

Words Fail Me: Questioning the Newspeak of My “Progressive” Education

by [Pr. Brett Jenkins](#), NALC pastor from Pennsylvania and former board member of Lutheran CORE



In This Issue:

- How does Jesus get us to the Father?
- The most effective way to change a heart
- Children’s sermons
- A challenge for yourself and your congregation
- How to forgive
- Committing to the traditional sexual ethic

In my office hangs my ordination certificate. Across it is emblazoned the name of the ordaining body, the body whose confessional commitments I pledged to uphold on the day I knelt and made my vows. An adult convert to the Christian faith who settled in Lutheranism as the place where I would live out my “mere Christianity” after reading a church library copy of the Augsburg Confession, in the spring of 2016 I had served that denomination in various roles for twenty years.

This spring marks the eighth year since I called my bishop and informed him that I would be serving in a new church body. Even as an adult convert, I know how painful the process is of leaving a church body you have called home; to cause further fracture to the Body of Christ, to disappoint My Lord by ensuring that His prayer that all His disciples might be one as I will become yet one more piece of living evidence of how little the truth of the gospel seems to change the lives of those who believe it, to serve at least in part as another stumbling block for people who—as did I at one point—hold the Christian faith in contempt, was an exquisite pain... I can only imagine how hard it is for a cradle member of a communion to make a similar choice.

In his classic study of what causes massive shifts in a mindset, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn details how it takes a superabundance of contrary evidence to get people to rethink their

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Racism, Power, and Prejudice

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



Almost 30 years ago, I had my first introduction to the tactics of postmodern argumentation. A professor at Texas Lutheran made the statement that he could not be racist because as a Latino, he had no power. Racism was prejudice plus power. I scratched my head. I had been taught that racism was prejudice towards another person on the basis of skin color or a sense of moral superiority towards one's own race. Where did this other definition come from?

Since then, I discovered the origin of the professor's definition, and I have also discovered that such shifting of definitions are a strategy to shift an argument to heavily favor one particular side by causing confusion, obfuscation, and, in the case of racism, an avenue where one does not need to examine one's own prejudice towards those of a different color.

There are times to call such obfuscation out and refuse to play the game. There are times to say, "I simply refuse to engage your definition of that word because it is not the culturally agreed upon definition of that word." However, there are also times to do what apologists call "defeating an argument on the opponent's terms."

When you can show that an opponent's definitions or stances will fail to accomplish what they set out to do, you can cut through the confusion and bring the argument around to your favor.

Such is the case with the definition of racism embraced by those of a more left-leaning bent. Prejudice plus power is their definition of the word, so logically, if you get rid of either of those things, racism is dismantled. Get rid of power or get rid of prejudice, and racism comes to a halt.

So, here is the question to ask in regards to power: has there ever been a system of thought or practice that gets rid of power? You really shouldn't have to wait long for an answer. The self-evident answer is no. Even that professor from Texas Lutheran was a bit misguided when he said he had no power. He handed out grades, after all. One simply cannot get rid of power structures. They emerge no matter what, and as power shifts and prejudice remains, you simply shift who is racist and never eradicate racism.

Therefore, you must look at the prejudice part of that equation. How does one get rid of prejudice? Can one pass any sort of legislation which will eradicate it? Again, the answer is no as prejudice pertains to the state of a heart and mind. In order to change prejudice, a heart and mind must be changed. What is the most effective way to change a heart?

From a Christian standpoint, it is the power of the Gospel which brings to fruition the baptismal promise: "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).



As far as I can tell, and please tell me otherwise if not, this particular approach completely dismantles those who would like to excuse racism by changing the definitions, and it brings the discussion to a place where Christianity offers the best answer to truly tackle the problem of racism.

Bringing Children to Jesus

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

In Matthew 19: 14 Jesus told His disciples, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” In Matthew 18: 3 He added, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Children show us what it means to be humble and trust.

Lutheran CORE is very pleased to be able to offer a large number of resources on our website for pastors, lay people, and lay leaders of congregations. We have suggested prayers of the church and hymns for each Sunday, daily devotions, and weekly lectionary-based Bible studies. Links to these resources can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

We are now very happy to be able to add weekly, lectionary-based children’s sermons. Many thanks to ELCA pastor Jim FitzGerald and his wife Hanna for providing this new resource. Jim is pastor of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Fulton, Maryland. A link to his children’s messages can be found [here](#).

The children’s sermons are focused on the lectionary, usually the Gospel. Hanna plays a lamb puppet named Sammy. Each week Sammy and the pastor have conversations about Jesus and the disciples. Pastor Fitzgerald shares, “We keep the scripts simple, fun, easy to understand, and focused on Jesus.” The scripts are written for young children under the age of twelve, but the Fitzgeralds have noticed that adults also have fallen in love with Sammy’s messages about Jesus. Each week the Fitzgeralds provide a prop list and Scripture reading along with the script as well as information about each of the characters. Their goal is to make the scripts “as accessible, readable, and easy to use as possible.”

I asked Pastor Jim how he and his wife became involved in providing children’s sermons. He wrote

“During internship, prior to his call to ministry at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Fulton, Maryland, Jim served at Evangelical Lutheran Church in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania as a vicar. One of the pastors had conversations with ‘Donkey,’ the puppet his wife played. Jim watched each week as children



filled several pews to hear about Jesus from Donkey and the pastor.

“The initial thought both Jim and Hanna had about these children’s sermons was how wonderful they were, but Hanna didn’t want to ever engage in playing a donkey puppet, and then their daughter was born. In October 2023, Pastor Jim was ordained, and he and Hanna began talking about how they could offer meaningful children’s sermons to the children at St. Paul’s. Hanna was not willing to play a donkey, but said she would play a lamb, as long as she could pick out the puppet (the puppet had to be cute). Sammy was born.

“Jim and Hanna started leading children’s sermons together at St. Paul’s Lutheran during the season of Advent in 2023. Working with Sammy, the lamb puppet, they had no idea how the congregation and children would respond to the weekly discussions Sammy and Pastor Jim had together. They had no idea how much the congregation would fall in love with the character of Sammy—and that love has to stem from the church’s deep love of Jesus.

“Each week, Pastor Jim reads the gospel and invites the children to come forward for a children’s sermon. During the time that the children are walking up the aisle, Hanna works her way behind the pulpit, grabs a handheld microphone, and becomes Sammy. One of the members of the congregation created a wooden frame with green felt on the front that slides into place next to the pulpit: Sammy’s meadow.”

A link to further information regarding “The Adventures of Sammy the Lamb” can be found [here](#).

Lutheran CORE would like to thank Pastor Jim FitzGerald and his wife Hanna for sharing this resource. To contact Pastor Jim for questions or more information, please email him at pastorjim@stpaulslutheran.info.

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The Ministry Challenge We Face in 2024

by [Pr. Don Brandt](#), [Congregational Lay-Led Initiative \(CLI\)](#)



Consider the contrasting good news and not-so-good news ministry challenges that are confronting many of our congregations in 2024:

Good News: Many local churches have now been blessed by the return of members to in-person worship services now that the pandemic is over.

Not-so-good News: A great many of our congregations have nevertheless experienced a significant decrease in overall weekly in-person worship attendance when compared to 2019; i.e., before the pandemic.

Good News: Many smaller congregations are in good financial shape; benefiting from the generosity of the active Boomers who make up a majority of their membership.

Not-so-good News: These aging Boomers will not remain active indefinitely. And there are very few Gen X, Millennial, and Gen Z members to take their place; whether as generous givers or volunteers.

Good News: Both the LCMC and NALC are continuing to attract new congregations. The NALC now has a total of 500 congregations, and the LCMC is now made up of almost 1,000 churches. (75 of these churches belong to both the NALC and LCMC.)

Not-so-good News: A significant percentage of these new congregations have been dealing with extended pastoral vacancies. Some of them are joining, in part, in the unrealistic expectation that they will now have an easier time finding and calling their next pastor.

Good News: Most LCMC and NALC congregations are aware of how important it is for them to prioritize and pursue the Great Commission. As a result, their congregational leaders are both

aware of the importance of reaching out to the unchurched, and are motivated to take action.

Not-so-good news: Effective congregational outreach and evangelism is actually more challenging now than in the past. The reasons include...

1. The on-going and increasing secularization of American culture; a process that has only accelerated with the advent and ubiquitousness of social media.
2. The politicization of so many American congregations in a time of unprecedented levels of divisive and partisan political conflict. Many congregations have been dealing with controversial political and social conflicts that have directly led to significant internal conflict. Of pastors who admit to considering leaving the ministry, 38% said that “current political divisions” were one important factor.
3. The growing percentage of Americans who claim they have no religious affiliation. Gallup has asked about religious affiliation going all the way back to 1950, when more than 90% of respondents identified as Christian. In 2012 it was 77%. In 2023 it was 68%.

However, I would like to conclude with some extra **good** news as you and your congregation plan for the immediate future.

Most of you belong to church bodies—like the LCMC and NALC—which adhere to and advocate for basing our Christian identity on the centrality of Scripture. As a result, your pastors and congregational leaders don’t need to make apologies for being part of a national church body that has based its primary identity more on secular causes than on the Great Commission.

While our culture has indeed become increasingly secular, and fewer people identify as Christians, many unchurched Americans are in almost desperate need of the kind of supportive and loving community that the local church—your church—can provide. The need of many unchurched Americans to be a part of a caring community is now greater than ever. The pandemic became a profound reminder, to millions of Americans, that they have been living lives characterized by loneliness and social isolation. This presents an amazing opportunity for local churches to incarnate the love of Jesus Christ for the isolated and hurting people living in their local communities.

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fundamental commitments, coining the terms *paradigm* and *paradigm shift*. A paradigm shift, when it occurs, is more than a reordering of the furniture in one's mental office or even changing offices due to corporate restructuring; it amounts to moving out of the building, watching that edifice be razed, and having a new foundation poured upon which you must tentatively build a new place from which to conduct your business.

It is for this reason that I am uncertain whether my decision to leave the ELCA represents a true paradigm shift or not. In the words of a Roman Catholic mentor whose specialty was ecumenical theology, with whom I shared the pain of my process, "You aren't leaving your church; your church is leaving you." Though hopefully my thinking has become more refined and nuanced, my fundamental commitments in some ways have not changed since I first knew myself to be a Christian in 1995 and a conscientious son of the Lutheran reformation by early 1996.

Yet once such a choice is made—the choice to leave the home that has nurtured you during your most formative years—once the evidence piles up so high that you cannot ignore it, you begin to rethink many things. Aspects of your identity you thought unassailable become things you question. Commitments you thought unshakable bedrock you begin to recognize as issues of secondary and sometimes tertiary importance... sometimes you come to know them as even detrimental to keeping the most fundamental commitments of all.

Such for me has been the issue of inclusive language in ministry, whether for God or people. The *sine qua non* of both my undergraduate and graduate education, I have come to question not just its utility, but its very ability to communicate the Word of God, which in turn means its very ability to foster human flourishing... especially for women.

By the time I was being formed in seminary, the use of inclusive language for human beings was a matter of basic politeness and the use of such language for God became mandated as a "justice issue" while I was away from campus on internship. My early training conditioned me to be okay with the former; indeed I had chosen to pursue ordination in the ELCA over the LCMS because of a precommitment to women's ordination, a commitment I still hold but should not have then, before I could possibly know the Biblical or theological issues at stake.

My conviction in Christianity as a *revealed*

religion prevented me from embracing inclusive language for God. Because of an encounter with a cult in my early twenties, I have a sensitivity to when I am only being told one side of an argument, so the aggressive insistence on the agenda second-cum-third wave feminism and the lack of critical presentation of any other perspective set off a voice in my head: "Danger, Will Robinson... Danger!" The special prominence of this in my liturgics class, where we failed to learn the rudiments of using *The Minister's Desk Edition*, made me begin researching the best arguments on the other side.

I was surprised to often find these arguments to be robust rather than reactionary. An honest reader could disagree with these arguments, but not accuse the writer of bad faith or barely disguised *animus* against women. Particularly compelling was an article by Jesuit Paul Mankowski (who often wrote under the pen name Diogenes) entitled *Jesus, Son of Humankind? The Necessary Failure of Inclusive-Language Translations*, which I found in a now out-of-print journal. (It is still available on the *Touchstone* magazine website for subscribers.)

There is one issue central to our salvation that inclusive language translations of the Bible obscure—even those translations that only use inclusive language for human beings, like the NRSV—that I have never seen referenced in any scholarly work, so I would like to address it briefly here.

"No one comes to the Father but by me," says Jesus in one of our most beloved funeral readings (John 14:6), but how exactly does Jesus get us to the Father? "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ," joyously declares St. Paul. (Galatians 3:27) Elsewhere he adds, "For if we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5) We have been united with Jesus.

A robust Sacramental theology teaches us that as regards our eternal inheritance, this means that when the Father regards us, He sees Christ, with whom we have been united, and whom we have donned like a mantle. In other words, He sees not Joe or Sally, merely created in the image of God however pious or penitent, but Jesus, His Son, God Himself, for Whom the entire realm of created reality and uncreated glory is the rightful inheritance.

What this means in contradiction to the polite niceties of post-Christian American cultural religion, each of us is, properly speaking, a child of God *only* when we share in the sonship of Jesus Christ through

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“Journey to Forgiveness: 21 Milestones to Freedom”

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



Many thanks to David Peterson, pastor of Apostles Lutheran Church in Chesapeake, Virginia (LCMC), for giving us a video review of his first book, “Journey to Forgiveness: 21 Milestones to Freedom.” A link to David’s review can be found [here](#). A link to our You Tube channel, which contains reviews of around three dozen books as well as a dozen CORE Convictions videos on various topics related to the Christian faith and life, can be found [here](#).

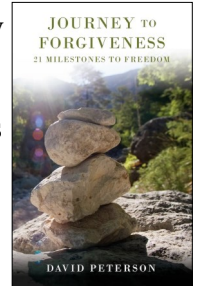
David writes, “After some thirty years of active ministry in congregations, hospices, hospitals, and fire and law enforcement settings, I have encountered many people wrestling with unforgiveness in their lives. Many well-meaning pastors have told folks, ‘You just have to forgive,’ yet have done little to share how to forgive. This book is intended to share the ‘how to forgive’ as well as provide some explanations of why extending forgiveness is so difficult.

“As I wrote, ‘Journey to Forgiveness: 21 Milestones to Freedom,’ I knew that I needed to share a bit of my own journey to forgiveness and the devastating effects that unforgiveness has had on my own emotional, physical, and spiritual health. But these effects also had a very real and devastating toll on my personal relationships as well. I was born with a common neurological disorder known as essential tremor which causes tremors in my hands and arms. Because of it, I encountered much painful teasing and bullying as I grew up. To add to my hurt, when I was twelve, I was targeted by a neighborhood pedophile and lived silently with shame and inner torment until I was nineteen. My parents were devastated but thankfully started me on a path of healing with competent emotional and spiritual providers. Through years of walking on my own journey of forgiveness, I have discovered some helpful methods or ‘milestones’ that have enabled me to experience

peace and harmony not only with myself but with those in my life that really matter most - my wife, my family, and those that I have been called by God to serve.

“In this book, I share the ‘how to forgive’ but also a number of reasons that explain why extending forgiveness is so difficult. I even share a bit about the latest in brain science and neuro-chemistry which begins to explain why forgiving others can be so difficult, yet with God, all things are possible! This is not a seminary textbook. In fact, it’s more of a field guide providing content, scriptures, and questions for deeper reflection. This little handbook is 136 pages in length and I have been so pleased that pastors and chaplains have appreciated having a helpful resource to offer those in need. Congregations have also found this book to be very useful for Bible studies and home groups. Imagine the inner peace that awaits you on your own ‘journey to forgiveness’!

[Here](#) is a link to more information regarding the book.



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Baptism. It is for this reason—not the misogynistic cultural baggage assumed by feminists of whatever wave—that St. Paul in his letters addresses both the male and female objects of his correspondence as “brothers.” We are all brothers because we all through Holy Baptism share in the *sonship* of Jesus Christ.

Inclusive language translations that render St. Paul’s address as “brothers and sisters” obscure this important salvific truth, esteeming the demands of feminist-defined justice as greater than the actual Biblically depicted mechanism of salvation. Further, it propagates its own fundamentally irreconcilable war between the sexes into the very “beloved community” that is to be the home of “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18), fomenting disunity in the Body of Christ. Under such conditions, the uniqueness of Christ as the way to God is necessarily veiled and universalism will proliferate to the loss of the evangelistic impulse.

I count this as a very serious way that the very inclusive language that is purported to be a justice issue for women actually does worse than underserve them; it may fail to call them to Christ and so be positively opposed to their ultimate interests.

Book Review: “Tenderness” by Eve Tushnet

by A. Nestenprest, a friend of Lutheran CORE



Note from Executive Director Dennis D. Nelson:

Many thanks to a friend of Lutheran CORE for giving us a review of Eve Tushnet’s book, “Tenderness: A Gay Christian’s Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God’s Extravagant Love.” The reviewer finds in this book a hope-giving guide for same-sex attracted persons who seek to live lives that are faithful to the Scriptures as well as find healing from their pain as they draw near to God. It is also a reminder to the followers of Jesus that we need to have the mind of Christ as we offer grace, encouragement, and support to people who are struggling with the issues in their lives as they seek to live lives that are faithful to God. [Here](#) is a link to our Resources page and [here](#) is the link to the post on our website that offers resources for same-sex attracted persons as well as their pastors, church leaders, friends, and family members.

Many Christian books have been written about LGBTQ+ concerns (homosexuality, transgenderism, etc.) from a traditionalist perspective. Rarely, if ever, are these books written by and for members of the LGBTQ+ community, addressing their needs and concerns.

Tenderness: A Gay Christian’s Guide to Unlearning Rejection and Experiencing God’s Extravagant Love meets the need for such a book. The author, Eve Tushnet, is a practicing Roman Catholic who holds to a traditional sexual ethic. Tushnet identifies as “gay”/“lesbian” (same-sex attracted); however, she lives a celibate life. ***Tenderness*** is addressed specifically to persons who identify as “gay” or “lesbian” and/or who experience same-sex

attraction. Its aim is to help gays and lesbians to know God’s love for them, and to learn how to live faithful Christian lives, with love for God and obedience to the Church.

Tenderness begins by acknowledging the pain that gays and lesbians have experienced. Part I: Hard Times details the various ways in which gays and lesbians have been needlessly harmed, both by the church (i.e., through sermons about “how the gays are destroying America”) and by the world (i.e., through “homophobic jokes”). Tushnet affirms that holding to a traditional sexual ethic need not - and should not - result in inflicting these sorts of wounds. Tushnet also acknowledges the struggles of same-sex attracted persons who have tried and failed to eliminate their battle with same-sex attraction (i.e., “you’ve desperately prayed to become straight, night after night, often in tears”), then experienced the pain of being misunderstood and shamed for their persistent struggle with same-sex attraction.

Tushnet assures same-sex attracted persons that they aren’t alone, that their pain is not their fault, that there is hope for their healing, and - most importantly - that God loves them and cares for them. By acknowledging their pain and by giving them hope, Tushnet takes crucial steps towards helping same-sex attracted persons to heal. This healing, for many, is required for them to be able and willing to accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ with an open heart.

The rest of the book provides teaching and practical help to Christian gays and lesbians.

Part II: What If “Bad Things” Are...Good? addresses what gays and lesbians should do about not being able to have sex and/or to marry. Drawing on St. Augustine’s concept of sin being disordered love which is in need of being rightly ordered, Tushnet explains how to rightly order “same-sex love”. Tushnet gives the prospect of celibacy a positive outlook, challenging the notion that a celibate life is one that is condemned to loneliness, isolation, and deprivation.

Part III: The Church Suffering addresses the various kinds of suffering that Christian gays and lesbians endure: anger and sadness, abandonment and abuse, guilt and shame, doubts about the Christian faith, questioning the traditional sexual ethic. Tushnet, again, assures those who have suffered in these ways that they are not alone in their suffering. Then Tushnet guides them in the process of working through these challenging thoughts and feelings. In so doing, Tushnet aims to help them (re)discover the

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So consider challenging yourself and the individual members of your congregation to pursue these three simple steps:

A. To each think of an unchurched friend (or acquaintance) living in your local community. Begin to meet regularly with this person; walking alongside him/her as he/she faces the challenges of life. This is primarily a listening ministry, and learning to ask the right questions as a way of bonding over time.

B. When the time is right, invite your friend to visit your congregation on a Sunday. Offer to pick your friend up on that first Sunday. And give two or three of your church friends (and the pastor) a “heads-up”, letting them know you are bringing a first-time visitor.

C. In this role you will essentially become your congregation’s ambassador for Christ to this new friend (and now visitor). You will be the one to not only assure your friend’s welcome on that first Sunday; you will also increase the odds that he/she will be assimilated and disciplined by the members of your congregation.

D. One more thing: Even if the new friend is unwilling to visit, do *not* end the relationship. Keep getting together, even if this becomes a solo ministry on your part. Ultimately it’s not necessarily about membership; it’s about discipleship.

Pastor Don Brandt

[Congregations in Transition](#)

[The Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative](#)

Book Review: “Tenderness” by Eve Tushnet

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beauty of the Christian life, to commit to the traditional sexual ethic with integrity, and to develop firm faith in Jesus Christ.

Part IV: How to Know God's Tenderness offers “specific practices or ways of thinking” which some gays and lesbians have found especially helpful. These are meant to develop knowledge of God, trust in God’s goodness, experience of God’s love, and closeness to God.

Tenderness provides an excellent resource for gays and lesbians who aspire to live faithfully, to heal from pain that has hurt their faith, and to draw near to God with faith.

* A note about language: There is a dispute, among traditionalists, regarding whether or not Christians who experience same-sex attraction should identify as “gay” or “lesbian”. Tushnet is comfortable with using these terms, but acknowledges the fact that some Christians are not, and would prefer to use alternate terms such as “same-sex attracted”.

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/>

CORE Voice Newsletter

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