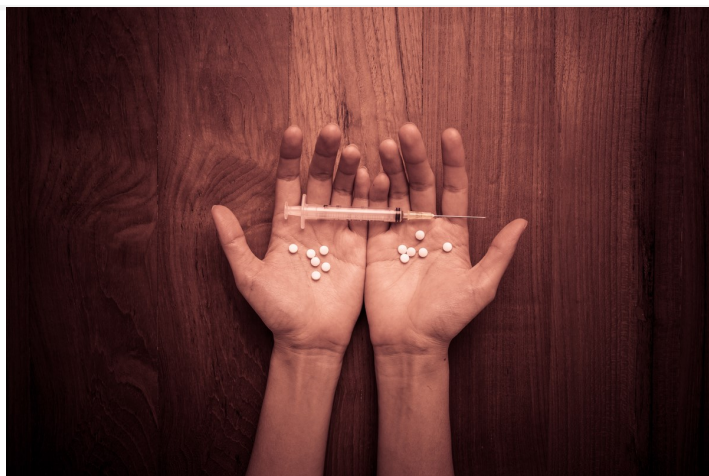
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Should We Put a Loved One Out of Her Misery

by [Dennis Di Mauro](#), pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church (NALC) in Warrenton, VA. He also teaches at St. Paul Lutheran Seminary and the North American Lutheran Seminary.



Imagine a scenario where a loved one is suffering from an incurable condition and unimaginable pain. And yet, antiquated laws have prevented her from finding peace once and for all. Shouldn't they be changed to allow a medical professional to compassionately put her out of her misery?

This is the argument posed by physician-assisted suicide (PAS) advocates, and it has successfully changed numerous laws in the United States. But is death the only way to end pain? And do laws which allow PAS affect others in unexpected ways as well? Furthermore, could the legalization of PAS be abused?

First, let's examine the facts. PAS is legal in many westernized countries today, such as Canada, the U.K., and Japan. But the country with the most PAS data is the Netherlands--one of the first countries to legalize the practice. Shockingly, PAS accounts for over four percent of all deaths in the Netherlands today, and the percentage is probably larger, since many such deaths go unreported. Furthermore, many euthanized were either unaware or incompetent to make this decision for themselves. Even children as young as twelve can be euthanized under the law. People can also be euthanized for depression in the Netherlands; eighty-three people were put to death for psychiatric conditions in 2017. Because of these facts, many Dutch citizens worry about being euthanized against their wishes. In fact, it is estimated that 10,000 Dutch citizens carry a "do not euthanize me" card just in case they become incapacitated.

Sadly, the United States is following in Holland's footsteps. Already ten states and the District of Columbia have legalized the practice of PAS and the number of states which will legalize PAS in the future is expected to grow.

But what are the risks of legalizing PAS? Physician bias is always an issue. One only needs to find one doctor who is willing to approve nearly any request for euthanasia, and numerous unneeded deaths will be the result. Furthermore, as the price of health care increases, the possibility for coercion grows. Families will decide, often for economic reasons, that it's best to end a loved one's life rather than pay for long-term treatments which might result in financial collapse.

Is PAS even needed to control pain? One of the

positive movements in recent decades has been the growth of the hospice movement and its effort to provide palliative pain care. The truth is that most pain conditions caused by life-threatening diseases can be alleviated using analgesic medications, including opioids. Indeed, proper hospice care has been able to *extend* life in many cases, even above the expected longevity of undergoing additional treatment.

Ultimately, as Christians, we need to understand how PAS does, or does not, fit into God's plan for our lives. And as with any moral issue, God's Word has to be our final guide.

One of the problems with today's society is that there is no perceived value in suffering. Everything is solved with a pill. But God's Word tells us otherwise. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul reflects on how the Lord told him that, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Paul writes, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Our illnesses teach us about the kind of humility we need in order to have an honest relationship with the living God.

We must leave the power of life and death in the Lord's hands. After his entire family was killed, Job wrote, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." We need to leave our mortality in the hands of God because we have a bright and shining future waiting for us - even *after* we die. At the end of time, "[God] will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

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online, so I am dependent upon a lengthy article by Bridgett Green, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Austin Presbyterian Seminary for insight into Isasi-Díaz's thoughts.³

For Isasi-Díaz, "kindom" better reflects Jesus's familial understandings of the community of disciples. Jesus envisioned an extended family with God as father. He announces that all who hear the word of God and do it are his family (Luke 8:21; cf. Mark 3:31-35 and Matthew 12:46-50). Further, Jesus links discipleship to membership in the family of God, saying that any who have left their blood relatives for the sake of the good news will receive back hundredfold in relationships and resources now and in the coming age (Mark 10:29-30, Luke 18:29-30, and Matthew 19:29). Jesus creates and grounds his community of disciples in the principles of kinship—and kinship with God comes not through blood relations but through participation in the duties and responsibilities proclaimed in the Torah and by the Prophets. "Kindom" evokes these values in horizontal relationships among all God's beloved children, calling disciple communities to live into familial ideals of inclusion, mutual support, and sharing of resources.⁴

I am quite sympathetic to this understanding of how disciples of Jesus interact with each other. St. Paul is emphatic that when we trust in Christ, we are adopted sons and daughters of God. Paul incorporates familial language throughout his letters, in the same vein Isasi-Díaz highlights. If highlighting this aspect of Christian thought was all that was going on, I don't think there would be much of an issue with using the terminology of "kin-dom" as it would simply be an emphasis of the language of family used throughout the New Testament. However, there are proponents of this terminology who want to get rid of kingdom language totally and replace it with kin-dom. I find this problematic.

Why Erase Kingdom?

According to proponents of "kin-dom," the language of kingdom presents multiple problems. It has been used by the church to make itself an earthly kingdom with earthly power and might.⁵ It tends towards exclusivity and can foster competition between kingdoms sometimes leading to violence.⁶ It is patriarchal in nature.⁷ And it "includes the specter of humiliation, subordination, punishment, exile, colonialization, sickness, poverty, as well as social, political, economic, and spiritual death."⁸

In their view, "kin-dom" represents a much better understanding of what Jesus taught about God's overall rule and what Jesus' parables lead us toward.

Let's work through a few of these things and of-

fer some critique. First, I think we must separate the intent of Jesus' teachings on God's Kingdom (and the vision of how it works when God rules) from how sinful human beings have appropriated it. Many of the critiques of kingdom language resonate with the experience of human history, and one needs only pick up a history book to see the truth of what is being said. However, does human failing nullify biblical intent and understanding? Hardly.

Several years ago, I attended a mandatory boundary training in my synod. We were cautioned and steered away from using familial language to describe the church. The reason? Because families are places where abuse takes place; where neglect happens; where harm and pain are caused. It was not until a day or two afterwards that it hit me: not a single good thing was shared about what happens in families. No one spoke about parents who lovingly raise and sacrifice for their kids. No one said a word about how spouses care for each other and build one another up. No one spoke about the emotional support and foundations that are laid to help us cope with things that happen in life. No one said a thing about how the vast majority of parents feed, clothe, shelter, and spend hours upon hours of time with their children raising them to be productive citizens of society. All of the focus was on the bad, and not a single thing was said about the good. Do we abandon the metaphor because there are times of failure? Absolutely not!! Especially when the biblical witness emphasizes the metaphor so much.

I believe the same application is warranted here. Yes, there are, but the vision set forth in the Gospels, epistles, the book of Revelation, and even in the Old Testament lead us to use kingdom language. Why? To emphasize the goodness of God's rule, and to show that there is a future hope which is a corrective to the failings of humankind.

Second, the kingdom of God is indeed exclusive, and I do not think this is something we as Christians should feel shame about. Paul is explicit in his writings that a person is either "in Christ" or "in Adam." There is a strong line of demarcation, and the only way to go from one side to the other is through the cross. Essentially, a person either trusts in Christ's work for salvation (in Christ), or they trust in themselves (in Adam). Either one trusts in grace for one's righteousness, or one trusts in one's works. There is no middle ground.

When you trust in Christ and His works, you shift your allegiance. No longer do you live for self: for self-indulgence; for self-affirmation; for self-preservation. Instead, you live for Christ. You live

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for God. No longer do you lay claim to the throne, but the rightful, righteous ruler is now seated upon the throne of your heart. You now serve a new master. (Romans 6) This is at the heart of the Christian creed, "Jesus is Lord." You are announcing that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. You no longer rule over your life. Jesus does. And when He is king of your life, you enter into the Kingdom of God.

If you do not trust in Christ's work, then you are not in the Kingdom of God. You are consumed by other hungers. You are on the outside looking in. In this fashion, the Kingdom of God is indeed exclusive, but, this does not lead to violence and conflict. It is self-righteousness which leads to such things, and a person who knows God's grace is not self-righteous. They know they have no righteousness of their own. They know their sin. They know their dependence upon God and Christ's grace. They also know they are commissioned to make disciples of all nations. They know the great command to love their neighbors as themselves. They do not seek to impose the faith or the Kingdom by imposition, but rather by invitation. The doorway to the Kingdom of God is always open, and the desire is to welcome all. Even though it is exclusive, it seeks the inclusion of all. This is not something to be ashamed of in the least.

A final word about patriarchy. Please know that I am using the following definition of patriarchy: a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line. The Kingdom of God is a patriarchy since God is our Father. As such, this is a rather neutral understanding.

However, there is another definition of patriarchy which oftentimes gets applied. "A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it." The Kingdom of God was never meant to be such a thing. One would garner that self-evidently from Jesus' own teachings on the Kingdom as well as St. Paul's baptismal theology. However, living this ideal out on earth has proven to be quite difficult, and the Church has fallen very short of the ideal.

But again, the question must be asked: do we abandon the language because the ideal has not been met? No. There is no justification for that. You cannot change reality just by changing language.

Embracing Kingdom

And the reality of the Christian faith is this: you

cannot have the "kin-dom" of God without the Kingdom of God.

As I hinted at previously, our Christian faith begins with God's great grace poured out through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This grace captures and changes our hearts so that our allegiance shifts from ourselves and the desires of the flesh to allegiance to God and the desires of the Spirit. This is a vertical relationship, and it is primary. It must take place first. For through it, we actually fulfill the first and greatest commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Everything starts with this vertical relationship.

Then, it moves to the horizontal. Then, it moves into our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Then, it moves to the second great command to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is where "kin-dom" language can come into play, but again, we must be careful.

Our neighbors may not share the same allegiance that we do. Our neighbors may not have Jesus as their King. They may still be "in Adam." They still may belong to the kingdom of the world.

I was struck by a paragraph in Professor Green's article:

This is the expansive sense of family to which Bishop Oscar Romero appealed when he exhorted the soldiers in El Salvador in 1980 before his assassination. He reminded them of Jesus's vision of kinship, reminded them that we are all children of God, that we are connected through an honor code that values all, that provides security and a foundation for each person to be able to extend themselves into the community without losing their identity and sense of self.²

Bishop Romero appealed to the idea of "kin-dom" with the soldiers of El Salvador, but they still assassinated him. Why? Because they were serving a different master. They were serving a different king. They were not serving the King of kings and Lord of lords. Their hearts had not experienced the grace of God which would lead them away from committing such a heinous crime. The vertical relationship must always come first, and the Church's primary job in the world is the proclamation of the Gospel which makes disciples of all nations—which calls our neighbors to have the same allegiance as we do.

To erase kingdom and replace with "kin-dom" means to place the second commandment above the first. It seeks to establish the kingdom without the King. That is not an option within the Christian faith, and it ultimately leads to failure. You simply cannot have the "kin-dom" without the Kingdom.

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Mission Under Accompaniment

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Photograph courtesy of Spencer Wentland; it is a protestant church in Okinawa.

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‡ *Unreached*: relative to the population living near a gospel witness. Imagine an American city of about 250,000 people and if there is only about three or four churches of twenty people and no youth groups.

Unengaged: has any effort been made by Christians to bring the Gospel and make disciples among this particular people group?

A Tribute to Carl E. Braaten

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

"I never thought of Carl Braaten as being with *us*. I thought he was on the *other side*." So a Lutheran leader reacted when I told him of Carl's passing at 94.



Carl was an enigma. He was an active member of an ELCA congregation, but the NALC theological conference carries his name, and the NALC continues a "younger theologians" gathering Carl founded.

In 1966 he made the *New York Times* by announcing, "The Reformation is over; let's go home." Yet unlike many of his friends, he never "swam the Tiber," just as he never left the ELCA. Carl devoted himself to an ecumenical vision informed and renewed by the Reformation. This was especially true in the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, which he and Robert Jenson founded.

To understand Carl, you need to understand his commitment to theology. When he felt that the ELCA had given up on theology, he blessed Lutheran CORE by building it into our DNA.

Carl grew up in the mission field in Madagascar, and struggled over the years until embracing the best of his pietistic background. He remained concerned about mission, yet flirted with universal salvation, carefully nuanced and always as a hope and not a teaching.

Paul Hinlicky wrote a [brilliant reflection for CCET](#), and Carl's own book, [A Harvest of Lutheran Dogmatics](#), includes reflections on his place in recent theology as well as thoughtful reflections on other theologians he knew.

May Carl rest in peace, as his theology now has been perfected into vision.

Coming Events

- **Pro Ecclesia Conference**—Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL. June 10-12, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **NEXUS 2024**—Des Moines, IA. July 21-27, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **NALC Online Convocation**. August 9, 2024. Click [here](#).
- **LCMC 24th Annual Gathering & Convention** — Marion, IA. September 29- October 2, 2024. Click [here](#).

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