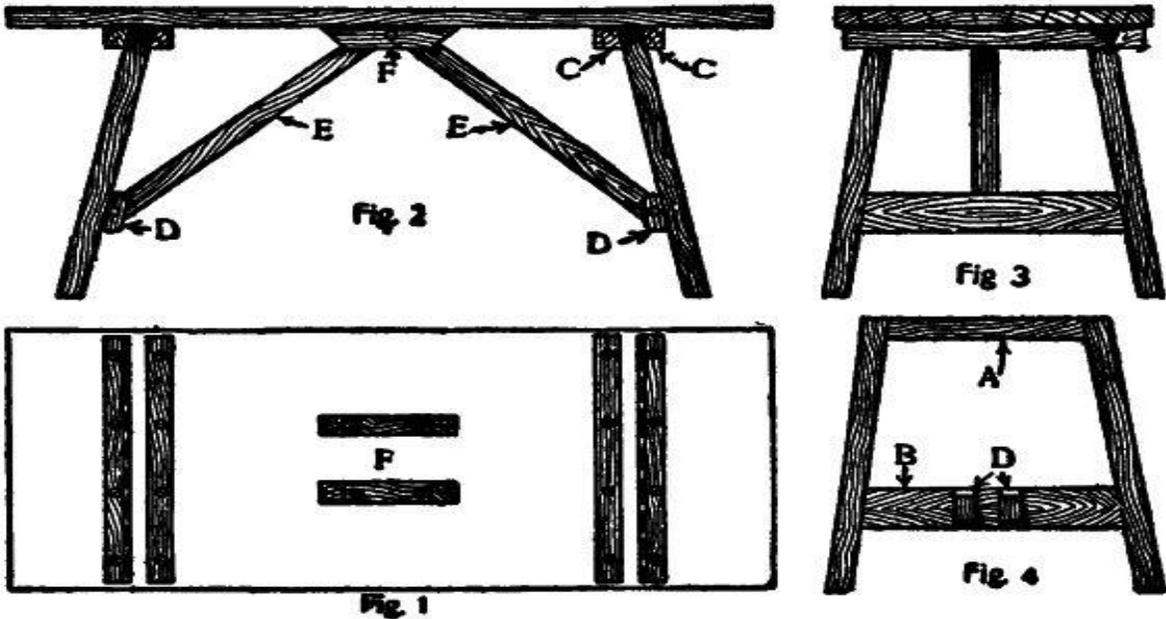


Building a Mission Table



Pastor Harold "Jake" Jacobson

Director for Evangelical Mission

Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA



October 31, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I had two experiences within a 24-hour span recently. The first was a congregation's 150th Anniversary Celebration and the second was a phone call from a congregational leader whose congregation had just voted to close. Both of these events in very different ways raised a question for me, "Is there a future for Lutheran mission in Northwestern Pennsylvania in the 21st Century?" Neither experience provided a clear answer for me.

I am not a big fan of statistics but they serve to highlight the situation we find ourselves in these days. Thirteen out of the fourteen counties that comprise the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod lost population (the exception was Forest County and a new prison). We are bleeding youth as well. In addition the population remaining is growing older, moving past childbearing years. At the same time our congregations saw an average decline in worship attendance of over 32%. I watched the congregation that I serve in that same time period go from a healthy and thriving congregation to one that has been decimated by a southern migration in search of jobs and retirement. It is not a bright picture.

Still the question remains, "Is there a future for Lutheran mission in Northwestern Pennsylvania in the 21st Century?" and if so, what is the nature of that mission?

At the Churchwide Assembly the LIFT proposals were adopted. A key proposal encourages every congregation to develop a mission plan and forward it to their synod. I have been called as the Director for Evangelical Mission to oversee that process. I find this mandate from the Assembly provides us with a timely opportunity to address our mission in light of our current situation.

Enclosed is material to assist you in that process. I am also available to work with congregations as you work through this process.

Emmanuel,

The Rev. Harold O. Jacobson
Director for Evangelical Mission
Assistant to the Bishop

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Part 2 Request for Chapel Status

(fill out only if the answer was “no” to God’s mission)

It is assumed that if you are not engaged in God’s mission in your parish that you desire to maintain your present status. To assist in that desire the NWPA Synod makes available the Chapel Program. The Chapel Program will seek to maintain the *status quo* by providing as little intervention as possible.

Chapel status makes available a continuum of services to assist the congregation to live out their last days. Pastoral care will be made available on a contract basis. Assistance with legal, emotional, and historical ‘story-ing’ will also be available if desired.

Chapel status must be approved by the Mission Table/Cluster and Synod Council.

Chapel Status Application

Congregation Name _____

Address _____

Contact Person _____

Reason for applying:

Mission Table/Cluster Approval _____ (date)

Synod Council Approval _____ (date)

Preface

We inherited a picnic table that my wife's grandfather had built. I soon discovered it was in need of serious care. Inattention had allowed dry rot to waste away much of the supportive structures. I went out and bought wood and refashioned replacement parts and put a new coat of paint on the whole table. That sufficed for a while. Over the past few years more parts have been fashioned and replaced and more paint applied. Despite all of my work it continues to deteriorate slowly. Inside I know that the best course of action is to build a new table that will meet our present needs but things are changing so fast in our lives that I haven't found the right design. That's actually not true. I have not taken the time to assess our current situation and design a table to meet our situation that will be substantial as well as adaptive.

As I look around our synod I find many of our congregations are in similar situations. We know that our current tables are in need of "something" but we have not been able or had the opportunities to assess our situations clearly and build new "tables".

At the 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America the report and recommendations of the LIFT Task Force was adopted. One of the recommendations was for every congregation in the ELCA to develop a Mission Plan. STOP! Yes, here we go again! I reacted in the same way, however, I was also charged to lead you through this development of a plan. So....

- I promise to do my best not to lead you through a "here we go again" process the result of which ends up in a notebook that takes up space on a shelf in a church office.
- I promise that if you take this process seriously it will renew your congregation.
- I believe that if we do nothing then in the next five years I will be overseeing a massive sale of used and unusable "picnic tables"!

I have tried to develop a process that is not tedious or burdensome and that will lead your congregation into a deeper relationship with Christ, a deeper understanding of your congregation and your community. In each of the areas of ministry I have tried to offer examples of new directions, food for thought and questions to invite discussion.

This process is your's and you decide how best to proceed. It can be done by a council or a smaller task group. In larger congregations individual areas may be assessed by the work of standing committees.

I am at your disposal as you work through this process: 814-229-0999 or jake.jacobson@elca.org.

Process

Former Bishop (Metro New York Synod) and now Executive Director of Congregational and Synodical Mission for the ELCA, Pastor Stephen Bouman first introduced me to the concept of “Mission Table”. While his use of the image was more one of oversight I believe that it is the appropriate image to begin our conversation.

One can legitimately argue that the table is the primary launching point for Jesus’ mission in the world. It is at table that Jesus encounters sinners, outcasts, and foreigners. It is from the table that Jesus sends his disciples out to serve. It is at table that Jesus is most recognizable in his post-resurrection form.

As I read ancient liturgies and history the gathering place of the early church (pre – 4th Century) was around the table. The worship of the community gathered resembled a meal far more than a show. It was around the table that community was formed, story remembered/shared, prayer was offered and mission was conceived. I believe that the table is the starting point today as we turn our energies toward mission.

On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus transformed all tables into sacred tables and all meals into holy eating. For the Christian whenever we gather to eat we do so as an extension of the Eucharist. Where two or three gather there is Christ in the midst of them. It was at table that the disciples first recognized the Christ following the resurrection as he broke bread with them. It is at table that we best re-present the risen Christ to the world today.

If this is true, how then do we build or restore our mission table for is the gathering of the whole people of God today? As an amateur furniture builder I have made plenty of mistakes over the years but through most of them I have learned a thing or two about building. Perhaps most important is careful and thoughtful preparation (while not a failsafe good preparation has saved me many expensive miscues).

Tools. It is true that a carpenter is only as good as his/her tools and also that the best tool in the hands of inexperience is not all that helpful. What tools do we as the church bring to the task of table building? The church has centered her life around seven faith practices: prayer, Bible study, worship, evangelism, mutual consolation of the brothers and sisters, service and the stewardship of God’s resources. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America refers to these practices in verb form: Pray, Study, Worship, Invite, Encourage, Serve and Give. The active form of these words lends a helpful sense of dynamic to our faith practices/tools. These will be the basis for our examining and building of our mission tables.

Materials. Our chief material for the construction of our mission table is the body of Christ in all its expressions. First, it is the body of Christ that we refer to as Lord (*kyrios*) who we believe, teach and confess sits at the right hand of God. It is his authority and presence through the work of the Holy Spirit that enables us to undertake this project with any hopes of success. Secondly, it is the body of Christ that we know intimately as those we gather at table with each week – the brothers and sisters of our local congregation. This is a body with a particular context, story and tradition. It will be those in-grained patterns that will give our table its distinctive grain and beauty. Thirdly, we are gathered together with brothers and sisters in the expression of the body of Christ we know as synod. This body too has a distinctive pattern that will impact our tables. It brings a larger sense of vision but also a greater wealth

of resources. As we begin building mission tables in our synod the experiences of each congregation will be invaluable to the others. The synod will also be the oversight for this process and may make possible resources for its implementation both in terms of my time as well as financial start-up resources.

Fourthly, there is the expression we refer to as churchwide or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. What is said about the congregation and synod is also true for churchwide. The material that the ELCA brings to the table is both financial (Mission Grants) and resources both in terms of materials as well as human resources such as the Director for Evangelical Mission. Finally, it is the body which gathers most fully in its catholic expression. Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses we do not loose heart. It is the communion of saints, not only of the church present but also of the church triumphant which surround and support us in these efforts to fulfill our calling as the body of Christ. As such gathered at our tables are the likes of Peter and Paul, Augustine and Francis, the Luthers (Martin and Katie), Bonhoeffer as well as all of those saints who have led and inspired us over the years in our present settings.

Plan. Early in my tenure as a parish pastor I launched into a discussion with council one night about a long-range planning process. One of the council members (a university faculty member) cut me off and said, “We are always launching into long-range planning processes and over the years I have noted that by the time we get to implementing the plan it is already outdated!” I have found that to be a helpful insight especially in recent years where our world seems to be changing at warp speed. I am proposing a planning process that is simple, ongoing, flexible and focuses on short-term goals/results. I have engaged in enough building projects to know how often things change in the middle of the plan. I envision this Congregational Mission Plan to be a living document... a work continually in process. That said, let’s get started...

Step 1 Pray

Two years ago I built a 6’x8’ “cave” in my basement. There you will find my easel, paints, knives and chisels, wood, music, books, pipe and the computer I use to do my creative writing. It is the place where I go when life gets too much to bear and I need to escape. This summer there had been a serious lack of “cave” time.

I was not fully aware of how it had affected me until I was on a conference call with author, Martha Grace Reese (**Unbinding the Gospel**). When she asked how I was doing I replied, “Empty.” The word was out before I could substitute my normal reply of “Okay.” We talked about it and shared prayer. By that point my other colleagues had joined the conversation.

Despite the fact that they were all coming off great vacation experiences when we began to talk about our respective synods words like dry, desolate, depressing, discouraged, lifeless, barren and stuck crept into the conversation. Martha Grace let us go with our complaining and we soon began to sound more and more like Elijah on Horeb desiring to find a nice cave to hole up in for the duration. When we had worn down she took off the gloves, picked up a baseball bat, and drove us out of the caves we were making. Like God on Horeb she laid out an agenda and a challenge.

She called us to commit to reading the Pentecostal cult classic, *Cross and the Switchblade*. It didn't take long to discover why she called us to read the book. I realized that despite a lifetime in the church, a theological degree, an ordination to Word and Sacrament, almost 30 years in the ministry and now four years of working as a spiritual director, when it came to the reality of prayer in daily life I really wasn't terribly confident that God would answer prayer. As such I cast my prayers with the enthusiasm of the sower who went out to sow. At best I expected a one in four chance of being answered (and then probably not in the way I desired). As I read the book I took more than one hit from the cosmic 2x4 between the eyes. What did I expect from God? My answer was, "Not much."

The second part of the challenge from Martha Grace was to pray. Imagine that! The prayer was specific. It was to have three parts:

1. God, reveal to me what you want me to do this day.
2. God, enable this synod to see what you are calling them to become.
3. God, send help!

We find ourselves today as congregations in this synod often running on empty. It is easy to get discouraged and throw up our hands in despair or climb into our cynical caves.

A number of years ago I was engaged in a study process of the Adult Catechumenate. The leader asked us, "How many of you pray for the unbaptized to come into your fellowships or be revealed to you in your daily life?" There was a long of serious head hanging. He said "That is where you begin but before you do figure out what to do with them when they come because they will come." One of my colleagues and I knew better we went right home and started to pray. Within a month we each had a half a dozen inquirers of a process we had not yet gotten planned. Lesson learned – God *does* answer prayer!

As you begin this process I encourage you to enter into a time of prayer as a planning group, council and congregation. I offer this simple prayer to be shared and prayed in personal devotions and whenever the congregation gathers (meetings, dinners, Bible Study, worship).

God and gracious God, we ask for your guidance as we seek to do your will: Reveal to me/us this day what you need me to be about; enable our congregation to see more clearly what you are calling us to become; and in your abundant mercy send us help to accomplish all that you call us to be and do. We pray this through Christ, our Lord. Amen

Step 2 Dream

One of my fictional hero's is Cervantes', Don Quixote de LaManca. In the musical version of this tale Don Quixote offers a soliloquy on madness from his death bed that ends with the line, "Maddest of all is to see life as it is and not as it should be."

As inheritors of the Kingdom we are called into God's vision for this world. Our next step is to prayerfully envision what God is calling this congregation to here in this place. What are the needs of the congregation and community? What are the resources needed to begin to address these needs? Who will be needed to do this work?

It is a time to engage in a long, loving look at the setting in which God has called you. There are many ways to study your community needs but the most successful call for us to hit the streets and talk with our neighbors. Who are they? What are they hearing? What are they experiencing? Stephen Bouman calls this process "Re-rooting in the Community" (Appendix D is a copy of the process Pastor Bouman developed to begin this re-rooting). In many cases we have become rootless communities of faith as our neighborhoods change around us. We must call our neighbors into the dreaming process.

For most of my life I have been accused of being an insane optimist. I prefer to refer to myself as an Impossible Dreamer. What dreams has God been dreaming about your community? What dreams are you willing to engage in with God? Remember! God makes all things possible.

Step 3 Start Cutting (Get to Work!)

At some point if you are going to get your table built you have to stop thinking about it and start work. For centuries it has been around the table that we have formed and been formed as human communities. From intimate multi-generational family gatherings to the public banquets society has found the table a place where formation has taken place, intentionally or unintentionally. As Lutheran communities of faith it has been around the communion Table where we have been called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified and kept at the church, the body of Christ. Therefore, I believe around the table is the appropriate place for us to begin our re-formation as the missional church.

We believe, teach and confess that for us as Christians all tables are a reflection and extension of that communion Table. Whenever we eat and drink together we do so as the people gathered and sent from that common Table. As such I would like to suggest that there are two table images that might be helpful for us to understand the two-fold dynamic of mission in the name of Jesus. They are: the kitchen table and the picnic table.

Kitchen Tables

There has always been a sure sign for me in my ministry that I have been accepted, "Pastor, you can use the back door." The significance of that is not the door but rather where the door led – the kitchen. Over the years my most significant conversations with people happened not in the living room or my office but rather around their kitchen table. The kitchen table has been the place in our families for generations where the work of being family is done. It is there we dare

to talk about what is really on our minds and in our hearts. For that reason I believe that we need to sit down at our congregation's kitchen table together that we may talk about the most significant things we have to talk about as the people of God: who are we and what is God calling us to do in this place. The kitchen table is about faith formation.

While such tables abound in scripture one of my favorite kitchen table talks is found in the 13-17th chapters of John's gospel. This "Farewell Discourse" by Jesus is a final stage preparation/formation of the disciples/church to carry on the mission of Jesus following his crucifixion and resurrection. All of the things that are necessary for the church's formation: Prayer (chapter 17); Worship/Community (chapter 15); Catechesis (13:31-35); Stewardship/Discipleship of Our Lives (13:1-20); Leadership Training (14:15-31; 16:1-33). Tables were the loci of the Kingdom for Jesus.

In the same way it is around the kitchen table of our congregations that we are called to engage in the hard, hot, stressful and at times costly work of ongoing preparation: prayer, worship, catechesis, stewardship and leadership development. The kitchen table calls for passion and skill. Those who are called to oversee the work of this congregation's kitchen table will need to be people who are passionate and skilled in the areas of prayer, worship, catechesis, stewardship and leadership development. Above all else they must be good cooks, that is, they must be creative and see how they complement one another in their respective callings in such a way as the meal is enhanced in its fullness.

[One of the most successful structural changes I made in my parish ministry was the development of a committee structure not based on IBM but on the seasons of the church year. Rather than separate committees we gathered as a whole seasonally to talk about how the particular season of the church year might impact/shape how we prayed, worshiped, formed each other in faith (catechesis), lived out our call to be disciples (stewardship), and developed leaders. I am proposing that we gather around the kitchen table seasonally (Advent/Christmas/Epiphany; Lent; Easter; Pentecost; Ordinary Time (Summer/Fall)). The makeup of those gatherings at the different seasons might be different from season to season depending upon gifts and desire (there are advent people and Easter people). (See Appendix C)]

This process is intended to walk you through a look at your kitchen table board by board. As you begin to wrestle with the questions at the end of each section the shape of your table will become clearer. It will be from this table that you will then be invited to look more carefully at your table as a mission table

To be able to witness to the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus we need to know who that Jesus is. This is the work of the Kitchen Table. But ultimately it will be around the Picnic Table that we begin to gather for mission so a brief description of this table and the interplay with the Kitchen Table is warranted before we go much any further.

Picnic Table

It was not unusual when I was growing up for Sunday afternoon to roll around finding my mother packing the picnic basket and my father rounding my brother and me into the Buick station wagon. Off we went on an adventure (usually without much direction) driving until we found a suitable picnic table. In those days there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of such places throughout western New York and northwestern Pennsylvania. Rarely was there just a single table either. This normally produced the second adventure...that of meeting strangers.

My mom and dad seemed to have no trouble engaging strangers in conversation to the point that before long it appeared that we had known each other for a long time. These exchanges often entailed the exchange of food. And when the food had been consumed and the tables cleared they became places to perch and continue shared conversation.

I believe that the picnic table offers us a fitting image to gather our thoughts and efforts around when we begin as congregations to talk about mission to the world. While there is much preparation that needs to be done before heading out on a picnic (kitchen table work) we also have to leave our homes if we are to discover the picnic tables that dot our world. So too when we talk of doing mission we have a great deal of preparation (faith formation) before we ever leave home. At the same time we have to go out to the picnic tables of our neighborhoods if we are to experience the picnic that Christ is even now preparing. Picnic tables are about the formation of apostles (the “sent ones”).

The picnic table in John’s gospel is clearly to be found in chapter six with the Feeding of the 5000. With no kitchen table at hand Jesus calls Philip and the disciples to step up and feed the multitude right there where they stand. They in turn seek out the one who was prepared (the young boy and his meager fish and bread) and it is enough. The rest of chapter six is an explication of this miracle in the larger context of Moses and the exodus. The picnic table is always “out there” in the world’s wilderness where life can be messy, difficult, barren, challenging and always harboring ants and bees and rain. Yet this is where God calls us and the Holy Spirit drives us that the flesh and blood reality of the risen Jesus may be seen by the world. It is the fulfillment of our baptismal calling: to go forth and let our lights so shine that others may see our good works and come to glorify our Father in heaven.

In the midst of chapter six there is the story of Jesus walking on the water. It is easy for us engaged in this mission work in the wilderness of NWPA to be overcome by the rolling waves and the whirling winds. Like those in the boat we need to keep Jesus’ words ever before us, “It is I (*I am with you*); do not be afraid”...and like them we too shall reach the place toward which we are being called.

... to the work at hand !

Gathered Around the Table (Worship)

From the days of my childhood when I subjected my poor parents and brother to “Living Room Eucharists” served with Ritz crackers and grape juice to chairing our Synodical Committee on Worship and Music, worship has been central to living out my understanding of what it means to be a baptized Christian today. I have always been an intense critic of the worship life of the church. At times I have been branded as dinosaur while more recently questions have been raised about whether or not I have crossed over to the Dark Side. The critique continues.

As I sit here at the church’s primary table (The Christian community is first and foremost the community gathered around the table. In the Lutheran tradition it is a table set with Water, Word, Bread and Cup).

I realize that a great deal of our missional energies are drained and many of our strategies evaporate into the black hole that I refer to as “The Worship Wars.” I believe that unless we can get past this distraction and deal with the heart of our Lutheran worship all conversations around the kitchen and picnic tables will in the end be fruitless.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

In conversations with councils and evangelism committees in large congregations and the smallest of rural congregations I have found that whenever the issue of evangelism/mission surfaces sooner or later the conversation turns in one of two directions (sometimes both): 1) The “Mega Church down the road and its exciting/damned praise style of worship or 2) “We need to explore adding a contemporary worship service.” Occasionally a group will focus on orthodox Lutheran worship practices but in “evangelism settings” that’s rare.

These conversations make an assumption that evangelism/mission and contemporary worship are synonymous. A corollary assumption is that liturgical worship is anti-missional or at the very least becomes an impediment. The truth is that there is no one worship style that enables mission.

The second issue with much of the worship/mission conversation is that it really is focused on the institutional church and not on mission. True mission/outreach is not about, “How do we get people to come to our church?” (This is often the underlying premise of the contemporary worship question) but rather “How do we share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard? (This may indeed be happening in the context of your worship but it is not guaranteed).

When we start off with such assumptions and questions it is no wonder our conversations quickly become arguments that either divide or derail congregational efforts to do mission (sometimes they are the perfect scapegoat for a congregation that plays the missional lip

service game – we tried!). I believe that if we are serious about wrestling with our worship lives and our lives in mission (which is after all one life) then we would do well to focus our discussion around two words: Presence and Passion.

PRESENCE

Whether our preference is the “highest” of liturgical styles replete with the accompanying smells and bells or the “contemporary informality” of Praise Worship accompanied with guitars, drums and backup vocals as I listen to the conversations I realize that much of our worship has a misplaced object. Our worship conversations have a great deal to do with us and very little these days with God. This should be especially disturbing for us as Lutherans. Instead of worshipping God we succumb to the idolatry of worshipping our worship.

I believe the key to fighting this temptation and also to being faithful to our call as evangelists (good news speakers) is found in the mystery of the incarnation. While we trot the doctrine of the incarnation out each Christmas we rarely take it seriously. Interestingly, the only times I have ever stirred opposition to a sermon was when I pushed the “incarnation button” (once I suggested that Mary must have had a struggle with Jesus as he went through the terrible twos and the other when I suggested that Jesus had doubts and fears on the cross). We have become functional deists. We desire a God removed from our spheres of influence (except when we need God – a kind of “Don’t call me, I’ll call you” relationship). The incarnation plops the Divine right down in the muck and mire of our daily existence...that’s a little too close for most of us! (That is especially true when it comes to our worship life).

A brief missional moment. If we take seriously the incarnation of John 1 (...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us) and its attendant parallel in Genesis 1 (...let us create humanity in image) then our task of evangelism is not to bring some foreign/outside word to bear on people’s lives but to speak to the presence of God in Christ that is already there...it is in a sense about uncovering... of revealing the truth that has been hidden to this person. Conversion then is to begin to see ourselves as God sees us and has from the beginning. Evangelism then in short is an encounter of the Christ in me and the Christ that dwells already in the other. The most effective arena for this evangelism is not in worship but in our service. I believe that the model Jesus lays before us of this is best illustrated in John when Jesus hikes up his robe, rolls up his sleeves, wraps a towel around his waist and begins to wash his disciples’ feet. That he feels compelled to command his disciples/us to do this (have love for one another as I have for you) testifies to the centrality of the church’s

witness in service. It is in the encounter with our brothers and sisters outside of the church that we most intimately encounter the risen Christ (scars and all). So what of worship?

If we encounter Christ/God in the face of those we live, work and play with then why go to church? Why worship? We worship for all of those reasons we have traditionally lifted up: praise, thanksgiving, catechesis etc. I would argue, however, that the primary reason we need to come together to worship is that we come to see Jesus in a way that we cannot do for each other. In the context of worship we are encountered by the Divine presence, exposed if you would, removed from the messiness of our human bodies. God reveals himself in a piece of bread and a sip of wine, a splash of water a word spoken and yet is not confined to those physical elements. While Christ makes himself present in, with and under these forms the divine presence is not limited by those forms. Christ also is present in the one who presides, present in the one who prays, present in the one who sings, present in the one who makes music, present in the one who offers hospitality, present even in the one who disrupts and yet Christ is not limited to these forms either. The Christ who greets us in worship comes as the one we anticipate – this one comes in glory and power and dominion...this is the one of whom Handel writes when he pens his Halleluiah Chorus...”and He shall reign...” This is the awesome presence of Yahweh’s shekaina (glory) as it booms from Sinai and the “crushing silence” that grips Elijah at the mouth of the cave. This is an uncomfortable presence for it calls for our continual conversion...our continual growing into who we are called to be as the people of God. Is it any wonder we try to cover up this God with our liturgies and bands?

PASSION

This passionate God comes to us in worship and calls us into a passionate encounter. Yet in most of our worshipping bodies our response leaves something to be desired: In liturgical churches we worry about how the liturgy gets done. In Praise churches we worry about how good is the band. In between all too often it’s a matter of getting through this worship stuff in an hour.

What is it to be passionate about worship? When I first began to explore this question my high church sensibilities were sorely rocked. Try as I might I could find little passion in my beloved liturgical tradition. What I did find was anxiety about getting it right and angst when things were not as they were supposed to be. I had to admit to myself that perhaps the contemporary worship folks did have the answer. Maybe theirs was a worship of passion. Then more recently I read the summary report of a congregation with a long-standing history of Praise worship. Repeatedly, comments were made of the succession of pastors that they either possessed or did not possess the energy necessary for Praise worship. Energy is not passion.

To speak of passion in worship we need only to seek the one who comes to us passionately for answers.

It is in the Passion, the incredible and vulnerable exposure of God in Christ's crucifixion and death that provides the clues. To be passionate before this God is to allow ourselves to be vulnerable. How do we come to the Garden sans our fig leaves? The question is not, "How comfortable does our worship make us?" or "How meaningful it is?" or "How much we were entertained by the 'Jesus Show.'" No, the question becomes, "How does what we do in worship leave us exposed and vulnerable before the passionate God who has come to encounter us?"

It is here where presence and passion kiss. Our worship is a present event. The God that greets us there greets us in the present – not the past – not the future. The great mystery of our faith, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again," becomes true and real in each celebration of our Eucharistic gathering. Past and future become present.

Our liturgical and pietistic traditions are important not because they are part of the church's past (they are not holy relics). Rather they are valuable for us because over the course of church history they have shown the ability to reveal to us the passionate God who makes himself known to us in the breaking of bread. In like manner contemporary worship is not necessarily present worship if it provides no opportunity for God to get a word in edgewise.

Whatever the "style" of worship what we must focus on is how well the worship allows for us to dwell in the encounter with the passionate presence of Christ. This is a much more difficult task. It requires those who plan and lead worship to have a dwelling relationship with that same passionate presence in their daily lives. It means when gathering for worship planning it is done in the context of dwelling with this passionate presence. It means listening and dwelling in that word made flesh to shape the "style" of a particular worship experience. It means that at some times of the year or certain celebrations smells and bells is the order of the day. On other celebrations an attitude of unabashed praise may be what is called for. The key is always pointing to the passionate presence and then getting out of the way.

In the history of the church, when the worshipping community was able to do this effectively they were also effective evangelists and mission oriented. One leads to the other. Our learning to encounter the Divine in our brothers and sisters in the midst of our witness drives us to be more open in our encounters with that passionate presence that grips us as we gather in the community of the baptized. In like manner, that gathering together in the passionate presence of Christ compels us into the world in such a way that our response to the dismissal, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord" is met with an enthusiastic, "Thanks be to God."

Questions for Review

- a. What are the strengths of our present worship?*
- b. What are we not pleased with, or what is no longer working?*
- c. How does/doesn't our worship tie in with God's mission to the world?*
3 things that would make worship more integral to mission in our congregation.
- d. Are there other worship experiences that you would like to try in the next year?*
- e. What assistance from the synod do you desire as you reflect on your worship life?*

Voices Around the Table (Study)

When we gather around the table we are shaped by the voices that also gather around that table with us. It was around the kitchen table that I learned who I was. It was there I heard the stories of the family, both past and present. It was there that I discovered the behaviors that were expected of me. It was in that community of voices that I was shaped.

When we have talked about faith formation in the past we have narrowly confined it to that hour block of time on Sunday morning affectionately known as Sunday School. As such the construct of our conversation has been “educational” (the transfer of information about God, Jesus and the faith). We as Lutherans have done a particularly good job of this style of faith education. But faith formation is a larger task than the transmittal of information. For that reason I prefer to use the word “catechesis” for the work of the church in forming faith. Catechesis literally means “sounding in one’s ear”. How appropriate for voices gathered around the table. It assumes that all of the voices around the table are important and that all of those gathered around the table will be formed/transformed in their faith journey together.

One of the most powerful loci for this conversation is around the worship table. We have often underestimated the power of our liturgy, music and prayers in the catechetical process. How often we have segregated catechesis from worship (at least in our minds). The worship table is one of the most critical voices around our catechetical table. That is particularly, but not exceptionally, true of the so-called liturgical churches. We might be shocked to recognize how much of our personal theology (understanding of God, Christ and church) has been shaped by the liturgy and hymnody. Our “favorite” hymns probably say a lot about how we have constructed the faith. That is why an exclusive diet of Praise Songs becomes an issue because it provides little content for the grist mill of catechesis. The first place we should look in examining our catechetical process is our worship. What are we saying about God, Jesus, the church, our gathered community (who gets included and how?), and the world in our dress, words and actions (both formal and informal or scripted and unscripted)? This should be the first agenda item on any catechetical conversation.

Sociologists point to one of the markers of community as having a common story (meta-narrative). The common story or the Voice of voices is the story of the Judeo/Christian tradition in its fullest form, the Word of God. As Lutherans we do not narrowly define this as confined to the pages of scripture but also speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in the gathered community of Word and Sacrament. How is this story told? What are the nuances to that story in our context? Is it a story (as popular indictments accuse us) of “Thou shall not’s...” and exclusivity? Is it a story of the love of God for his people through Jesus? Is it a moral code? Is it information about

God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, personalities of the Bible, and history? Is it a story that invites discussion or cuts it off? Is it a word that transforms? How do we speak of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) in relation to the New Testament? In addition to this meta-narrative we have our Lutheran story (what is the place of the Lutheran Confessions around the table?), and our local story (Who are we here at St. John's by the Gas Station?). What is the place of these stories and their traditions in the conversation around the Table?

Recently I was invited into a congregation to, "...tell us about any of the new and innovative offerings in adult education... and, O by the way, we'd like more information on that adult catawhatchamacallit ... you know, the thing you talk about." I had 15 minutes on the agenda.

What they were looking for was a miracle... something to rejuvenate a dying program in four easy steps. As I sat down to discern where I was to go with the presentation I was struck with an interesting synthesis.

For the past 15 years I have been working with the adult catechumenate model for baptismal preparation and faith formation including a short stint with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's introduction team for Welcome to Christ. While the integrity of the process as a baptismal process is critical I believe that the process has more to say to us today. I believe that in the midst of our struggles with Sunday School, intergenerational and adult education this process is a voice we need to listen to. I believe that it can provide for us the shape for a more effective approach to catechesis in our congregations.

In my reflection became aware that each of the four movements within the process (inquiry, catechumenate, purification and mystagogy) should be present at all times within the overall catechetical ministry of our congregations. One of our problems is trying to create a program/class/offering to meet everyone's needs and in the end it may meet no more than our own personal need. At any time in our faith journey we can find ourselves needing to revisit (or visit for the first time) any one of these movements. If we can offer opportunities in each of these areas we open up the potential to reach more people where they find themselves on their journey.

I would like to walk through each of these four movements and then offer some possibilities of practices that you might introduce or adapt for your situation. There are four legs to the journey each marked by an appropriate rite. These are:

Inquiry
Catechumenate
Purification and Enlightenment
Mystagogy

The ***Period of Inquiry*** is the initial stage of the journey. It has no prescribed time limits. It is a time when those who are experiencing an awakening faith come with their questions and inquiry about the Christian faith. It is a time to build trust and to share personal stories. During this part of the journey they begin to hear the message of salvation and experience the first pangs of conversion. It is a time to introduce them into congregational life.

Through discernment the inquirer may come to recognize his or her desire to continue this journey in a more formal sense. At this time the congregation makes plans to welcome them into the process in a formal and public way through the Rite of Welcome. At this point the inquirer, now called a catechumen, enters into the ***Period of the Catechumenate***. This period may last from one to several years depending on the candidate. It is a time to deepen the initial conversion and to pass on the Christian faith and tradition. The candidates will engage in the life of the community in prayer, worship and service. The catechesis (teaching) is based on the Liturgy of the Word. The candidate will receive a sponsor at this time who will accompany them throughout the remainder of their journey.

Following the discernment of the catechist, sponsor, pastor, and the candidate, (and in our case also the church council), the candidate is invited to celebrate the Rite of Enrollment where they publicly declare their intentions to journey toward the baptismal waters. This rite is a powerful witness of the community on behalf of the candidate and a decisive step on the part of the candidate. This rite usually takes place the Festival of the Transfiguration of our Lord or the First Sunday of Lent. Lent then becomes the context for the ***Period of Purification and Enlightenment***. The elect (no longer candidates) join the congregation in a forty day retreat where the effort is to eliminate what is weak and sinful and to affirm what is holy. It is a time for recollection and the final preparation for the celebration of the initiation into the Sacraments.

The Sacrament of Baptism and the reception of First Communion is traditionally celebrated at the Easter Vigil. The great 50 days of the Easter season constitute the ***Period of Mystagogy***. During this period of the journey the newly baptized (neophytes) are invited to reflect more deeply on the Sacraments. The newly baptized also begin to discern their ministry in the community/congregation. The choosing of their vocations is celebrated on Pentecost Sunday as we gather to celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The texts for this journey are: the Bible, the hymnal (color optional), Luther's Small Catechism, and the life of the community of faith.

I believe that if we are open to the Spirit's promptings then we probably would cycle through this process (informally) several times along our baptismal journey. As such I believe that it is critical for a good catechetical program to have offerings reflected in all four of the stages (at any point in our lives we might be in one or another of these) as well as a structured process for baptismal/confirmation preparation.

Below are the elements of each of the stages as they might be reflected in a catechetical curriculum:

Inquiry Catechesis Sessions

The period of inquiry should be relaxed and informal. This is a time of testing the waters. As the group develops the sessions may be driven by the group's interests or questions. Things that might be helpful:

- Sharing of stories. How did you get to this place in your journey of faith?
- Journaling
- Church tour
- Congregational History
- Meet the congregation. Invite different people from the congregation to come in and share their faith stories.
- Review the Liturgical Year
- Sharing of photos
- Current Events
- Lutheran Trivia
- Introduction to Scripture
- Prayer

Catechumenate Catechesis Sessions

This period center on “breaking open the Word” or reflective scripture study.

- Opening Prayer
- Reading of the text
- Initial sense of the text by the group
- Life Issues Raised by the Text (catechist will need to do their homework)
- Dialog with the text (What does the text say about these issues?)
- Integration (Does the Word challenge present realities for the catechumens?)
- How does this all get lived out in the tradition of the church?
- Mission: What does the text call us to do with our lives?
- Closing Prayer

Purification/Enlightenment Catechesis Sessions

This time should be as much like a 40 Day retreat as possible. Involve the congregation and/or design a complementary Lenten process for them. You may choose to use the Gospel readings for Cycle A as an outline and focus on Temptation, Spirit, water, Light and New Life. Focus on prayer. Explore the variety of prayers and praying (e.g. Contemplative prayer, prayer books, etc.). Keep in minds that the focus especially in this time is not the head but the heart.

Mystagogy Catechesis Sessions

The focus on this time is unpacking of the Baptismal and Eucharistic Rites that they have experienced at the Vigil. One parish I know used a weekend post-Easter retreat to provide

the setting for this. Be creative. Time also should be spent on assisting the newly baptized in their selection of vocations.

An Inquiry-type event/offering might look like an informal group gathered to talk about the faith/church. It might be intergenerational (it always helps to keep the kids involved lest the adults begin to take themselves too seriously). Catechumenate-type session might easily replace the time-worn Bible study or Sunday School class curriculum. A Purification/Enlightenment Session might be a Lenten retreat or a series on prayer/spirituality. A Mystagogy-style offering might be a series of events focused on worship and the sacraments. The possibilities are limited only by one's imagination.

Having briefly looked at the traditional shape of the catechumenate model I would like to suggest that an effective use of this model is to adapt it as an ongoing faith formation process within the life of the congregation. I would argue that a healthy formation process within a congregation would have elements of each of these four movements operating at all times. Below I offer some suggestions as to what this might look like in each of the movements.

Inquiry

In many of our congregations what passes for the period of inquiry is called either "Pastor's Class" or "New Members' Class." While these can be effective tools I am finding that fewer and fewer people are wandering into the church for worship and hence inquiry within the confines of the church building is becoming less and less viable.

I believe we begin by gathering a handful or so of our friends, workers, family (anyone we truly care about) around a table. (I am speaking not first and foremost of the marble altars that adorn our churches but rather the ordinary tables that call us together. It may be a booth at McDonalds, or a counter at the coffee shop. They are the kitchen tables in our homes and apartments. A cafeteria table at school or work also serves the purpose well. The coffee table in the living room or the TV trays that open and fold so conveniently work well to bring us together. A park bench or a picnic table also serves to gather the hungry. Within the congregation it might be the lounge or a Sunday School table. Wherever two or three gather... it is here that we begin the work of the gospel). Before we go any further it would serve us well to remember that the work around the table is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit. While the table very well be the arena for conversion it is not our task to make it happen. Our task is to set the table...the Spirit will serve up the Meal.

Our task is to foster a caring community around the table. True community work takes time. It requires getting to know one another, sharing hopes and dreams, fears and tears, in short it is trust building. In a society of rampant individualism (and yet a profound hunger for relationship) I believe the church not only has a mandate but is empowered to convene these fledgling communities around the table. While these tables are living communities it should not be expected that they will grow significantly in

numbers. Trust, safety and security are paramount and this will require a consistent gathering. Remember we are not starting new churches at these tables but rather being the authentic church in the world. Over time these groups may come to pray together and seek to care for each other's needs as well as responding to the needs of a larger community (church, community, world) but this cannot be programmed.

These offerings are an opportunity to explore the stirrings of the Holy Spirit that those gathered may be experiencing. It is a time of trust building, story sharing, questioning and an introduction into congregational life. Some gathered may desire to go deeper into their relationship with God that could lead them into a more intentional engagement with a larger faith community or expression of the church.

When this occurs outside of the church setting the first movement often is not to the worshipping community. Christian worship is the primary arena for conversion and those who are growing into the faith recognize this intuitively and may be overwhelmed or intimidated by the experience of worship. It may be a more pastoral invitation to encourage them to enter the life of the congregation through such things as a men's or woman's fellowship group, a spirituality group/discussion, a Bible Study, a work projector mission trip or a group that is formed around an inquiry model within the church. This allows them to ease into the community and to begin establishing a support group within the community. These larger relationships will be critical as they move through the faith formation process.

Another opportunity for those already in the worshipping fellowship might be an annual or monthly "festival celebration" around the elements of "inquiry."

- Sharing of stories. How did you get to this place in your journey of faith?
- Journaling
- Church tour
- Congregational History
- Sharing of photos
- Current Events
- Lutheran Trivia
- Introduction to Scripture
- Prayer

Catechumentate

The movement of catechumentate most resembles those activities associated with Christian Education. Classes on special topics, Bible studies, Sunday School, Book Clubs etc. can be the meat and potatoes of the catechumentate.

Several helpful resources that may raise the connection of the catechumentate with the life of faith/congregation are:

- **Book of Faith Initiative:** I have found the piece "Open Scripture: Four Ways to Approach the Bible" especially helpful. The questions around devotional reading, historical reading, Literary

reading and Lutheran theological reading can be used to provide a variety of entry points into the use of scripture in faith formation.

- **Wrestling with Jakob** is a resource that Pastor Deborah Jacobson and I developed to provide an introduction/overview to scripture with the focus on faith formation in an intergenerational or adult forum.
- A third resource I have developed in conjunction with **Wrestling with Jacob** and **Front Porchin'** (a grassroots look at faith sharing) is a simple list of 52 Bible passages/stories that I feel provide the vocabulary/syntax for all our theological conversations. These have been used by adult classes as a year-long curriculum of faith sharing.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church's Mission in Appalachia (ELCMA) has created resources designed especially for small membership congregations where critical mass makes traditional curriculum difficult (www.elcma.org).

Purification

When engaging in Natural Church Development most Lutheran congregations find that their growth area of greatest need is passionate spirituality. Lutherans (and we are not alone these days) are by nature "head" Christians. One of the strengths of our heritage is serious study of scripture and faith. I used to claim that we as Lutherans had overdeveloped heads. I want to repent of that. It is not that they are overdeveloped it is that our hearts of faith have not been nurtured.

To cultivate a deep and lasting relationship with Jesus we need to be balanced Christians... Christians of both head and heart (many popular Christian movements these days have the opposite problem all heart and no head).

I did not fully understand this movement from head to heart until I enrolled in a four year program to become a spiritual director. In that time I have learned and practiced the art of action/reflection. The core question in this process is: Where do I see God in my life today? I have found that reflection on this question in an intentional and regular way has brought God's Story and My Story more into relationship with one another and as such God has become more the subject of My Story than myself. As that has happened it is far easier for me to share God's Story because it is no longer distinct from mine. It also happened in a more natural and less programmed way.

This reflection can take place both in an individual as well as a group setting. I have found value in having both opportunities. Individually, it can be a general reflection on the day's events around the question of where was God present in the midst of your day. It can also include a reflection on a scripture reading where the question is modified to: What is God saying to me in this passage in my life today?

A group process that I have used is this:

- Preparation: Take a piece of paper and write the first names of each member of the group (include your own).
- Someone offers a brief prayer.
- Ten minutes of silent reflection on the past 24 hours: Where was God present in my life?
- Then in turn each member of the group shares one specific experience (keep it short and to the point!). If a person is struggling with finding one they may simply say “Pass” and move on to the next person.
- As the person is sharing the rest of the group is listening to them and to God. When the person is finished take time to write what you heard...it may be an image, a Bible passage, a hymn/song, a line from a poem, a movie...next to their name. When all have finished writing move to the next person. (Do not share what is written at this time).
- When all have shared begin with the first person who shared and go around the group and share what was written (no commentary or judgments about what was said and no conversation between group members). The person receiving these gifts writes them down next to their name to be taken to prayer and reflection). Again, the “Pass” rule also applies here...if you heard nothing as you listened simply say, “Pass”.
- When all have shared. Someone close with a brief prayer.

A concrete example from a recent session I was involved in might be helpful in fleshing out this process: I shared that I was feeling like I was in transition but I didn’t know what God had in mind for me. One response was, “Jake, I heard in what you said the image of a threshold...stay a while in the threshold” Another offered the image of the Sun Gate from her recent trip to Machu Picchu in Peru. Another offered, “Jake, I heard the word from the psalm, “For God alone my soul in silence waits.”

A second, more structured resource in Martha Grace Reese’s series *Unbinding the Gospel*. The 40-day prayer experience that she offers has been helpful for many congregations to engage in when trying to focus on the spiritual aspects of the individual and gathered community.

Mystagogy

Mystagogy is literally, the breaking open of the mysteries of faith. In the catechumenal process it is the reflection on the Sacraments which the catechumen has recently received: Baptism and Eucharist/Communion.

In a broader congregational setting a mystagogical approach might be a series on the sacraments and/or worship. The family of resources that has been developed as part of the Evangelical Lutheran Worship are helpful aids.

A second focus might to offer opportunities to explore your faith through the arts. I have had the privilege of having a professor of art history at my disposal who can highlight religious themes

throughout the development of art. One can also offer opportunities to learn/develop one's own artistic abilities in visual media, music, drama, and dance.

The important theme in mystagogy is that you cannot explain a mystery... you can only enter into one.

I believe this synthesis of approaches to our faith formation process in the congregation will open up some new and creative opportunities. By providing offerings from all four stages of faith development we offer ongoing opportunities for entry not only by members of the congregation but also those seeking to deepen their relationship with God. Our faith journey is rarely linear but rather cyclical. Each time we move through it we are drawn as individuals and congregations deeper into the mystery that is God.

Questions for Review

- a. What are the strengths of our present catechetical process?*
- b. What are we not pleased with, or what is no longer working?*
- c. How does/doesn't our catechesis/study tie in with God's mission to the world?*
 - i. 3 things that would make catechesis more integral to mission in your congregation.*
- d. Are there other catechetical experiences that you would like to try in the next year?*
- e. What assistance from the synod do you desire as you reflect on your catechetical life?*

Listening Around the Table (Spiritual Formation/Encourage)

Four decades ago the Lutheran Church in America produced what in concept was one of the finest programs for evangelism in our church entitled, **Word and Witness**. Conceptually it reintroduced us to the story of God's Word in a way that could be used in the sharing of that story (evangelism). It focused on the interplay of three stories: My Story, God's Story, Your Story. The concept was good the methodology flawed. True to our heritage what happened in most congregations were excellent Bible Studies and lip service paid to the witness piece. I believe where the process broke down was that it allowed for the process to remain a head trip and failed to move the interplay to a matter of the heart. Evangelism/faith sharing is always a matter of the heart...an invitation to enter into relationship.

Critical in this movement from head to heart are the transitions especially between My Story and God's Story. I did not fully understand this movement until I enrolled in a four year program to become a spiritual director. In that time I have learned and practiced the art of action/reflection. The core question in this process is: Where do I see God in my life today? I have found that reflection on this question in an intentional and regular way has brought God's Story and My Story more into relationship with one another and as such God has become more the subject of My Story than myself. As that has happened it is far easier for me to share God's Story because it is no longer distinct from mine. It also happened in a more natural and less programmed way.

This reflection can take place both in an individual as well as a group setting. I have found value in having both opportunities. Individually, it can be a general reflection on the day's events around the question of where was God present in the midst of your day. It can also include a reflection on a scripture reading where the question is modified to: What is God saying to me in this passage in my life today?

A group process (and this could be used around those inquiry tables once trust is built) that I have used is this:

- Preparation: Take a piece of paper and write the first names of each member of the group (include your own).
- Someone offers a brief prayer.
- Ten minutes of silent reflection on the past 24 hours: Where was God present in my life?
- Then in turn each member of the group shares one specific experience (keep it short and to the point!). If a person is struggling with finding one they may simply say "Pass" and move on to the next person.

- As the person is sharing the rest of the group is listening to them and to God. When the person is finished take time to write what you heard...it may be an image, a Bible passage, a hymn/song, a line from a poem, a movie...next to their name. When all have finished writing move to the next person. (Do not share what is written at this time).
- When all have shared begin with the first person who shared and go around the group and share what was written (no commentary or judgments about what was said and no conversation between group members). The person receiving these gifts writes them down next to their name to be taken to prayer and reflection). Again, the “Pass” rule also applies here...if you heard nothing as you listened simply say, “Pass”.
- When all have shared. Someone close with a brief prayer.

A concrete example from a recent session I was involved in might be helpful in fleshing out this process: I shared that I was feeling like I was in transition but I didn't know what God had in mind for me. One response was, “Jake, I heard in what you said the image of a threshold...stay a while in the threshold” Another offered the image of the Sun Gate from her recent trip to Machu Picchu in Peru. Another offered, “Jake, I heard the word from the psalm, “For God alone my soul in silence waits.”

While this spiritual formation piece can be programmed into the catechetical/study life of our congregations it needs to be more pervasive in the overall life and vision if we are to be bold in our mission. That said, I believe that as we become more comfortable with talking about our faith experiences with one another the Kitchen Table of our congregations we will find setting the Picnic Tables in our neighborhoods less of a daunting task.

Questions for Review:

- a. *What are the strengths of our present spiritual formation?*
- b. *What are we not pleased with, or what is no longer working?*
- c. *How does/doesn't our spiritual formation p tie in with God's mission to the world?*
- ii. *3 things that would make spiritual formation more integral to mission in your congregation.*
- d. *Are there other spiritual formation experiences that you would like to try in the next year?*
- e. *What assistance from the synod do you desire as you reflect on your spiritual formation?*

The Big Table (Mission Interpretation/Give)

One of the touchiest if not downright controversial discussions around our Kitchen Table these days is that of Mission Support. The question is: How do we see ourselves in the context of the ministry of the wider church? This can take the context of local ecumenical efforts, synodical, church-wide, or national/international ecumenical mission efforts. The answer to this question is critical in how we see ourselves and how we present ourselves to others around the mission of the church. I have intentionally chosen to talk about mission interpretation/support before mission because I believe how we answer that question impact how we do mission and how we see our mission in the world. This conversation constitutes yet another layer of that story that shapes us. We are not isolated congregations but as we believe, teach and confess part of the one, holy catholic and apostolic church. Does our behavior support our confession or contradict it?

How do we talk about our relationship with the church catholic around our tables these days? In the midst of growing economic stress and church politics we have not done well with this question. One of the hardest realities of my new position both and its synodical as well as its national expression it that I have had to come to grips with the fact that the church is larger than the ecclesiastical ghetto of Grace Lutheran Church in Clarion, Pennsylvania. There are things about that insight that give me cause for celebration and at other times tears but both testify to the truth of that reality. I can no longer pretend that the whole church is like “my” church (I may still wish that to be true but it isn’t). As mission interpreters for the whole church we must accept that for some that realization of a church other than “my” church concept is threatening to their self-understanding as a participant around the Kitchen Table. A wider-vision of the church will call our view of church into question. I believe that many of us have failed to grasp the impact that has on many who gather with us.

Before we can begin the mission interpretation/support discussion we must first have the vision of the church discussion. How do we see “church”? How do we see ourselves as part of that church? What are our responsibilities to that church? What are that church’s responsibilities to us? How big is my vision of the church? (It is absurd to try and talk about church-wide mission when one cannot even grasp a sense of being connected with the mission of the synod). Once we have begun to identify how big our church is individually and collectively we can begin to talk about the support of that church’s mission.

Assuming for a moment that we are by nature parochial let us begin locally. The first step in the conversation might be to begin to invite the congregation to think of mission support as something beyond keeping the doors of the church open (which is demanding more and more of our membership each year). I would encourage beginning with one project to support in the community. We have designated one local agency (in our case a domestic violence agency) to

be our community outreach which we support with personnel, monetary contributions, building space and in-kind donations. A local food bank, a community shelter, feeding program for the hungry might also be local options to expand the conversation of mission.

A second step would then to begin to look at ministry beyond the local congregation to synodical mission. How are the contributions to mission support used to do mission in our synod (or respective judicatory)? How is it being used to support the camps and social agencies of the church on the territory? How is it used to promote evangelism, youth ministry, campus ministry, and congregational support? One of the examples of this has been a tie between our Sunday School and the synod's ministry to our companion synod in Tanzania. They are using a curriculum that is focusing on issues of hunger and poverty and then tying that in with supporting the Girl's School in Tanzania as well as World Hunger and Heifer International.

As often happens, synodical mission leads to a widening vision into church-wide and international mission. I have found one of the most important pieces in making this transition is to identify the mission of the wider church with a face. My apologies to all those who work so hard in church-wide offices to provide beautiful interpretation pieces (many of which attempt to identify mission with individual stories) but if you can put a local face on a church-wide mission who knows how far that might take a congregation. Following Hurricane Katrina two of our members spent three months outside New Orleans working in a Lutheran Disaster Relief sponsored shelter and recovery facility. Last year they made a presentation to the congregation on their experiences. In a moment of divine inspiration I grabbed a LDR offering envelope and said, "This is the kind of ministry that your dollars given to LDR go to support." When the earthquake in Haiti all I did was to point out where the envelopes could be found and the response was overwhelming. A similar connection with World Hunger occurred following our sponsorship of a domestic World Hunger grant for the local women's shelter.

Questions for Review:

- a. *What are the strengths of our present Mission Support?*
- b. *What are we not pleased with, or what is no longer working?*
- c. *How does/doesn't our Mission Support tie in with God's mission to the world?*
 - i. *3 things that would make Mission Support more integral to mission in your congregation.*
- d. *Are there other Mission Support experiences that you would like to try in the next year?*
- e. *What assistance from the synod do you desire as you reflect on your Mission Support?*
- f. *What is our percentage of Operating Expenses that will be used for Mission Support?*

Sent From the Table (Mission/Invite)

As we are gathered at the table so we are sent from it also to go in peace and to serve the Lord. Ultimately our Kitchen Table conversations propel us out into the world to do the work of the kingdom. To be faithful we cannot stay we must go and tell. Jesus sends us out into the world to announce that the kingdom of God has come near, turn around and see it coming among you. It is made visible in our mission. The great heresy of the consumer-driven church is its inward focus...what do I get out of church? The kingdom church, or the church of the Picnic Table, asks how might I now embody this Jesus/kingdom in the world in my daily life?

St. Francis reminds us that sometimes these efforts might even require us to use words. Whenever we engage in a Habitat project or serve a meal for the hungry we proclaim the presence of Christ in the world. In our giving and in our acts of kindness to the neighbor we set the table.

Mission in the world is about faithfully tending the conversations around the Kitchen Table of our congregations as well as consistently and persistently looking for opportunities to set the Picnic Tables in our community.

The picnic tables of the 21st Century are the tables of the coffee shops in our communities, the counter at the local dinner, the bleachers at the stadium, the park benches, the checkout line at WalMart, the gathering of parents waiting to pick up their school children, the cafeteria at work, the classroom, the service counter, the break room, and the list goes on... The question is not, "How do we witness in these venues?" (For we witness regardless of our efforts or lack thereof). The question, and the challenge before us is, "How do we witness to the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in these places in a way that is faithful to his life in, with and under us?"

Those called to the picnic table of our congregations will need first and foremost passion for the crucified and risen Jesus and secondly passion for their brothers and sisters who may not recognize this presence in their lives (love of Christ/love of neighbor). The other common gift is an appreciation for the work of the Holy Spirit in this process. Like Jesus we are driven by that Spirit into the wilderness of this world where our sense of self and church will be challenged but never are we alone/orphaned. The Spirit is in, with and under all that we do. Without that understanding we would become discouraged. The other gifts needed around the picnic table are discernment (picking the right spot for the picnic); an understanding of how communities work; a heart for service; enthusiasm; an understanding of how to effect change; the ability to dream dreams and the willingness to see visions. (*Front Porchin'* was designed to assist in fostering this passion and providing an arena to talk about the intersection of faith and community).

The initial work of this table may be define your "parish" the lace to which God has called this congregation. The article "*Parish As Place*" in Appendix A may be a helpful tool for entering into this discussion. Once you have defined your "parish" the next step is to begin an intentional

study/listening to the people of that parish (not just the members of the congregation). Pastor Stephen Bouman's *"Re-rooting in the Community"* is an extensive but helpful way to do this (see Appendix D). However, it can be done as simply as intentional interviews with key leaders and neighbors around three basic questions:

1. From your perspective, what are the major issues facing this community?
2. How could the church be helpful in addressing these issues?
3. What do you think the overall impression of this congregation is in the community?
What are we known for/as?

Interviews should include people like: the mayor, borough/city council members, commissioners, supervisors, teachers, law enforcement, business owners as well as members of the parish area. This information is vital as you move forward in creating your mission plan.

Following a conversation on Kitchen and Picnic Tables one local pastor took the concept to her congregation and they developed it quite literally. Once a month this summer they have literally sent a picnic table in the community park adjacent to the church and invited the neighborhood to join them. The pastor remarked that the following week after their first effort when she left the church those playing in the park stopped and waved to her (that had never happened before). As the summer has gone on some have shown up for worship leading to a whole new kind of conversation for this congregation around the Kitchen Table (What does the mean? What do we do now? – a great problem to wrestle with!). Who knows what will happen next... but set the tables and the Spirit starts to blow...on that I am convinced.

Questions for Review:

- a. *What is our "parish"?*
- b. *What are the strengths of our present mission to the parish?*
- c. *What are we not pleased with, or what is no longer working?*
- d. *3 things that would make mission to the parish more integral to mission in your congregation.*
- e. *Are there other mission to the parish experiences that you would like to try in the next year?*

Step 4 Finishes

As you begin to gather direction from these Kitchen Table conversations it is helpful to begin to organize this material in a way that is useful for planning. The first step would be to collate the answers to the various questions from each section.

A second step is to assess the material and proposals coming out of each of those areas of ministry. I have found that a process called SWOT Analysis can be helpful. An intentional look at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can be eye-opening. An example of this schematic is found in Appendix B.

A third step is the formulation of goals. How do you know what kind of goals to set? The whole point of setting goals, after all, is to *achieve* them. It does you no good to go to the trouble of calling meetings, hacking through the needs of your congregation, and burning up precious time, only to end up with goals that aren't acted on or completed.

The best goals are *smart* goals —. SMART is a handy acronym for the five characteristics of well-designed goals.

- **Specific:** Goals must be clear and unambiguous; vagaries and platitudes have no place in goal setting. When goals are specific, they tell us exactly what is expected, when, and how much. Because the goals are specific, you can easily measure your progress toward their completion.
- **Measurable:** What good is a goal that you can't measure? If your goals are not measurable, you never know whether you are making progress toward your successful completion. Not only that, but it's tough for you to stay motivated to complete your goals when you have no milestones to indicate their progress.
- **Attainable:** Goals must be realistic and attainable. The best goals require you to stretch a bit to achieve them, but they aren't extreme. That is, the goals are neither out of reach nor below standard performance. Goals that are set too high or too low become meaningless, and you naturally come to ignore them.
- **Relevant:** Goals must be an important tool in the grand scheme of reaching your company's vision and mission.
- **Time-bound:** Goals must have starting points, ending points, and fixed durations. Commitment to deadlines help to focus your efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. Goals without deadlines or schedules for completion tend to be overtaken by the day-to-day crises that invariably arise in a congregation.

Finally, we are ready to compile a *Congregational Mission Plan*. There are four questions around which to center your discussions.

First, **Will this congregation continue to engage in God's mission in 2012?** That seems like an obvious no-brainer question but as I travel around I find the answer as lived out in our various congregational contexts is not so obvious. Does your congregation exist to survive or is it actively engaged in God's mission to embody the good news of Jesus Christ in all that we do, say and are? Take time to critically look at your life together both around your kitchen and picnic tables. If your answer is "no" to this question then move to Part II and the application to be considered for Chapel status.

Second, **What is the specific/unique mission of this congregation in this community?** What difference does the existence of this congregation make within the life of the parish? If you

Third suddenly no longer existed what would be missing or left undone?, **How will this congregation enact this mission? Please list specific goals.** This is where you look back on your SMART goals. I would suggest choosing between one and three goals for a one year period. Too many goals and you become overwhelmed. Be critical in your choices. Which goals will have the greatest impact in God's mission in your parish?

Fourth, **What resources (financial, pastoral, time) will be needed? What resources are available? What assistance is needed from the synod, Director for Evangelical mission or ELCA?** As you look at your SWOT Analysis what are the costs (obvious and hidden) as you look at working on these goals? What resources do you have at your disposal and what partnership will be necessary? As we discussed above, God's mission is bigger than just the work of the congregation. In what way can I, the synod office, other congregations (do not forget the gift of prayer) or the ELCA assist you in achieving these goals?

Finally, please submit your completed **Mission Plan** along with the signed **Evangelizing Congregations Mission Covenant** (included with the Mission Plan) to me: Pastor Harold Jacobson, DEM, PO Box 43, Pleasantville, PA 16341-0043 no later than **May 31, 2012**.

Part 2 Request for Chapel Status

(fill out only if the answer was “no” to God’s mission)

It is assumed that if you are not engaged in God’s mission in your parish that you desire to maintain your present status. To assist in that desire the NWPA Synod makes available the Chapel Program. The Chapel Program will seek to maintain the *status quo* by providing as little intervention as possible.

Chapel status makes available a continuum of services to assist the congregation to live out their last days. Pastoral care will be made available on a contract basis. Assistance with legal, emotional, and historical ‘story-ing’ will also be available if desired.

Chapel status must be approved by the Mission Table/Cluster and Synod Council.

Chapel Status Application

Congregation Name _____

Address _____

Contact Person _____

Reason for applying:

Mission Table/Cluster Approval _____ (date)

Synod Council Approval _____ (date)

Evangelizing Congregations Mission Covenant

Between
(Name of Congregation, City, State)
and the
Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18–20)

A VISION OF PARTNERSHIP

Shaped by the presence of the Risen Lord through communal and individual faith practices of the disciple, CONGREGATION NAME, CITY, STATE and the **Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod** will partner interdependently with other agencies, institutions and organizations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to preach the Word, administer the sacraments and carry out God’s mission. The interdependent partners of the ELCA accompany new and renewed evangelizing congregations as centers for evangelical mission, inspiring missional leaders, re-rooting in their communities at the grassroots and joined together as partners in mission support. The congregations, synods and churchwide organization of the ELCA with other interdependent ministry partners will engage mission for the formation of evangelizing congregations that make disciples for Jesus Christ who use their gifts for God’s reign in the church and in the world. Grounded with the leadership of the *missionary bishop*, all congregations are called to evangelical mission for the vision: *Every person is a missionary, every pastor is a mission director, and every congregation is a mission station for the sake of the world.*

PURPOSE

In faithful participation in the mission of God in and through this church, its congregations, synods and the churchwide organization—as interdependent expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—are guided by the biblical and confessional commitments of this church (ELCA Constitution, 8.16). The purpose of this Covenant is to foster *interdependent partnership* of all ELCA expressions for *congregations as centers for evangelical mission* to be shaped by both local needs and global awareness, by both individual witness and corporate endeavor and by both distinctly Lutheran emphases and growing ecumenical cooperation, consistent with the following commitments:

+**Constitution for Congregations** (4.01): The Church is a people of God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming and sanctifying activity in the world.

+**Synod Constitution** (6.03e): Each synod, in partnership with the churchwide organization, shall bear primary responsibility for the oversight of the life and mission of this church in its territory. In fulfillment of this role, the synod shall: Plan for the mission of this church in the synod, initiating and developing...new ministries, redevelopment of existing ministries...leadership and encouragement of congregations in their evangelism efforts...encouragement of financial support for the work of this church by individuals and congregations...provision for resources for congregational life...and assistance to the members of its congregations in carrying out their ministries in the world.

+**Strategic Directions for the ELCA Churchwide Organization**: *Claimed, gathered and sent by God’s grace for the sake of the world, the ELCA will...* support congregations; grow in evangelical outreach; step forward as a public church; deepen and extend global, ecumenical and interfaith relationships; and bring forth and support faithful, wise and courageous leaders.

+**Churchwide Priorities**: Working collaboratively with congregations, synods, agencies and institutions and other partners, the churchwide organization will give priority to: *accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission; and build capacity for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.*

COVENANT EXPRESSIONS

The congregation is engaged in God's mission through this church in its community and the world through the discernment, development and implementation of *missional plans* as an evangelizing congregation that makes disciples for Jesus Christ who use their gifts for God's reign in the church and in the world. To participate in God's mission, this

congregation as a *center for evangelical mission*, shall implement missional plans (consistent with the Statement of Purpose of ELCA congregations in chapter 4, Model Constitution for Congregations), including to:

+*Carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier of all.*

+*Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.*

+*Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling and to use these gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.*

The synod is engaged in God's mission through this church for missional ministry in this synod through the discernment, development and implementation of synodical missional plans focused on intentional engagement for *new evangelizing congregations, renewed evangelizing congregations, mission support and stewardship education and missional strategies*

(e.g. attentiveness to ethnic and multi-cultural strategies; ELCA Evangelism Strategy; missional leadership).

To fulfill these purposes "the congregation shall...motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation's ministry and the ministry of other parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America....Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod and the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." (Chapter 4, Model Constitution for Congregations) The congregation and the synod will be "walking partners" with one another and pray for each other regularly. The congregation and the synod will continue to embrace and practice transparency and mutual accountability in our ongoing relationship as partners. The congregation and the synod will be alert to the needs of each other as we communicate regularly. There will be periodic review of the missional plans of the congregation and the synod as an expression of our relationship.

Initiated in consultation, (date) :

NAME: CONGREGATION NAME: **Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod**

City, State

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Signature _____ Signature _____

President of the Congregation Vice President

Signature _____ Signature _____

Pastor Bishop

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

Step 5 Testing (Evaluation)

Since this process is initiated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Assembly (2011 – LIFT Process) it is a process that will call for some accountability. What we do as individual congregations ultimately is done as members of the whole body of Christ. Congregational Mission Plans will be reviewed annually by the congregation, the Mission Cluster and the Synod Council. These Mission plans will be used as the basis for critical decisions regarding future funding and staffing of congregations by the church.

You are encouraged to review your progress with your goals at 6 and 12 months and report the result of the review to the Mission Table/Cluster. Your experiences will be included as part of the Mission Table/Cluster's report to the Synod Assembly.

Thank you for your faithful service and please contact me if you have any questions or needs with the process.

Final Thoughts

One of the decisive moments in my ministry and one that has ultimately led me to this place in my life came some 25 years ago. It involved a student at the university, Chris, and his roommate. Chris took great pains to introduce me to his roommate every time we met on campus or in town. I knew that one day Chris would bring his roommate to church with him. Four years passed...nothing. Finally on the weekend before graduation the two of them were there. I simply laughed to myself... a final goodbye.

The next week they were there again. Chris was in no hurry to move and the roommate was continuing with graduate studies. The following week the roommate was there alone...and again the following week. The third week he was waiting at the door for me following worship. "Pastor, I want to join the church." I gave him my card and told me to call the following week and set up a time to talk about it. He never called. The next week he was waiting at the door again. "Pastor, there is something you need to know before we go any further...I'm not baptized." I assured him that that would not be a problem and I gave him my card and told me to call the following week and set up a time to talk about it. He never called.

The following week he was not in church (What had I done wrong?) nor was he there for the next two months. Then one Sunday morning I found him waiting for me at the door after church.

 "Pastor, I bet you wondered what happened to me?"

 "The thought had crossed my mind."

“Well, I decided if I was going to become a Christian I wanted to be sure what kind of a Christian I would become. I have been to every kind of church I could find...I want to become a Lutheran Christian.”

“Fine, be in my office at 11:00 a.m. tomorrow.”

He was.

We began, as I always did, talking about the process of baptism and the role of scripture in the life and faith of the baptized. The more I talked the more agitated he became. Finally, he could contain himself no more, “Pastor, you keep talking about this Jesus...who is Jesus?” Four years of seminary had not begun to prepare me to answer the question. Oh, I could give him Jesus 101 but he was looking for more. Like the Greeks who come to Philip he wished to see Jesus.

As I journeyed with him over the course of the next few weeks toward the waters of baptism I found myself being transformed. His hunger was insatiable. Our conversations stretched this shy Lutheran to his limits. He did not want to learn about Jesus he wanted to encounter the Jesus I had come to know and love. While I tried my best, and he was very appreciative, I knew that I was woefully inadequate.

That experience drove me to rediscover the adult catechumenal process of preparing adults for baptism but it also left me realizing how easy it was for me to take for granted the great gift I have in Jesus and how we are depriving so many by not sharing the gift. I short doing evangelism, sharing the good news of Jesus, being missional is not for the sake of the church but for the sake of the world.

We have been given the pearl of great price and we sit on it like an egg. No matter how long we sit on it, no matter how long we talk about, no matter how much we conjecture what we should do with it it will not hatch. The worth of the experience of Jesus the Christ is revealed only when we share it with others. The question for us today is... What are we waiting for?

Appendix A *Parish as Place*

Parish as Place:

Principles of Parish Ministry

Harvey S. Peters, Jr
 Division for Mission in North America
 July 28, 1986

Biblical and Historical Background

The church's ministry is rooted in God's Word. The church's ministry is informed and shaped by circumstances in God's world. Ministry is the activity of God's people, the church, participating in God's mission in and for the world.

This paragraph is a concise summary of truths proclaimed through the testimony of our foreparents. It describes the purposes of God as the one who creates all that is and buys it back. The world and all who dwell therein are the object of God's mission.

God, the very one who existed before all else, in Jesus, entered the inhabited earth, lived in it as a sojourner, and so fully identified with the circumstances of humanity as to become a human. In that way God took on the enemies of the good creation – sin, death and evil in all of their expressions – and succumbed to their power in order to break their hold on all those who inhabit that place. In doing so, Jesus the Christ became the first-born of a new creation- a new citizen of a new realm. The church, the community of the baptized who have been called, gathered and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to be the embodiment of this ministry of Christ in each time and every place as a sign of the new creation.

It is not possible to speak of the church's ministry apart from its purpose for and relationship to a specific place any more than it would be possible to speak of Jesus' ministry without speaking of Jerusalem. The church *in* each place is the church *for* that place. Just as God chose Israel to be a blessing for all nations and just as God appeared in human form for the good of the world, so the church exists not for itself but for every hamlet, town, neighborhood, barrio, hollow, country, city and person.

Currently within the Lutheran Church in the United States and the Caribbean there is a growing need to rediscover the relationship between the ministry of each congregation and the place in which it is located.

While that relationship may be described demographically, sociologically or historically, this is basically a theological concern. What is the object of each congregation's ministry if it is to be a faithful incarnation of the ministry of Jesus? How can the church be helped to rediscover what it means to be responsible for bearing Christ's ministry to its place?

Perhaps such a rediscovery can begin with understanding the difference between the words “congregation” and “parish.” These words are often used interchangeably, thereby revealing the confusion that exists regarding for whom God’s mission is intended.

The Bible has a word for this understanding of the creation as the object of God’s salvation and justice. In Greek it is *oikoumene*. This translates “the whole inhabited earth, the world.” In the Greek translation of the psalm we read, “The Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the *oikoumene* and they that dwell therein.”

In the New Testament we read in Luke’s gospel of Jesus being tempted when “the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the *oikoumene*. In Matthew’s gospel, the words of Jesus to his disciples about the last days speak of “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole *oikoumene*, as a testimony to all nations: and then the end will come.”

Originally, the meaning was “the inhabited creation.” Over the centuries this understanding has changed to the point that the word “ecumenical” has come to refer to relationships within the church. There are historical reasons for this, especially as the church to on the “indelible impress of the political framework” of the Roman Empire. During the ensuing centuries the distinctive nature of the *ekklesia* (church) and the *oikoumene* (inhabited creation) became fused and confused.

The word parish has had an equally interesting evolution. It derives from two Greek words, *para oike*, , meaning “dwelling near, neighboring.” It is the stance that a congregation takes in a particular place (parish) when it seeks to incarnate the ministry of Jesus. In the New Testament a “parochial” person is one who lives in a place without the right of citizenship – a sojourner like Jesus. Using the words of Paul, one who is “in but not of” the world. It will serve the church well if the meaning of parish as the “inhabited place” in which a congregation is called to incarnate the ministry of Jesus can be rediscovered.

A congregation is the expression of the church (*ekklesia*). A parish is an expression of the inhabited creation (*oikoumene*). A congregation exists for its parish just as the church exists for the world. A congregation that does not make this distinction clearly runs the risk of seeing its existence as an end in itself – with members spending most, if not all, of their energies to serve one another exclusively rather than ministering to the people in their parish.

Over the past two decades a concerted effort by the Lutheran church to recapture the understanding of parish as place has resulted in significant renewal of ministry. What follows are fundamental principles of parish ministry that have been rediscovered by experience. They can be applied by any congregation that desires to have its ministry rooted or re-rooted in its parish.

Principles of Parish Ministry

1. Parish ministry demonstrated the fullness of God’s mission

- The ministry of the congregation is centered in the means of grace given exclusively to the church- the Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.
- The congregation strives to incarnate the ministry of Christ through its programs and to participate in God's continuing creation through its involvement in the life of the parish.
- Seen collectively, the ministry of the congregation to the parish demonstrated the proclamation of God's love for the parish and actions which work for just conditions for all who inhabit that place.
- The congregation and the pastor consciously seek to incarnate the presence of Christ in the parish by identifying with the hopes and struggles of the poor and those who have been marginalized.

2. Parish ministry is geographical and integral to its setting.

- The pastor lives in the parish. The members of the congregation increasingly reside in the parish. They know their neighbors and are directly involved in the institutions of that place.
- The pastor and the congregation are consciously aware of their ministry as a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's kingdom in relation to the realities of their parish.
- The pastor and the congregation demonstrate in their worship as well as in their public ministries a sense of responsibility and respect for the welfare of all people in the parish.
- The pastor and the congregation participate with others in the parish in community organizations that seek justice and promote well-being for all of the citizens.
- The pastor and the congregation are visible and known by name among others in the parish.
- The pastor and the congregation welcome others not living in the parish and who desire to be a part of the fellowship and ministry of the congregation in this place.

3. Parish ministry is inclusive.

- The congregation's membership increasingly reflects the racial, economic, cultural and social composition of the people of the parish.
- The pastor and the congregation actively welcome and celebrate the gifts of racial, ethnic and cultural diversity that come from an inclusive ministry.
- The liturgies of the congregation and other aspects of the congregation's life utilize the languages and varied cultural traditions of the people of the parish.
- The pastor is assisted and supported by the congregation in becoming equipped to minister in a multicultural setting when the parish reflects that need.

4. Parish ministry is interdependent.

- The pastor and the congregation are fully involved in a relationship of mutual support and accountability with other ministries of the Lutheran church in the area.
- The pastor and the congregation engage in ministry for their parish consciously representing the entire Lutheran church and are aware of its support at all levels.
- The pastor, as the primary teacher in the congregation, meets regularly with other pastors for study, prayer, consolation and mutual support.

5. Parish ministry is catholic.

- The pastor and the congregation understand that they share the responsibility of ministry in and for their parish with all other congregations of the one holy catholic apostolic church that are located in the same parish.
- The pastor and the congregation actively seek ways in which they can demonstrate the unity of the church as together with other congregations they seek to witness to God's saving love in Jesus Christ and to serve and advocate justice for the parish they share.
- Special emphasis is given by the various congregations of the church to efforts that result in empowerment of people for mutual determination about community life within the parish. The church, as one among many institutions in that place, demonstrated its solidarity with the oppressed in that parish in ways that will benefit all.

6. Parish ministry is intentional.

- The pastor makes repeated call in the homes of parishioners, inviting them to unite in the life and ministry of the congregation. Members of the congregation assist in this effort.
- The pastor and the congregation avoid the development of a "clientele" by assuring that all programs include and invitation into the full blessings of membership in the fellowship of the church and the means of grace.
- The synod and churchwide agencies and other local ministries of the Lutheran Church make their decisions with respect to how those decisions will affect the ministry of others. Decisions regarding funding, placement of pastors, interns and other staff should be intentional and informed by the circumstances of the parish.

Appendix B *SWOT Analysis*

Internal	
Strengths	Weaknesses
1.	1.
External	
Opportunities	Threats
1.	1.

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SWOT Analysis Summary

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Appendix C *Seasonal Committee Structure*

Seasonal Committee Structure

Harold “Jake” Jacobson
Grace Lutheran Church
Clarion, PA

Introduction

The church is today facing a severe resource crisis. It’s most valuable and at times most depleted resources are its leaders. Nowhere is this more evident than in the small and mid-sized churches.

I believe that we have compounded our frustrations with this problem because we have turned to business for our models of structure. The corporate model that sets up a board of directors (church council) and committees and sub-committees designed around specific tasks (worship, evangelism, stewardship, social ministry, etc...) may not be our best alternative today. Instead of business models why not look within our own tradition for models. We structure our calendar year around for worship and program around a seasonal calendar which functions very differently than that of the secular world. Why not structure our organizational life around that same calendar.

Much of what follows is the result of an ongoing conversation with the Rev. Dr. John Westerhoff III, former Professor of Religion and Education at Duke University Divinity School, in which he raised the issue and I have tried to provide a working structure to address it.

Rationale

1. How to best utilize the talents and gifts of a limited number of human resources and still provide quality programming and vision.
2. How to creatively live out the story of Christ and the church as we have structured it through the liturgical church year.

Proposal

The proposed structure is designed to be flexible and adaptable to a variety of congregational settings and ways of operating. It takes a little time to feel your way through it in terms of what will work in your setting.

The first step is to determine what committees need to function as standing committees throughout the year.

Next determine how best to group the church calendar year. You may choose to establish a committee for each season. We found that a bit too ambitious as a starting point. We settled on the following:

Advent/Christmas/Ephiphany

Lent/Holy Week/Triduum/Easter

Pentecost/Ordinary Time (we ended up dividing this into a summer and fall component)

We found that the activities and themes of these seasonal groupings flowed nicely one into another.

Committee Agenda

The most important element in this structure is careful homework and planning. I cannot emphasize this enough.

The agenda is developed for two purposes: education and program development

The first item on the agenda is a brief **history of the season and its historical themes**. Dr. Westerhoff's book, *A Pilgrim People*, is a valuable resource with this element. The question which needs to grow out of this step and be kept in mind throughout the remainder of the planning is, "What is the church trying to say about God, Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit through the people of God in this season?"

Reflection on this question should lead to a particular **theme** or direction for your committee at this particular time. The transition is hermeneutical. There needs to be a transition from the historical interpretation of the season to the parish context (What are the needs and concerns that are raised or addressed by this season?). A word of caution needs to be raised in establishing a theme for the season. We have found that some years the theme leaps out at us while at other times we struggle. We have found that if a seasonal theme does not become evident quickly that by proceeding with the planning an appropriate theme often reveals itself.

The most appropriate place to begin the actual planning is with **worship**. This is facilitated by identifying the special worship events which will take place throughout the particular season and also any additional worship events that might be highlighted.

Example: *In the Lenten season one would identify: Ash Wednesday, Passion Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday as appropriate special celebrations. One might also wish to include special midweek Lenten services to enhance or complement these services.*

This portion of the agenda calls for considerable time. This can be aided by some preplanning on the chairperson's part or by delegating different people to take charge of mini-planning sessions to work out specific details for specific worship events. It has been my experience that it is well worth the time to deal with the final worship portion of the agenda as a group as it allows for a more inclusive expression and flow between worship events.

Included in the worship life of the season might be: hymns, special music, choir, musicians, banners or other art forms, children's sermons, temple talks, bulletin inserts and sermon direction.

You will need to tailor the remainder of your agenda to fit the season, your congregation and the members of your committee.

Learning concerns might include: How can the Sunday School effectively reflect the theme in its lessons? What special educational events (short-term classes or all-day events) might be appropriate? Are there intergenerational or family events that can be reflected in the newsletter, bulletin or internet?

Social Ministry concerns might include: special community projects (health kits, quilting, clothing drive, toy collection, adopt-a-family, adopt-a-grandparent, hat/mitten tree, ect...), special synodical emphasis (advocacy concerns, support of a social ministry agency, etc...).

It is often tempting to treat **Evangelism** within this structure (or any other) very lightly but it has been our experience that when we focused hard on what a particular season had to say to the unchurched of the community we were greatly rewarded. Questions for discussion might include: Are there special areas of evangelical outreach that need to be highlighted during this season? What publicity does there need to be for events and worship?

Stewardship questions could include: What stewardship education needs to be done during this season? What specific gifts are we going to need from the congregation (money for support of specific ministries, talents for specific projects and/or additional time for work in the church, worship or education)?

Community Building concerns need to be shaped around the particular needs of the congregation. In some congregations community building happens best in the context of worship. In others it is in educational events. For still others it is in fellowship and dinner events. Included in the planning should also be a concern for specific groups such as sick, shut-in, inactives and actives. As part of a college community a special concern for community with college students is an important part of our planning.

Youth and other organizations (women's groups, couple's groups, men's groups, etc...) can play an important part in implementing projects and facilitate community building. What special projects or events can the groups of the congregation take part in that will reflect the season.

Committee Membership

One of the positive aspects of this structure is that it enables persons with several interests of expertise to fully share these gifts. When you recruit for the committees you need to make sure that you spread these people out over different committees. You will also find that specific people relate more comfortably with one season or another. You will need to have people that can serve as liaisons with musicians, Sunday School teachers and representatives from other organizations within the congregation. It is also helpful if these committees are reflective of the diversity of the congregation.

Appendix D *Re-rooting in the Community*
Appendix E *Front Porchin' Overview*

Rerooting in the Community and Front Porchin' Resources are available upon request (documents are too long to include):

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Appendix B