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The Lazarus Project: The Dying and Raising of the Rural Church in the Minnesota North District-Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

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THE LAZARUS PROJECT: THE DYING AND RAISING OF THE RURAL CHURCH
IN THE MINNESOTA NORTH DISTRICT-LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI
SYNOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
RICHARD JOHN MANUAL HANS

PORTLAND, OREGON

March, 2007

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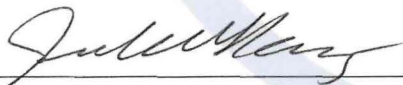
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DISTRICT-LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD**

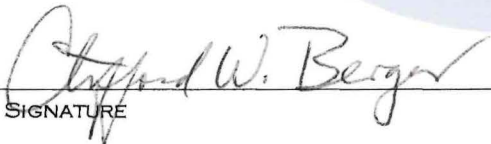
***WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
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Hebrews 12: 1-3 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

SECTION ONE: ABSTRACT

Rural communities and the church at large currently face the difficult challenge of rapidly dying rural churches. As a result of this decline the six thousand churches in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) face a number of issues including the loss of financial aid for mission work in United States and abroad. The closure of this one church also affects the middle judicatory. The district depends financially upon the churches in its district to support mission starts and financial concerns affect a congregation's ability to support a pastor. Overall, the closure of the local church demonstrates a lack of vibrancy in the community.

Currently, American churches die at the rate of twelve to fifteen each day.¹ Two major factors that contribute to this decline include a lower birthrate and a higher percentage of young people leaving rural areas altogether. The change of decline stirs conflict, which leads to members leaving their church. Often, dysfunctional members cause unhealthy conflict and other members leave because they cannot cope with it. Presently, 57 percent of the members of the LCMS are over fifty-one years of age.²

In North America, 80 percent of churches have fewer than 100 people in worship, the median age is fifty-five and increasing, the median age of leadership is sixty-two and

¹ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question, Into the Mystery* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 4.

² Rosters and Statistics, International Center, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, St. Louis, MO.

increasing, and few men, youth, or people between twenty and thirty-five years old regularly attend.³ In a 2000 Hartford study, Gilson Waldkoenig observed: “These pieces add up, in my figuring, to a looming tidal wave of congregational closings for mainline Protestants.”⁴

Many rural churches in the Minnesota North District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod have experienced decline, lack of active membership, and general apathy. The thesis of this project states that these problems may be addressed and engaged through two empowering actions:

1. Some of the “dying” churches must die, close their doors, and their members should join another Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod.

2. The rest of the churches in the Minnesota North District need revitalization.

The lay members of rural churches have no training to cope with demographic drain, unhealthy conflict, and changes in the community which can lead to the death of that church. The education of lay members will empower them to face the many changes in their rural church and rural community.

Empowerment will help members cope with change positively and offer congregations resources to help discern a church’s strengths and weaknesses. A key question for empowerment is: “What might God want for this particular congregation with its unique history and identity?” During this process of human reason and spiritual

³ Thomas G. Bandy, “Anticipating Inevitable Accusations,” *NetResults* (July/August 2004), 24.

⁴ Beth Ann Gaede, *Ending with Hope* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), vi.

discernment, a congregation may discover new ways of living together, bringing new life into its communal soul. Through active empowerment a dying church can uncover its myths or its own inability to see God's bigger picture.⁵

This project serves as a resource for rural church leaders. The presentation notes will be the foundation piece at the Rural Church Institute (The Lazarus Center). The presentation notes will be for lay leaders who want to explore the dynamics of leadership, change, conflict, confession and for those who choose to close their rural congregation, help to close with dignity. The project will aid in making God pleasing decisions in matters that affect their particular rural ministry with its unique history and identity.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

Audience

Thesis Readers

The content of this project is directed to church leaders who know that their church is dying, want to understand why their church is dying, and take proper action. Many of these readers have been experiencing the following stages of grief including: shock, panic, denial, numbness, anger, bargaining, and depression. These presentation notes aim to help readers take the problem of decline seriously and move beyond the first seven stages of grief toward acceptance and forgiveness.

Multimedia Experience Reader:

The multimedia experience will include lay leaders of the dying churches. The Lazarus Project will empower them in the areas of leadership, change, conflict and confession. And for those who choose to close their rural congregation, help to close with dignity.

Congregation pastors are welcome to join the lay leaders and participate in this project. The project did not specifically target pastors because in many family-sized rural churches lay leaders have final authority, and many of these churches lack full-time pastors.

SECTION TWO: THE PROBLEM

This study focuses on rural churches in decline and aims to identify if and how these ministries can achieve renewal and health. The Psalm passage, “Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep,” (Psalm 107:23-24)

These early church leaders left European countries and sailed to America in the mid to late 1800’s. These church members saw God’s mighty power at work in their congregations. Their mission was first to fellow transplanted countrymen who spoke the same language and practiced the same theological distinctiveness. Second, their church grew because of children born to members. The waves of the sea that threatened with destruction their small boats when they left their homelands are tiny compared to today’s waves that pound the ship of the rural church in the Minnesota North District.

For a while they had found success in their own minds with the building filled during worship, but they never sought out lost souls. Now the rural church experiences stormy winds and the mountainous waves of change. As members look out from their church “their courage melted away” and they are at “their wits’ end (Psalm 107: 25-27).

Another reason these members are at their “wits’ end” is the rural church in the Minnesota North District mission was at the frontier of a Christian empire and the congregation’s role was to send financial support and the occasional young recruit.⁶ Currently, most churches in the United States are at least thirty years old and beyond the early stages of birth and development.⁷ A church up to thirty years old has a sense of vision, but with maturity comes a reluctance to take risks because there is more to lose. With maturity the shaping vision of the church gets lost and becomes focused on caring for the interests of those already in the church. Peter Drucker wrote: “Any organization run for the benefit of those inside the organization begins to die.”⁸ Presently, fewer births and marriages no longer keep up to the numbers leaving and dying.⁹

This project aims to facilitate hope. Alan Roxburgh stated: “God is always found in the most God-for-saken places.” God is found at work in the old, hopeless, helpless, and in those places that people give up on. In many ways, the most God-for-saken place in America is the local congregation. Many members in dying churches do not expect

⁶ Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live?* (Bethesda, Maryland, Alban Institute, 1999), 23.

⁷ Jock Ficken, *Change: Learning to Lead It and Living to Tell About It* (Lima, OH: Fairway Press, 1999), 32.

⁸ Ibid. 33.

⁹ Rosters and Statistics, International Center, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, St. Louis, MO.

God to be at work in their congregation because they experience a deep visceral sense that something is wrong in their church.¹⁰

This project seeks to bring understanding, empower, and give words to members of dying churches so they may speak of their experiences in a healthy and effective manner. The Lazarus Project is intended to help more than just “stuck” congregations. The Lazarus Project hopes to help raise dead churches from mossy graves.

I know your works, you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you (Rev. 3:1b-3).

Many of the 208 rural churches in the Minnesota North District are dying and the members of these churches are in denial or numb to the realities around them. This project aims to guide such church members through change so that churches may become healthy and vibrant.

One major problem many rural churches face is that members do not see a need for renewal. This denial and resistance complicates the context of these marginalized congregations. Pastors who wish to revitalize congregations must work to gain the trust of rural church members before they will support change.

Perhaps, it is too late to be a benefit for many rural churches. One rural church member responded to the declining figures by saying, “It’s true and it hurts!” Another member expressed worry that her church will close in the near future. She was among

¹⁰ Alan Roxburgh, *God is Found in the Most God-for-saken Places*, (lecture notes, Summer, 2004).

fifteen in worship that morning. That church's records showed that their average worship attendance was fifteen for the last six months. The only reason that they had a pastor was they split the costs with another church seven miles away.

Amidst this context of death and resistance, new changes must be implemented in order to revitalize and strengthen rural churches. The next section proposes specific solutions to help these complicated issues.

SECTION THREE: A PROPOSED SOLUTION

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). The Lazarus Center brings together lay leaders from dying rural churches and communities. Lay leaders will be given a forum for learning and gaining insight. This insight includes understanding how the first seven of the ten emotional phases have emotionally drained the congregation, these include: shock, panic, denial, numbness, rage, despair, and bargaining.¹¹

The Grieving Process

Shock, is the first reaction to an unexpected death or tragic event, and the effect is much the same as a hard blow to the head or sticking one’s fingers in a live socket. The tragic news causes an immediate and intense mental, emotional and even physical reaction. Often shocked individuals should seek medical attention or need medication to help them through this first reaction to the loss.¹² Although churches can decline slowly, the sudden realization of a church’s death can shock a congregation.

¹¹ Arthur H., *The Grieving Indian* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 1991), 36.

¹² *Ibid*, 37.

Panic often sets in after the initial shock. In this state, church members cannot think clearly. They cannot make up their own minds or organize themselves for action and they need sensitive guidance through this phase.

Denial is an almost automatic reaction to tragedy. Many people say “no” to the news because they cannot absorb the facts and must allow themselves time to adjust.¹³ Congregants can deny the reality of decline by making comments like: “Doesn’t the Bible say that ‘Wherever two or three are gathered, there Christ is in the midst of them?’ I’d say we have plenty more than three here.” or “Things really aren’t as bad as people are making them out to be. After all, we still have a good number coming to church each Sunday—certainly more than the Baptist church across town!” or “Numbers are just not that important.”

For some congregations, the most difficult task will be to acknowledge the denial in order to move on. Denial may enable many individuals to regroup and get on with life after a dramatic or identity threatening experience, but denial ceases to be useful when it is no longer temporary. Most of the time, denial is not a conscious behavior, but its manifestations can be obvious to the world around, and it can ultimately destroy an individual or a congregation.¹⁴ Denial can be especially harmful to a dying church because it inhibits members from actively seeking solutions.

¹³ Arthur H. the Grieving Indian, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 1991), 37.

¹⁴ Gaede, *Ending With Hope*, (Bethesda, Maryland: Alban Institute, 2002), 48.

Unexpected tragedy temporarily overloads the emotional circuits. The survivor is dazed or numb and unable to display emotion. This numbness may also be expressed in a physical sense where parts of the body lose a measure of feeling. This phase may be as brief as a few hours or as long as several days, and it is sometimes delayed in happening. Occasionally it may not appear until several months later when suddenly the hands, feet, or some other body part begins to feel numb.¹⁵

Rage is the opposite of numbness, it burns, boils, and often strikes out unreasonably. Several days may pass before it appears, but it always appears as a reaction to tragedy. At this point in a tragedy, many people get stuck in the grieving process. Their rage appears and continues to churn inside until they either find a way to resolve it or it destroys them.¹⁶

Denial can be a coping mechanism as it holds in bay another primary emotion, anger. Many see the expression of anger as sinful or destructive and choose to repress the emotion rather than pray for constructive ways of expressing it. Many congregations moving through a decline feel anger and express it toward many different entities. There may be real anger about the uncontrollable forces of change that have affected their congregation's historical way of being in their community.¹⁷

¹⁵ Arthur H. The Grieving Indian (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 1991), 38.

¹⁶ Ibid, 38.

¹⁷ Gaede, Ending With Hope, 49.

Anguish-despair, the next emotional phase, is when the church is at its lowest. Many members do not bargain or even realize their anger, but most people feel an undeniable sense of depression. Churches increasingly consumed by grief and despair, lack the spiritual or physical strength to reach out in new, life-giving ways to others.¹⁸

Bargaining begins acceptance of the loss because members can accept the loss and get on with living. The mourner might say, “I could accept her death if only we had not had a fight before the accident” or “I know he can’t come back, but why did he have to be drinking when he died?” To live is an effort. Someone else may have an answer.¹⁹

Bargaining often begins when a congregation must close its doors. Just as the disempowered devil tried to strike a deal with Jesus during his time of temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:9), so will desperate members try to coerce the “powers that be” to give them a chance.²⁰

There comes a time to forgive those who have been blamed for the loss. Before the mourners can finish grieving, they must forgive those they have blamed for the loss. If a mourner does not forgive the grief remains present. The will to forgive must continually be reaffirmed until the intellect and emotions have been brought in line.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

²⁰ Gaede, *Ending with Hope*, 50.

²¹ Arthur H., 66.

Acceptance follows logically once a person has taken the step of forgiveness which begins with the realization that no amount of grief will bring back the past. From then on, life begins to get back to normal.

Grieving inhibits personal growth and development until grieving stops. Grieving is such a strong experience that it prevents learning until the grief work is done. This is one reason it is so important for mourners to finish their grief work so that they may begin to grow again and develop meaningful relationships. Grievors find that while life may not be as good as it once was, it can still be pleasant and once an individual has gone through the process, logical decisions based on facts and not emotions can be made.

The Presentation Notes

A majority of the 208 district rural churches are experiencing the first seven phases of grief. Without outside help these churches will die. Some churches need to close the church and some churches need revitalization. The presentation notes promote hope for these rural churches.

These presentation notes are designed for the Minnesota North District rural churches of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, other districts will also benefit from this project. Over 1200 rural churches within seven nearby districts need the resources that a Lazarus Center can offer.

These presentation notes are the foundation piece for The Lazarus Center. In May, 2006 the Minnesota North District Convention voted to create a Rural Church Task Force to study the areas of demographics, leadership, change, conflict, stewardship, spiritual

life, and evangelism in the rural context. They will report to the members of the next District Convention, 2009 its findings.

While other denominations might also be receptive to what is taught at the Rural Church Institute, this project specifically addresses the 208 churches of the Minnesota North District. Once the presentation notes and the Rural Church Institute are in place members of other denominations can access the tools and resources that come from this project.

The presentation notes will aid the participant in retention and understanding of God's principles for a healthy church and can be used in individual study or in a group setting. The goal is to take people from emotional drain to healthy gain, not merely increase numbers.

This project's research has considered others who have devoted years to the task of church renewal. Leonard Sweet, William Easum, Thomas Bandy, Loren B. Mead, Alice Mann, Lyle Schaller, and Beth Ann Gaede are some whose passion is renewing congregations to face the twenty-first century. They give help in breaking down resistance and building up hope. Their intentionality is to change church leaders from maintenance harvesters to nurturing seed planters and from member donors to disciples. Each author has a unique contribution to this endeavor of releasing stagnant churches. Often these churches are locked in the past and have some grief and pain through which they never resolved. Influential patterns passed on from generation to generation are still active in church life and emotional layers remain. There is no separating the emotional

from the spiritual. We cannot grow an emotionally healthy church if we ourselves are not addressing issues beneath the surface of our lives.²²

Waldo Werning agrees with George Barna the mainline church has no more than five years to turn itself around and begin to affect the culture, rather than be affected by it. If the church does not quickly realign its heart, mind and soul, and so redirect its efforts, it will lose its waning platform of influence in American society.²³

Alice Mann suggests the church is in trouble now because churches are smaller, weaker, older, often poorer, lack passion and clear direction. Renewal ministry happens when a church accepts the death of its old identity and purpose. Contemporary churches must answer the question: “What is the church’s enduring faith-task and what fresh form could it take today?”²⁴

The rural churches in the Minnesota North District don’t want to die. Devastating decisions are going to be made on the basis of finances, limited worship attendance and conflict. The presentation notes are the first step of the journey of helping these rural churches close, merge, revitalize, or yoke together. These churches need to know that they are not alone. The Lazarus Center will be a place for them to look at the hard facts, avoid blame, and engage in a new learning. It will be a place where lay leaders can come to get refreshed and refocused.

²² Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 46.

²³ Waldo Werning, *12 Pillars of a Healthy Church* (Carol Stream, Illinois, ChurchSmart Resources, 2001), 7.

²⁴ Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live?*, 23.

SECTION FOUR: THE THESIS

This project asserts that a dying rural church needs to take action. The thesis of this project is that two choices exist for dying churches: to close or renew.

To Close

Sometimes God does not miraculously prevent the deaths of some churches. Many stagnant churches recognize on some level that they are “circling the drain” on the course to a slow death.²⁵ The death of a small rural church is closer than it appears. To die does not always mean failure, but often demographics, finances, and resources have dwindled and now it is time to close. Individual congregations are not immortal. They do have a life cycle. Just as King Solomon said, “there is a time to die,” a grieving congregation must learn to accept its death. Until this happens, they cannot bring the grieving to a conclusion.²⁶

A small congregation, advanced in age, with little demonstrable sense of mission will experience denial and blame for their decline. When the congregation takes responsibility for the current situation, the situation can end with hope. There comes a time to close the building and some congregations might choose to accept the end and should, therefore, plan a process of letting go.

²⁵ Mike Simpson, *The Lazarus Project* (Greensborough, NC: 2nd Wind Press, 1999), 203.

²⁶ Arthur H., *The Grieving Indian*, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian Life Books, 1991), 83.

The members and pastor should plan their last worship service and celebrate the church's historical significance in that community. This service should stress a sense of accomplishment and closure, and remind members that the congregation lives on in them because the church is the people and not the building. After this final celebration, members should say good-bye, close the church building, disband the fellowship, and find other established churches to join. The pastor retires or accepts a call to another church.

This project asserts the necessity to change attitudes toward congregations closing. "The medical model says that if you can't cure, you die. A healing model says that even if you can't cure, you can still encourage healing in all phases of life," including bereavement.²⁷ Closing a congregation is in many ways about dying; it can also be about new life. By closing one congregation energy can be used in places where God is working in new ways. As churches explore their choices, the congregation needs to ask: "To what ministry is God calling us?" The question, "Why not close?" raises the possibility that God calls some churches to close, that closing a congregation is a resurrection opportunity to release resources for new ministry.²⁸

John Cassian, a fourth-century church father and the writer of *Conferences* suggests five questions a declining congregation should address:

1. Is it filled with what is good for all?
2. Is it heavy with the fear of God?
3. Is it genuine in the feelings that underlie it?

²⁷ Gaede, *Ending with Hope*, vii

²⁸ *Ibid*, vii

4. Is it lightweight because of human show or because of some thrust toward novelty?
5. Has the burden of vainglory lessened its merit or diminished its luster?²⁹

The above questions are asked by the congregation as they consider their future.

Each question combines logic and spiritual discernment as they seek God's will for their congregation. The first part of the journey is called "framing." The leaders of the congregation have responsibility for "framing" the appropriate question to God. The question seeks God's desire and not their own.

The above questions help the congregation discover the options that lead to possible improvement of their ministry. Does one option seem preferable? The congregation is seeking to uncover what God is calling them to be in the future. One option for some congregations will be to close. The congregation's response is stated, "God, it seems to us that your yearning is for us to close."

Next, there is a period of "resting." This is to give the decision the "test of the heart." In other words is there consolation, a sense of comfort or desolation, a sense of discomfort. The goal is for the congregation to come to be at peace with the pain of closing or merging or linking or yoking.³⁰

²⁹ Gaede, *Ending with Hope*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14

Renewal

The second choice leads to refocusing a church's vision and mission. After accepting the fact a church could die, a congregation can, through hard work, discover a new attitude of hope.

Hope is a stronger experience than the seven negative grieving phases because hope gives purpose. Many authors, facilitators, and consultants want to help churches turn around their ministry. Some churches that have worked through their grief are now ready to make the necessary changes in their ministry. Purpose gives the capacity to decide. Purposeful discipleship of members gives direction.

In her book *Can Our Church Live?*³¹ Alice Mann gives three responses to help return the congregation from the decline phase to the formation phase of its life cycle. The three responses are renewal, revitalization, and redevelopment. A church that begins to stagnate needs renewal which requires the evaluation of the congregation's identity, purpose, and content. A church in the early stages of decline needs revitalization which looks hard at their vitality that can be refreshed and refocused. A congregation that has been declining for years needs redevelopment. It has sustained significant losses in people, energy, flexibility, and funds.

Old elements of an old identity and purpose must die to allow new growth and change. Redeveloping congregations live out the mystery of death and resurrection by

³¹ Mann, Alice, *Can Our Church Live?* (Bethesda, Maryland, 1999), 9.

“losing their life to find it.” In *Death of the Church* Mike Regele writes: “The Church has a choice: to die as a result of its resistance to change or to die to live.”³²

Church renewal is a time when the “new” occurs, for example a new church building, new outreach potential in the community, new mission projects, or new forms of worship. It is also a time of miracles, big miracles that leave the hearts of everyone in the sanctuary trembling, and little miracles that confirmed the hand of God is present in the fellowship’s day-to-day work; serendipity that just bursts forth in every aspect of church lifelike dandelions in spring. It is, above all, a time of fellowship in concert with God.³³

The sociological relationship between church and community must be addressed. Within the church there are various other systems and subsystems, and members of a congregation must be aware of how emotions work. Emotional systems are like delicately balanced mobiles, and any movement within the mobile or any outside force will affect the balance of the whole mobile. Emotional reactions rather than objective reactions will keep a congregation stuck in their emotionality.³⁴

Renewal requires the congregation to stay radically open to new information and to change their shape constantly to remain what they are. Church leaders must learn together about the congregation and its environment, and allow failing structures and

³² Regele, *Death of the Church*, 19

³³ Simpson, *The Lazarus Project*, 181.

³⁴ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1996), 22.

styles to collapse. The congregation's faith-story must be retold relentlessly. Leaders and members need to embrace risks, mistakes, disagreements, and even disasters as opportunities to trust God and to live faith. Finally, congregations should accept their church may die no matter what they do.³⁵

The church must address the changes that influence it. The church has been and remains for many a temporary haven for many from the cruelty of the world they live in. They see the many changes in their world and refuse to risk change.

In 1970, Francis Schaeffer saw change in the church coming. The church today should be getting ready and talking about issues of tomorrow and not issues of twenty or thirty years ago. The church is going to be squeezed in a wringer. If congregations found it tough in these last few years, what are they going to do when we are faced with the real changes that are ahead?³⁶

The "real changes" that Francis Schaeffer spoke about in 1970 affect many congregations today. Change scares many people who work to resist it. Today, many Christians have a consumer approach to the church that allows them to avoid stretching, ignores the roughness of the cross, and preserves comfort at all costs.³⁷

Resistance to congregational change has more to do with the fear of conflict than with conflict itself. Congregations are more fearful of losing a few sheep from the flock,

³⁵ Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live?*, 38.

³⁶ Brian McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 15.

³⁷ Kent R. Hunter, *Discover Your Windows* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 31.

than of deserting the mission of Jesus to the world.³⁸ Max Depree wrote: “In the end, it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.” When individuals are through changing, they are through. Individuals can make a choice today to change, and when change is successful, they look back at it and call it growth.³⁹ Change affects us in two ways: we choose to change by our own free will and secondly, we choose how we respond to the change.

Thomas a Kempis suggested: “If Christ is among us, then it is necessary that we sometimes yield up our own opinion...trust not too much to thine own opinion, but be ready also to hear the opinions of others.” The ability to sacrifice comfort indicates whether a church is alive or dead.⁴⁰

Conflict provides opportunities for the rural church. Many rural churches have forgotten or lost their purpose. That purpose was to be “fishers of men,” netting people from the sea of discontent and despair. In these last days, the rural churches have stopped fishing and started fighting:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3)

³⁸ Thomas G. Bandy, *Fragile Hope* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 113.

³⁹ John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 74.

⁴⁰ Kent Hunter, *Discover Your Windows* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 37-38.

As we try to better understand conflict we look at the Latin root word *fligere* which means “to strike.” This root is found in the word “inflict,” which means to strike something onto (in) somebody, and in the word *profligate* means to “strike forward” or to knock someone on the face. The word “conflict” means to “strike together,” and it is this meaning which is fundamental to the working definition of conflict.⁴¹

Confession gives freedom to the church to successfully handle change. Everyone suffers in times of grief. Many, when softened by the loss, make a major spiritual commitment that last a lifetime.⁴²

Years after the war, survivor Corrie Ten Boom stood before a man who had been one of the cruelest guards at the concentration camp. He was now a Christian, and as he held out his hand he said, “Fraulein, will you forgive me?” Corrie said, “I forgive you, brother!”

Corrie Ten Boom did not completely forgive the prison guard, but she took the first two steps toward complete forgiveness by 1. extending love and 2. the past was recognized as past. Before complete forgiveness could take place, the two would need to remember the pain together, recall the injury together, recognize real repentance together, and agree to forget together. Only through the difficult journey can real forgiveness occur.⁴³

⁴¹ Speed Leas, *Church Fights* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1937), 28

⁴² Arthur H., *The Grieving Indian*, 79.

⁴³ David Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 51.

God's Word gives the foundation for forgiveness and guidance for that complete journey. Through forgiveness the arms of Jesus lifts, His blood cleanses, and His love changes believers. It is His free gift to His children. He will make all things new. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). "In Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

Dying to live. It sounds strange, but that's exactly how Christ brings life into this dying world. Through death: His death on the cross. From His body flowed blood and water that day, the signs of His death. But they are signs of life for believers. In fact, there's no other way to live than through the death of Jesus. His death brings life, and when believers die with Him they begin to live.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Harold Senkbeil, *Dying to Live* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1993), 55.

SECTION FIVE: THE PROJECT BLUEPRINT

The map for the project has been drawn. We only need to follow the direction. As the baseball player and manager Yogi Berra once said, “When you see a fork in the road, take it.” We have a choice either to go the route of closing the church or renew the church. First, let us begin the journey of renewal.

Module One: Developing the Leader

The intended outcome this study is to promote stronger rural leaders to support a stronger rural church. To achieve this goal, the participant will experience exercises that will demonstrate the five levels of leadership which are position, permission, production, people development, and personhood.⁴⁵ The participant will learn which level they are on and the necessary qualities to be successful at each level.

Rural leaders will be taught to take home one of the most important lessons of leadership: to recognize their level of leadership and maximize that leadership. The contemporary world often lacks clear answers; however, this module explores good leadership and demonstrates how the rural church leaders can attain it.

Romans 12:8b suggests that the one who leads, *leads* with zeal. According to F. F. Fournies’ *Coaching for Improved Work Performance*, there are four common reasons why people do not perform with zeal:

⁴⁵ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN. 1995) 12

1. They do not know what they are supposed to do.
2. They do not know how to do it.
3. They do not know why they should.
4. There are obstacles beyond their control.⁴⁶

Participants will read John Maxwell's book, *Developing the Leader within You* and watch the movie, *Les Miserables*.

Developing the Leader within You teaches new principles that work in leadership, helps you uncover where you are right now as a leader, and shows you the way to higher levels of leadership.

Les Miserables is about a Frenchman Jean Valjean as he experiences different levels of leadership. He is imprisoned for stealing bread, is paroled after nearly two decades of hard labor. A gift of silver candlesticks from a kindly priest helps him begin anew. Forging a decent and profitable existence, he finds success as a businessman and as the mayor of a small town. He even takes in a pregnant young woman and raises her daughter as his own. Valjean's past catches up to him when a former prison guard recognizes him.

Module one will have the participants relate the five levels of leadership to the movie. The participants will match a character from the movie to a different level of leadership and explain why.

⁴⁶ John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN. 1995), 75

Module Two: Hope for Change

The topic for this module demonstrates that change can be good and should not always be avoided in the rural church. This module promotes new lessons, not following old rules.

The intended outcome is to discern God's intent for a church. Key questions include: What is status quo? What is change? What affect change has on the rural church? What is the health of your congregation?

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-12)

The text asserts that for the child of God to weigh, ponder, and decide God's revealed will, believers must worship constantly and demonstrate nonconformity to this world, or age, which is an evil age.

This module also distinguishes between change and transition. Change is situational. Situations arise that change the congregation. Congregational transition is the process of reshaping the congregation's faith foundation, identity, and ways of being in response to change from a new situation.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Craig Satterlee, *When God Speaks through Change* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005), 4.

Assignments include reading *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson and watching the movie, *Groundhog Day*.

The book teaches that change can be a blessing or a curse, depending on your perspective. *Who Moved My Cheese?* is a parable that takes place in a maze. Four beings live in that maze: Sniff and Scurry are mice—nonanalytical and nonjudgmental, they just want cheese and are willing to do whatever it takes to get it. Hem and Haw are "little people," mouse-size humans who have an entirely different relationship with cheese. It's not just sustenance to them; it's their self-image. Their lives and belief systems are built around the cheese they've found.

Groundhog Day portrays the various emotional states through which the man passed in coming to terms with being stuck in time. He moved from panic to despair and then to cynicism, to a desire for self-destruction and finally to hope. When he realizes he cannot change others but that he can change himself he discovers the impact he has upon others' lives. The world around us may be stuck but we are not.

Module Three: Hope from Conflict

This module explores conflict in the rural church. The participants will learn the value of healthy conflict in the rural church and learn to recognize healthy and unhealthy conflict.

The intended outcome is for church leaders to learn behavior appropriate in a Christian rural congregation. Key questions include: What is conflict? What is good conflict? What are the church conflict dynamics in the rural church?

Acts 15: 1-35 provides a key biblical text. Two sides disagree on the leading principle rite of the Jewish religion, circumcision. It was indispensable to the name and privileges of a Jew. They also held this rite to be indispensable to salvation. Paul and Barnabas had dispensed with this rite in regard to Gentile converts. A division of the church is imminent. Both sides (Jew and Gentile) could hold their view as sacred and thus unchangeable or both sides could come together to settle their differences through conciliation, mediation or arbitration.

Participants will read *Guiding People through Conflict* by Ken Sande. This workbook describes three responses to conflict. Only the peacemaking response is healthy. The peacemaking response is directed at finding a just and mutually agreeable solution. View the movie *Metallica, Some Kind of Monster*. A documentary crew followed the band Metallica for the better part of 2001-2003, a time of tension and release for the rock band, as they recorded their album *St. Anger*, fought bitterly, and sought the counsel of their on-call psychiatrist.

Module Four: Hope from Forgiveness

This module focuses on the freedom that confession and absolution gives to the members of a rural church as it faces change and the conflict that arises. The primary concepts include those of forgiveness. Forgiving is a painful journey, extended wrestling with the injury. Forgiveness is more than just saying, "I forgive you." It is a 5 step process that is intense and deliberate. Forgiveness is a gift of love that enables one to perceive another as a precious person in spite of a wrongdoing.

The intended outcome is reconciliation. Key questions for this section include:

What is complete forgiveness? Why seek forgiveness? What about the emotional side of forgiveness?

Matthew 18:15-20 provides a central text for the section:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

This lesson asserts that Christians are to forgive not to benefit oneself but to “regain your brother.” Forgiveness is not just extending love and recognizing the past as past. Before real forgiveness can take place, the two parties need to remember the pain together, recall the injury together, recognize real repentance together, and agree to forget together.

Participants will read *The New Freedom of Forgiveness* by David Augsburger and watch the movie *Dead Man Walking*. This movie is about a nun who ministers to a death-row inmate and results in the fact that she is faced with a moral crisis as she tries to reconcile her anti-death penalty views with the truth of the inmate’s actions and the pain felt by the victim’s families.

The book, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness* teaches that forgiveness is something we discover, more than something we do. Forgiveness is something we gratefully

receive, more than something we give. Forgiveness is costly but is well worth the effort for the forgiver and forgiven.

Resources for Rural Congregations

A Checklist for Change

Eleven questions are posed in such a fashion as to indicate whether a rural congregation is ready for change or that the change will be difficult.

A list of Reasons Why We Resist Change

John Maxwell in his book *Developing the Leader Within You*, gives a succinct list of reasons why many of us resist change. This list helps us when we ask if the change will help our personal growth or hinder it?

A Demographic Resource

This demographic study is offered through the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. This is a tool for the motivated congregation to find out where the mission field exists. Congregations need adequate data to assist them in making important mission decisions.

This is a computer based program that can be sorted to reflect any specified geographic location. Five pieces of information that the demographic resource offers is who is our neighbor? How many are there? What are they like (culture)? Where are they? How do we reach them? This tool helps the congregation get to know its community. From this information a strategy can be planned.

A Service of Reconciliation

The goal for Christians is to seek reconciliation. The best way to accomplish that is for the conflicted parties once they have reached accord to gather in a Worship Service of Reconciliation.

A Service of Closing

When a congregation decides to end its ministry it is proper to have a Closing Service. There is confession and absolution, a congregational history is presented, and the furnishings are removed. This Worship Service is to give the members a sense of closure to the ministry that was performed in that place.

Conclusion

The intended outcome:

*To renew, revitalize, and redevelop those rural churches who don't want to die.

This project asserts that closing a congregation is in many ways about dying, but it can also be about new life. The closing of some churches and the movement of those people to both new and established congregations can be a source of revitalization for that receiving congregation. By closing one congregation, energy is released for use in places where God is working in new ways.

God working in new ways, no matter the outcome, shows us three elements:

1. The judicatory is to be a nonanxious presence in situations often loaded with anxiety for clergy and members.
2. The judicatory can help the members explore their story, so they can see the power present in it but also discover whether the reason for their congregation's initial formation still exists or whether there are new reasons for the congregation to go on.
3. The judicatory can teach and preach God's truth that death is not an enemy, that indeed, life comes after death.⁴⁸

Ministers of dying rural churches must give guidance and support, to be both caring and well informed, and to help the dying rural church choose its direction.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

⁴⁸ Gaede, *Ending with Hope*, 82.

SECTION SIX: REFLECTION

It is my privilege and honor to take part in orchestrating the sounds of rebuilding the church with a building of hope called the Lazarus Center. I look forward to the many wonderful notes of praise and hope that will touch the minds, hearts, and souls as these individual rural church leaders will be better prepared for the task set before them.

Before the Lazarus Center can come to fruition a solid base of presentation notes are needed. That is why I chose the areas of leadership, change, conflict, and confession.

I see myself as a Paul or Barnabas going to the rural communities to bring a message of hope to their struggles. The people who live in the rural communities of my district don't have time to explore the vast written resources that abound. I have immersed myself in the waters of knowledge and come forth able to refocus the rural congregation. The rural congregation can still be a vibrant actor in the face of decline in their community and even within their congregation.

The books that were chosen for the modules moved me to better understand the role of leader in the church and in my life. I have to find my level of leadership to make the Lazarus Center viable. I did not realize that leadership is not only an art but also a science. I was more comfortable with the art of leadership. I will have to grow beyond the permission level of leadership and become a people developer.

Change and conflict are the enemies of the church. What I mean by that is if the rural church cannot control change within the church, the conflict will end the rural church.

I used to think that forgiveness was a one act play. And it is on many smaller acts of disagreement, however, the greater the emotion the greater and longer the journey to reconciliation. In our churches today, there is much unresolved conflict which hinders the mission of the church. The church needs more than one act plays performed by its members if forgiveness is to lead to reconciliation.

There are going to be many more congregations than we realize who will choose to close their building. They need help and hope when that event is before them. I have learned hope is really what we all want from every situation we face and when we face our final breath of life, we have hope of eternal life.

I have a dream. I see a Rural Church Institute called The Lazarus Center devoted to rural churches. Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave and The Lazarus Center will raise dying churches as well. "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). Only the church helps individuals with their guilt, suffering, and with death. The Lazarus Center will help rural churches end with hope and hopefully many others will be raised to new life!

My hope is the Rural Church Institute will be shared at the next District Convention in May, 2009. When the district staff has permission to launch efforts to make the institute a reality the real work begins. I hope to make the institute a difference maker in the lives of dying rural churches.

This doctoral project has allowed me to see The Lazarus Center. This Center will be a center of hope where rural church members know their best interests are being looked after in a concrete way.

A future study is that of my district rural churches showing all the signs of alcoholism. I believe the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod rural church was drunk with the false growth of its church (through baptisms and marriages). So far, many of the district's churches have not freed themselves from this addiction of false evangelism. The Rural Church Institute could look at this issue as it is especially problematic to the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE LAZARUS PROJECT: THE DYING AND RAISING OF THE RURAL CHURCH
IN THE MINNESOTA NORTH DISTRICT-LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI
SYNOD

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
RICHARD JOHN MANUAL HANS
PORTLAND, OREGON

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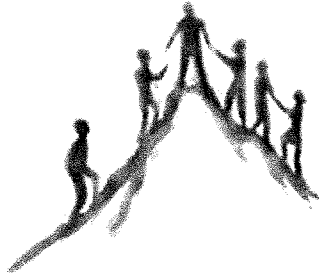
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Module One: “Developing the Leader”

Leader’s Edition



“The one who leads, leads with zeal.”
Romans 12:8b (paraphrased)

Preparation:

Prior to the event, participants should ...

- Read *Developing the Leader within You* by John Maxwell, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1993).
- Watch *Les Misérables* (DVD, Director: Billie August).
- Read Acts 9, 19, 20, and 21:19-20.

Module Topic: Learning to lead

Main Concept: Leadership happens at multiple levels.

Intended Outcomes:

Each participant will discover the five levels of leadership, evaluate their own leadership behavior, and recognize the behaviors to be successful at each level

Introduction

We begin with prayer before we begin the journey of developing the leader within you:

My Lord God
 I have no idea where I am going.
 I do not see the road ahead of me.
 I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,
 and the fact that I think I am following
 your will does not mean
 that I am actually doing so.
 But I believe that my desire to please you
 does in fact please you.
 And I hope that I have that desire
 in all that I am doing.
 I hope that I will never do anything
 apart from that desire.
 And I know that if I do this
 you will lead me by the right road
 though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always
 though I may seem to be lost
 and in the shadow of death.
 I will not fear,
 for you are ever with me,
 and you will never leave me
 to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton ⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Thomas Merton, "Prayer,"
[http://www.worldprayers.org/frameit.cgi/archieve/prayers/adorations/
 my_lord_god_i_have_no_idea.html](http://www.worldprayers.org/frameit.cgi/archieve/prayers/adorations/my_lord_god_i_have_no_idea.html) (accessed June 15, 2006).

Leadership in the rural church

Many fine lay members are elected to serve in church leadership positions, and they have wonderful ideas, hopes, and dreams. They are ready to climb the highest mountain to help their church. Rarely is there a written job description for their tasks, and they do not know their boundaries and authority. They are not trained to do the job, and this lack leads to fear, apprehension, and failure.

Please discuss the following:

Describe an experience where you received little training.

Describe a time when you experienced good training.

What is your conclusion on this issue of training?

Now, imagine yourself changing the course of history as a leader. Empowered to change the course of history in your church, community, and world, you need to understand the following five levels of leadership⁵⁰: They begin with position and move upward to personhood.

The Five Levels of Leadership

V. Personhood

IV. People Development

III. Production

II. Permission

I. Position

⁵⁰ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 12

Bible Study (Acts 9:13-28)

In *The Last Days Newsletter*, Leonard Ravenhill tells about a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village. As they walked by an old man, one tourist asked in a patronizing way: “Were any great men born in this village?” The old man replied: “Nope, only babies.”⁵¹

Saul, was a highly educated and rigorous observer of the requirements of the Jewish Law. Saul recognized the threat that belief in Jesus posed to Judaism, and this belief in Jesus caused many Jews to believe that there was a different way to become righteous with God. Saul was given authority from the high priest (level one leadership) to bring followers of the Way as prisoners to Jerusalem. Saul was an officer of the law. (Acts 8: 3, 9: 1, 2; 9:13-14). Saul as an officer of the law, persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons. Saul received his position from the Council of the elders and the high priest Acts 22: 4, 5). He was zealous in living the Jewish life and he was zealous in carrying out his duties.

One day Saul experienced a radical change that transformed him from an enemy of the faith to brother in the faith. In Acts 9: 3-15, Saul becomes a chosen instrument of God’s (level one leadership). In 1 Cor. 1:9, Paul claimed that he saw the Lord on that Damascus road (Acts 9: 3-6). He was just as qualified as the other apostles, for his conversion experience was just as objective a reality as their meetings with the risen Christ before the ascension (Acts 1: 6-9).

In *The Power of Servant Leadership*, Larry Spears writes:

One of the greatest strengths of servant leadership is the potential for healing one’s self and others. Martin Luther addressed this need for continued healing, even among those who lead Christ’s people: “This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health but healing; not being but becoming; not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it.”⁵²

This growing began during Paul’s three years of training in Arabia. Paul needed healing after realizing the damage he had accomplished in his past persecution of the

⁵¹ Ibid., Introduction

⁵² Jane L. Fryar, *Servant Leadership: Setting Leaders Free* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 93-94.

church. “Paul was alone with God, thinking through the implications of his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road.”⁵³

What can we learn from Paul?

His three year tour in the desert of Arabia was to deepen Paul’s understanding of what God wants him to be and do. Level one leadership is a change in who you are. Paul is preparing to be a preacher to the Gentiles. He has to prepare himself against fear, doubt and adversity. The old methods will no longer work. He is preparing to enter a different culture with different values.

What behavior demonstrated the position level for Saul as a Jew?

What behavior demonstrated the position level for Paul as a Christian?

Name a person who you think provided leadership at this level.

What behaviors demonstrated that fact?

Level I: Position

Positional leaders operate on the basis of the authority of their positions. They have more difficulty working with volunteers than the other levels of leadership because they do not have relationships and trust built up with the volunteers. The following qualities are needed to be successful in the position level:

1. Know your *job description*.
2. Be aware of the history of the *church* and this *ministry*.
3. Accept *responsibility*, do your work with consistent excellence, and do more than is expected.
4. Offer creative *ideas* for change and improvement.⁵⁴

Examples of the position level include police officers, soldiers, teachers, ministers, and others who lead through the authority of their profession. They protect another person’s rights. These leaders are in charge only when they are in “uniform,” and they are followed only when they “wear the uniform.” The rewards of this leadership style are few.

The leader at the position level learns survival techniques. The longer leaders remain at this level the more they acquire a “superman” mentality, and they believe they alone

⁵³ Swindoll, Charles, Paul, A Man of Grace and Grit, (Nashville, Tenn: A W Publishing Group, 2002), 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

can lead. These people are task oriented, and they seldom spend time planning or anticipating problems.

Position (level one leader)

This level of leadership is the heart of the church. However, it is being served by accommodation. Rather than someone serving because of abilities they are chosen because they are a warm body. The authority they possess is only enough to get the task accomplished. Level one takes time and effort to do well. Almost every church volunteer who says “yes” serves at level one. The question that has to be answered is “What is required of me?”

The organization relies heavily on the level one leader. Nothing gets accomplished successfully without the level one leader. This level of leader must buy into the leader who supervises them. This level of leadership needs a job description. Without a job description a level one leader becomes frustrated. The reason being is that they need to know what to put first (priorities).

A job description gives them the purpose a level one leader needs to prioritize the duties so that the little problems don’t become big problems and overwhelm the promised reward. The level one leader has to juggle their time and their resources in order to accomplish the assignment. If the reward is sufficient in nature to the expectancy of the worker they will consider another task.

Level II: Permission

People who cannot build solid, lasting relationships discover they cannot sustain effective leadership. You cannot lead people without loving them, and this is level two: permission. Leaders cannot lead without the permission of their followers, and the essence of the permission level is building meaningful relationships. Leaders love the people as Jesus loved.

Servant leadership has been taught by Robert Greenleaf who gained the idea from Hermann Hesse’s *Journey to the East*, and both teach that great leaders are servants first. This is in opposition to a moral principle that holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that granted freely and knowingly by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the servant stature of the leader. A leader is trusted and proven, and the only viable institutions are dominantly servant-led.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 10.

Fun characterizes this level. Enjoyment is the motivation to be at this level. This is the fellowship level. Those who enjoy each other are happy to serve. This is the quality of life level. This is the emotional feel good level. The follower will follow as long as the task is fun and the co-workers are getting along. This is the attitude level.

The level two leader uses varieties of activities to keep the followers focused. Nothing can be more fun than not having to deal with big problems. Big problems are handled at the next level of leadership. Little problems are dealt with at this level. The attitude of the level two leader has a definite impact on the quality of followership. This level to be successful needs to be filled with good thinking and good feelings.

The level two leader wants to influence followers to have a good attitude that can sustain a project preparing the way to level three.

Bible Study (Acts 9)

Paul gathered disciples quickly. His followers were so loyal that they rescued Paul from a plot to kill him (Acts 9:23-25). After being rescued by his disciples Paul went to Arabia, and he spent over two years there studying and praying. During this time, Paul prepared to go to Jerusalem and meet the Christian leaders.

Upon his return to Jerusalem, the other leaders did not trust Paul. Barnabas, however, found Paul and made him his ministry companion, which empowered Paul to become a second level leader (9:26-29). Barnabas gave a historical account of Paul's entry into the faith and convinced other leaders of Paul's dedication to the movement.

What behavior demonstrated the permission level for Paul?
Name a person who you think provided leadership at this level.
What behaviors demonstrated that fact?

Level Three: Production

Movement from the permission level to the production level requires a goal, something to work towards. People want to accomplish a purpose. They come together for fellowship, but they want to accomplish something worthwhile eventually.

Many potential leaders stay at the second or permission level due to a lack of problem-solving skills. People avoid problems, and they tend to shy away from bold action. A person who is willing to tackle problems or can train others to solve problems is very successful at the production level. The test of a production leader is the ability to

recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency. The problem solving process identifies the problem, prioritizes the problem, defines the problem, and applies a solution.

This level is built on momentum. Momentum carries the organization based upon what the first two levels of leadership have successfully accomplished. The level three leader recognizes momentum and is able to use it to the organization's advantage. Another key to this level of leadership is success. Committed followers and leaders feed upon success.

Success happens when the problem is identified correctly, prioritized and then defined. A level three leader invites all to get involved in the problem-solving process. Problems are fixed when momentum is working and the group has problem-solving skills. This entails the right attitude and the right action plan.

When momentum is lost problems seem to be insurmountable. That is when the problem is bigger than the leader. Hope is affected when the problem is a mountain. Mountains take greater skills to climb than hills. Life is not problem-free. There will be mountains and there will be hills. Skills adequate for solving the challenges we face need proper preparations. The level three leader makes specific preparations that leads to success.

Bible Study (Acts 20)

At this level people come together to accomplish a purpose, a goal. Paul's purpose was to liberate people of the terrible burdens and guilt laid on them by Jewish law. His goal was liberty and freedom in Christ (Rom 8:9-25, 2 Cor 3:17, Gal 5:13). He disciplined himself for godliness, and his followers respected him. Paul told Timothy: "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 4:6a).

Paul left that congregation following a tumult excited by Demetrius (Acts 20:1) and could not return (Acts 20:25). Paul was driven away unexpectedly since he had not completed his task in Ephesus, he gave Timothy suitable instructions and sent Timothy to work with the leaders (Acts 20:17). Timothy's goal was production, which was to complete the work Paul began. Paul expected results.

Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, coauthors of *The One-Minute Manager*, write that servant leadership can be misunderstood as the idea that leaders must give up leadership in favor of letting followers decide what to do and where to go. Nothing could be further from the truth. Blanchard and Johnson point out that leadership involves two main functions: a visionary element and an implementation component:

They state: “A river without banks is a large puddle. The banks permit the river to flow; they give direction to the river. Leadership is about going somewhere; it’s not about wandering around aimlessly.”⁵⁶ Level III leadership produces results.

Name a person who you think provided leadership at Level III: Production.
What behaviors demonstrated that fact?

Level IV: People Development

Allowing others to be involved in the problem solving process takes the production leader to the next level: people development.

Good leaders empower others. A leader’s main responsibility at Level IV is developing others to do the work. Paul’s leadership is more caught than taught. A level IV leader understands that people are the primary asset of an organization and that investment in their development is a high priority. By modeling leadership and focusing on selected individuals, the development leader can provide a setting for growth that creates multiplication of new leaders (Acts 20:4).

In growing to this level requires being successful in the lower levels. This level of leader is a servant to those who follow. They make decisions based upon the impact upon their followers rather than upon themselves. They are selfless in their character. This selfless leader is seeking to elevate all followers to a higher level.

The way to accomplish good level four leadership is integrity. Integrity is truth, trust and temperature. Truth is standing tall for what one believes. Trust is being able to let someone else solve a problem and receive the credit. Temperature is being able to control one’s emotions. They receive evaluation in a mature manner.

Developing the strengths of others is the level four leader’s calling. This person picks good people and helps them to be more successful. This person knows what motivates individuals on their team.

Bible Study (Acts 19 and 20)

Paul empowered others by opening a mini seminary in Ephesus. Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31) and two of those years he trained young men in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10).

⁵⁶ Kenneth H. Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager* (New York: William & Morrow, 1982), 22,23

In *Servant Leadership*, Jane Fryar writes that the essence of servant leadership springs not from a leader's traits or behaviors. At its heart, servant leadership is identity-based. The servant leader's core identity and core values determine his or her attitudes and actions.⁵⁷

The people development level is the real growth potential for the leader and followers. This level is attainable for many leaders. When leaders believe in their people, trust is exchanged freely. The exchange of trust produces change. The follower listens to the leader's ideas, and the follower is willing to change and grow. A climate of change is cultivated which leads to congregational change. Leaders must make changes in themselves before they can expect changes in others. This was true for Paul.

Who in your experience has demonstrated great trust and thus brought change in your community or in your church?

Level V: Personhood

A personhood leader lives and dies with his people as he mentors them to reach their leadership potential in the organization. Personhood leaders come from successful level IV leaders.

Integrity is measured by how a leader lives. People may forget much of what a leader says, but they remember how a leader lives. The daily prayerful study of Scripture is the single, most important and powerful discipline in life of level V leaders because it points their lives, like a compass, to "true north," our divine destiny.⁵⁸

This person is unique in that they see the big picture (dream) and are able to translate the effects of that vision to his or her followers' benefit. This person is eloquent in life and eloquent in words. Authentic is a word that describes a level five leader. This person relies on the facts which lend others to trust them implicitly.

The level five leader is available to assist when needed. The assistance is offered and not mandated. Assistance given recognizes that two can do more than one. This leader is respected more than just liked.

The level five leader loves the people he or she leads. There is expressed care and concern for the followers and their families. This leader touches the lives of his

⁵⁷ Fryar, *Servant Leadership*, 11.

⁵⁸ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 324.

followers in many ways. These touches are emotional in nature for leader and followers.

Bible Study (Acts 21:19-20)

Paul reached the level of leadership his skills allowed. He stayed focused on God's teaching, lived out that word, and spoke to those who listened to him. The writer of Acts reports that thousands listened to and believed Paul's words (Acts 21: 19-20).

Leaders cannot place themselves on the personhood level; only others can do that. The best people can do is work their way up through the levels of leadership. Personhood leaders are seen by others as bigger than life. Followers want leaders to know what the followers are doing, and they want to be with personhood leaders. They would sacrifice all for these leaders. Paul was that kind of leader. During house arrest, Paul remained in his own rented quarters and openly welcomed all who came, and he preached and taught about Jesus Christ. During this time of confinement, Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

When Paul was released from house arrest, he visited Ephesus, and left Timothy to supervise the churches. Paul traveled to Macedonia and wrote 1 Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul visited Crete, left Titus there to supervise those churches, went to Nicopolis in Achaia (Titus 3:12), and wrote Titus to encourage him. He visited Troas (2 Timothy 4:13) where he was suddenly arrested, taken to Rome, imprisoned, and finally beheaded. During his last days in Rome, Paul wrote 2 Timothy.

Believers in Jesus ever since Paul's day have made him bigger than life. His doctrinal statements have had immense influence on lives ever since he wrote them. There are few people who have had the influence that Paul has had. He wrote the greatest portion of the New Testament. He was the greatest missionary and church planter of the first century. All one has to do is look at books that are written about him and see the one word title of Paul on the cover of a book and those of us in the Christian community know who that book is about. That is personhood leadership!

In Philippians 1: 15, 16 Paul tells us that "some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry. They also preach Christ out of selfish ambition." Paul "preached out of goodwill...in love." "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

John Maxwell states the following are important:

1. Know what level you are leading from.
2. Know and apply the qualities that are needed at each level.
3. Know what you must do to reach the next level.

4. Teach others to be leaders.⁵⁹

Which level of leadership are you at presently?

Which behavior demonstrates that fact?

What is it that you need to learn to attain the next level?

How will you mentor another person to be a leader?

Movie Discussion

The movie *Les Misérables* teaches us about the five levels of leadership. Place below each level a character from the movie that you believe exhibited a particular level of leadership. Explain your choices:

V. Personhood

IV. People Development

III. Production

II. Permission

I. Position

⁵⁹ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader within You*, 21.

Practical Application of the Five Leadership Levels

Scenarios for the group:

Break into at least five groups.

Group #1 acts out a scene from the movie demonstrating level one leadership.

Group #2 acts out a scene from the movie demonstrating level two leadership.

Group #3 acts out a scene from the movie demonstrating level three leadership.

Group #4 acts out a scene from the movie demonstrating level four leadership.

Group #5 acts out a scene from the movie demonstrating level five leadership.

You have five minutes to prepare. Please be creative in your use of characters.

Which level of leadership do you practice presently and why do you think so?

Goal: Identify participants' leadership styles and motivate them to move to the next level of leadership.

What will you do to move to the next leadership level?

Goal: Participants will identify a mentor who will help them move to the next level.

How do you see the five levels of leadership working in your congregation?

Goal: Participants will see the big picture of leadership and the different levels and responsibilities to leadership in their churches.

What kind of leader do you see in the following words from Psalm 107: 23, 24? "Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the lord, His wondrous works in the deep"

Module Evaluation Form

Please fill out your evaluation form for this module and turn it in before leaving.
Thank you! See you at the next module!!

Homework**Preview of Module Two: Change in the Rural Church**

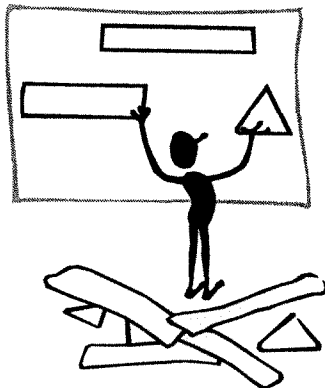
Please read *Who Moved My Cheese?*⁶⁰ When you register for this module you will get a copy of the book.

You are also expected to view the movie, *Groundhog Day* (2002, DVD, Director Harold Ramis, Columbia Pictures, PG). You can arrange to watch the movie here at the Lazarus Center, or rent or buy the DVD.

⁶⁰ Spencer Johnson and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (New York: Putnam, 1998).

Module Two- Hope for Change

Leader's Edition



Change is inevitable except from a vending machine. –bumper sticker wisdom
 How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb? Change?!?
 "Change is good—You start."—sign on a T-shirt

Preparation:

Prior to the event, participants should ...

- Read *Who Moved My Cheese?* Spencer Johnson (1998, New York, Putnam and Sons)
- Watch *Groundhog Day* (2002, DVD, Director Harold Ramis, Columbia Pictures, PG)
- Read Romans 12

Module Topic: Change

Main Concept: Change can be beneficial.

Intended Outcome: Leaders will be empowered to deal with change

Introduction

Before we begin our journey, we turn to our Heavenly Father for guidance:

St. Francis Prayer

Disturb us, O Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord, when
with the abundance of things we possess
we have lost our thirst
for the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity.
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
we have allowed our vision
of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, O Lord, to dare more boldly
to venture on wider seas
where storms will show Your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask You to push back
the horizons of our hopes;
And to push us in the future
in strength, courage, hope, and love.

This we ask in the name of our Captain,
Who is Jesus Christ.
Amen

Some change questions

The dictionary's definition of status quo is "the way things are" or "the existing state of affairs."⁶¹ Status quo in the church reminds me of a person hanging by a rope. He cannot touch the ground with his feet nor can that person see because they refuse to open their eyes. They do not have the strength to climb up the rope nor the will to drop. They are afraid they will fall to their death when, in reality, the fall is only a few feet. As this illustration shows, much of the resistance to change and the intense hold on status quo is based on perception, not reality.

I want the participant to recognize fact from fiction, perception from reality. This will help to recognize when to let go and when to holdfast.

Status quo in the church is creating time warps where the past will be preserved so reactionary folk can flock there for a safe—temporary—old familiar haven.⁶²

The church has been and remains for many a safe temporary haven. They go to church to find safety from the cruelty of the world they live in. They see the many changes in their world and refuse to conform to the ways of the world.

In 1970, Francis Schaeffer saw change in the church coming. The church today should be getting ready and talking about issues of tomorrow and not issues of 20 to 30 years ago, because the church is going to be squeezed in a wringer. If we found it tough in these last few years, what are we going to do when we are faced with the real changes that are ahead?⁶³

We are now faced with the real changes that Francis Schaeffer spoke about in 1970. Change is hard, anytime there is change in the air; people hesitate and wait to hear the bad news. Resistance to change is still present thirty seven years later. A new hymnal with large print is offered to the church and the members say "No thanks, the old one works just fine."

Another example of resistance to change as told by a pastor; I was about to enter the sanctuary to preach a life-changing message when Art approached me and said, "Pastor, you're responsible for bringing all these new people into this church! You think all this growth is good. Now there's somebody parked in my parking spot!" Art was one of

⁶¹ Webster's Universal Dictionary & Thesaurus (Concord, Ontario: Geddes & Grosset, 2003), 795

⁶² Brian McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 14

⁶³ McLaren, *Reinventing Your Church*, 15

those people who consistently put *comfort* above the cross. He was unwilling to make sacrifices for the good of others. But Art isn't alone in that category. It's a root problem in the church that manifests itself in symptoms of selfishness.... The truth is, many Christians have a consumer approach to the church—one that allows them to avoid stretching—one that ignores the roughness of the cross—one that preserves comfort at all costs.⁶⁴

How do you know your church is too comfortable? How to know if your church is alive or dead?

The answer to both questions is found in the following statement by Thomas Kempis, "If Christ is among us, then it is necessary that we sometimes yield up our own opinion.... Trust not too much to thine own opinion, but be ready also to hear the opinions of others." Your ability to sacrifice your comfort is one-way to tell whether you're in a live or dead church.⁶⁵

I know a church that has been a family size church for over 100 years (50 or less in worship attendance). Over the past twenty years, the church has grown and shrunk repeatedly. New and fresh faces move into the area, they join the church with enthusiasm because of a pastor and his preaching, and then these new and fresh faces disappear.

What do you think is the problem? How would you solve it? Do you see any applications for your own church?

For that church to continue to grow in membership both new and old members have to yield up their own opinion and listen to the opinion of the other. If the two sides are unwilling to work together they will repeat the cycle of growth and decline again.

Bible Study

A key Biblical text is Romans 12:1-2: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Paul calls for a spiritual paradigm shift that translates directly into daily practice. Paul presents spiritual themes in chapters 1-11 and in chapter 12 and following shows how those themes of righteousness, faith, redemption, atonement and reconciliation work out in our everyday lives.

⁶⁴ Kent R. Hunter, *Discover Your Windows* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 31

⁶⁵ Hunter, *Discover Your Windows*, 37-38

Paul is giving a summary of the human condition. Without God man is a lost and condemned race. In light of God's mercy, Paul urges his readers to pursue a lifestyle that expresses love and grace in relating to others. Paul exhorts a change in behavior.

Spiritual people are Christians changed in mind and body. This is a living sacrifice. Without sacrifice, there is no change. Without a change of heart and mind there is no sacrifice. Comfortable people have to sacrifice their comfort in order to realize that change can be used in good ways.

The truth of Romans 12: 1,2 is for the child of God to weigh, ponder and decide what changes are needed for personal renewal.

The book, *Who Moved My Cheese?*⁶⁶ teaches profound truths about change as well. This simple parable is about four characters that live in a maze and look for cheese to nourish them and make them happy. Cheese is a metaphor for what you want in life-whether it is a good job, a loving relationship, money or a possession, health or spiritual peace of mind. In the book, the cheese moves. To survive, the mice have to move with the cheese. This takes changing comfortable patterns and assumptions to see something better which takes an attitude shift and adaptation.

The four imaginary characters depicted in this story represent the simple and the complex parts of ourselves-the mice: Sniff, who sniffs out change early; Scurry, who scurries into action; Hem, who denies and resists change as he fears it will lead to something worse; and Haw, who learns to adapt in time when he sees changing can lead to something better.

How did the book remind you of your church?
Which character did you identify with most?

Practical Application

In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Charlie Brown says to Linus: "Perhaps you can give me an answer Linus. What would you do if you felt that no one likes you?" Linus replies, "I'd try to look at myself objectively, and see what I could do to *improve*. That's *my* answer, Charlie Brown." To which Charlie replies, "I *hate* that answer!"

⁶⁶ Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (New York, New York: Putnam's Sons, 1998)

There are reasons why many of us, like Charlie Brown, resist change.

1. The change isn't self-initiated.
2. Routine is disrupted.
3. Change creates fear of the unknown.
4. The purpose of the change is unclear.
5. Change creates fear of failure
6. The rewards for change don't match the effort change requires.
7. People are too satisfied with the way things are.
8. Change won't happen when people engage in negative thinking.
9. The followers lack respect for the leader.
10. The leader resists change because of personal criticism
11. Change means personal loss.
12. Change requires additional commitment.
13. Narrow-minded thwarts acceptance of new ideas.
14. Tradition resists change.⁶⁷

Which of the above reasons do you resonate with most? Why?

Resistance to congregational change has more to do with the fear of conflict than with conflict itself. Congregations are more fearful of losing a few sheep from the flock, than of forsaking the mission of Jesus to the world.⁶⁸ The focus of the rural church needs to be that of bringing Jesus to a hurting world. We must not let fear cloud our vision.

Max DePree said, "In the end, it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are." It's a fact that when you're through changing, you're through. You can make a choice today to change. And when change is successful, you will look back at it and call it growth.⁶⁹ This happens more than we realize. Does the change we face help our personal growth or hinder it?

Let's go to the heart of the matter. The Christian Church in America is in desperate need of leadership. It needs leadership that can guide the church through change. The church is in danger of drifting downstream and over the waterfalls of irrelevance.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 56-61

⁶⁸ Thomas G. Bandy, *Fragile Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 113

⁶⁹ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 74

⁷⁰ Jock E. Ficken, *Change: Learning to Lead It and Living to Tell About It* (Lima, Ohio: Fairway press, 1999), 7

I am reminded of an old movie where two men are fighting over control of the boat they are in. As they are battling each other, the boat is being carried down river toward a waterfall! That is what is happening in many of our churches. The church members are fighting with each other while the waterfall of irrelevance looms ahead!

The question should not be “Will we or won’t we change?” but “when and how much will we change?” Nothing stays the same except change, which is always present. Even in the beginning, Adam reportedly said to Eve, as they were led out of Paradise, “My dear, we live in a time of transition.”⁷¹

Another goal of this module is to distinguish between change and transition. Change is situational. Situations arise that change the congregation. The largest employer announces layoffs. The congregation no longer reflects the neighborhood surrounding the church building. The congregation unexpectedly receives \$2 million. A congregation’s success at responding to any change ultimately depends upon the congregation’s claiming a new identity and adopting new ways of being in response to the new situation. When congregations fail to claim new identities and adopt new ways of being in response to change, ministries stall and become less relevant; congregational life deteriorates.⁷²

Congregational transition is the process of reshaping the congregation’s faith foundation, identity, and ways of being in response to change from a new situation. Transition is a psychological journey from the congregational’s established identity to the identity befitting the reality brought on by change. A congregation is to approach a change as initiating a transition then the congregation itself becomes the focus. This is a time for the congregation to look at what it needs to let go of.⁷³

The rural church can only change when enough people in it change. Let’s look at the following checklist for change and identify some questions that will help us in the change process:

Checklist for Change

Yes No

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Will this change benefit the follower? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is this change compatible with the purpose of the church? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is this change specific and clear? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the top 20 percent (the influencers) in favor of this change? |

⁷¹ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 72

⁷² Satterlee, *When God Speaks Through Change*, 3

⁷³ *Ibid*, 4

- ___ ___ Is it possible to test this change before making a total commitment to it?
- ___ ___ Are physical, financial, and human resources available to make this change?
- ___ ___ Is this change reversible?
- ___ ___ Is this change the next obvious step?
- ___ ___ Does this change have both short and long-range benefits?
- ___ ___ Is the leadership bringing about this change?
- ___ ___ Is the timing right?⁷⁴

Questions in the checklist that are answered with a “No” will indicate that change will be difficult.

Why people like Hem still resist change in the rural church.

What I have found in my research is there are those who are still resisting change in the church. They have not deciphered between what can change in the church and what cannot. Rather than risk any changes, they continue to resist until all in that church will leave or die. Support for this is found in Thomas Bandy’s disturbing data on change:

1. The smaller the church is, the less open it is to change.
2. Newer congregations think they are already contemporary and need not change
3. Moderate and liberal churches are less open to change than anybody else.
4. Finally, conflict grows worse as worship changes or financial debts increase.⁷⁵

On the other hand, The Evangelical Free Church of America states that “In the final analysis the difficulty of church change cannot become the determining issue. The ultimate issues for the church are the effective fulfillment of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission provides a litmus test...for the collective faith of a congregation.”⁷⁶

The standard U.S. railroad gauge, the distance between rails, is 4 ft. 8.5 inches. The measurement was brought to the United States by English expatriates. The railroads in England used the same wheel spacing that conformed to the spacing of old wheel ruts on old long-distance roads, because wheels and axle would be broken if they did not ride smoothly in the well-established ruts. And the ruts were developed through the use of these roads constructed by imperial Rome for their legions and war chariots, which were built to standard specifications. The conclusion is that the U.S. standard rail-road gauge of 4 ft. 8.5 inches is based on the imperial Roman army war chariot. Can you imagine

⁷⁴ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 62

⁷⁵ Bandy, *Fragile Hope*, 101

⁷⁶ Embrace Change. Home Page, 24 February 2004
<http://www.efca.org/health/checkup/change.html>, 1

trying to change that tradition!⁷⁷ This true story gives us a basis for understanding past decisions and why many will not change. The following discussion looks at possible changes that have become traditionalized.

Discussion (10 minutes)

“It is the nature of people as they grow older to protest against change, particularly change for the better.” - John Steinbeck, author

1. Read the above quote. Give examples of possible changes for the better in the following arenas that were initially protested by people. (four minutes)

In the workplace
In the field of entertainment
In the church

2. Discuss what values and contributions we would have missed if these changes had not been made. (six minutes)

Movie and Book Discussion

You were asked to watch the movie *Groundhog Day*. This movie portrays the various emotional states through which the man passed in coming to terms with being stuck in time. He moved from panic to despair and then to cynicism, to a desire for self-destruction and finally to hope. When he realizes he cannot change others but that he can change himself he discovers the impact he has on others' lives. The world around us may be stuck but we are not.

Identify and describe a character in the movie that acted like:

Sniff--
Scurry--
Hem--
Haw--

The purpose of this module is to give you hope through the changes that occur in your life and in your church. You have received a survey to gauge your congregations' readiness to face change. This is a tool you can use when facing a big change. You have also received a list of reasons we resist change. These are tools that you can take home and use.

⁷⁷ Rendle, 1998, 11-12

My hope is that you and members of your congregations by the mercy of God, “present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”—Romans 12:1,2

Module Evaluation Form

Please fill out your evaluation form and turn it in before leaving. Thank you!

Homework

Preview of Module Three: Conflict in the rural church

Read *Guiding People through Conflict* by Ken Sande. When you register for the course you will receive a copy.

View the movie, *Metallica, Some Kind of Monster*. We have a copy for you to view in the Lazarus Center or you can purchase a DVD.

Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Twenty-Four Hours 1980,

Module Three- “Hope From Conflict”

Leader’s Edition



“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

Preparation:

Prior to the event, participants will...

- Read *Guiding People through Conflict* by Ken Sande⁷⁹. You will receive a copy of the workbook when you register.
- View the movie *Metallica, Some Kind of Monster*.
- Read Acts 15: 1-35

Module Topic: Conflict

Main Concept: Learning to deal with conflict

Intended Outcome: Empower the leader to learn the value of healthy conflict.

⁷⁹ Peacemaker Ministries 1998, Billings, MT: www.HisPeace.org

Introduction

We begin with this prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is your definition of conflict?

An axiom often used by Minnesota North District President Don Fondow, “If fishermen are not fishing they are fighting.” Many of our rural churches have forgotten or lost their purpose. That purpose was and is to be “fishers of men” netting people from the sea of discontent and despair. In these last days, the rural churches have stopped fishing and are fighting.

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:1-3).

The Latin root word for conflict is “fligere, which means “to strike.” This root is found in the word “inflict,” which means to strike something onto (in) somebody, and in the word “profligate,” which literally means to “strike forward” or to knock someone in the face. The word “conflict” means to “strike together.”⁸⁰

Another definition of conflict states, “Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.”⁸¹ This definition points to several elements present in nearly all conflicts. The emphasis on perception is important, because it is difficult to see any point of view other than our own, especially in conflict.

Normal conflict happens wherever normally functioning people interact. It is also normal for people to disagree when they solve problems together, since differing biases, priorities, and experiences bring different perspectives about how to handle the problems.⁸²

⁸⁰ Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *Church Fights, Managing Conflict in the Local Church*, (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1937), 28

⁸¹ Marlin E. Thomas, *Transforming Conflict in Your Church: A Practical Guide* (Herald Press, Scottdale, Az. 2002), 18

⁸² G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers, Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*, (Westminster Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997), 54

Conflict: good or bad?

By itself normal conflict is neither good nor bad. But we can choose to deal with it constructively or destructively. Thus, the outcome of conflict resolution can be either good or bad. It can divide us or it can strengthen us. It can be a doorway to growth, or a pit that entraps us. The danger in conflict is that we may move farther apart. The opportunity is that we can grow closer together.⁸³

Getting rid of normal conflict is impossible. In fact, we may not want to, especially if conflict can be an open door that brings about creative, constructive change. “Rocking the boat” (in other words, creating some kinds of conflict) is sometimes even beneficial. At the same time, limiting or managing the intensity of conflict is also important for preventing confusion, chaos, and even violence. The conflict we see around us—in the world, in our neighborhoods, and even in our churches—are frightening. However, conflict provides opportunities.⁸⁴

Healthy conflict helps keep communication open and honest. It promotes authenticity by recognizing diversity; it teaches how to be a community of faith rather than an artificially homogeneous group. Healthy conflict helps us to keep learning and being creative. We know there is conflict in all churches. In the past, several factors have tended to mitigate and control church conflict. The extended family, socialization, and healthy leadership have helped keep the “lid on” in previous generations. In the rural church before the 1980’s, there was a healthy dependence on one another.⁸⁵

Change is the landscape of life and it is also the landscape of the church as well. The church can see change as a friend or as an enemy. The healthy church regards most changes as friends. Let’s take a look at the early Christian church to see if they knew the value of healthy conflict.

Bible Study

Let’s take out our Bibles and turn to Acts 15: 1-35.

They came together because of a dispute Paul and Barnabas had with some men from Judea over circumcision (v. 1, 2, 5).

⁸³ Marlin E. Thomas, *Transforming Conflict in Your Church: A Practical Guide*, (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa. 2002), 17

⁸⁴ Thomas, 17

⁸⁵ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers, Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*, Westminster Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997), 50

Can a Jewish follower of Jesus get along with a Gentile follower of Jesus? The reason I ask this is because for the first time old and sacred traditions (Jewish and Gentile) were brought together under one roof.

For the Jew circumcision was more than mere ceremony. Circumcision united the Jews to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who followed the law of Moses. It was in circumcision that blood was spilled to prove their identification with the one true God as His people, the chosen race. Therefore the Jews stated in v. 1, 5, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.” They wanted to keep their Jewish identity but have the Gentiles lose their identity and become more Jewish.

The Gentiles also had old and sacred religious traditions. They worshipped many gods and goddesses who they believed blessed them with abundance of crops, children and cattle. Their gods gave meaning and purpose to events around them. Now, with becoming followers of Jesus old ways would have to be left behind and new ways adopted. The old ways for the Gentiles are listed in v. 29, food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. These were means by which they were to identify with their gods and with each other.

The Jews wanted to follow the moral law in this matter but in verse 10, Peter tells us that to circumcise the Gentile is not following moral law but following the ceremonial law which was burdensome and oppressive not only for their forefathers but for them as well. One design of the gospel was to set men free from such rites and ceremonies. They would be an infringement of Christian freedom.

After Barnabas and Paul give account of God’s work among the Gentiles James (Acts 15: 13-21) gives his opinion “that we shouldn’t trouble non-Jewish people who are turning to God.” James does not assume authority to settle the case when he states that we do not molest, disturb, or oppress them, by imposing on them unnecessary and burdensome rites and ceremonies.

The Gentiles are told in a letter (verses 23-29) that “You will do well to avoid these things” so that non-Jewish believers were to not give offense to the Jewish converts.

Both Jews and Gentiles were to leave their identities behind as they became followers of Jesus. Verse 22 states that there was agreement and the whole church was pleased that non-Jewish believers are not to be circumcised. Also, Silas and Judas (Jewish leaders who were believers, v. 27) were chosen to accompany the letters sent to the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia in order to substantiate the agreement made by the Jerusalem council. Verse 31 gives us the Gentile response to the reading of the letter, “they rejoiced”. The Gentiles were willing to leave the old traditions behind. There was cooperation and compromise by both groups.

Conflict Generalizations

What follows is a list of generalizations made about conflict:

- Conflict is real, persistent, and sometimes mean.
- Conflict can be normal, abnormal, or spiritual
- Conflict can escalate into abuse and inflict collateral damage.
- Conflict can be managed poorly or well.
- Imagining that conflict should not exist in the church is denial.
- Effective conflict management is not yet norm in the church.⁸⁶

General discussion-

Which one would you consider as the most important?

Explain how your choice fits the conflict in Acts 15: 1-35.

Book Discussion

Ken Sande's workbook, *Guiding People through Conflict* shows us that God is calling His people to put His peacemaking system back into practice. He states there are three responses to conflict: Two responses that typically drive people apart and one response that promotes peace and harmony. The diagram on page 6 describes the "Slippery Slope." Let's take a closer look at the Escape, Attack and Conciliation responses on pages 6-8.

Which responses to conflict were used in Acts 15: 1-35?

Conciliation responses, including discussion and mediation were used in Acts 15 to come to a peaceful decision. Verses 6, 7 mention the discussion. Most conflicts can be resolved by giving one party individual counseling on how to go to the other party and work out their differences in private. Individual counseling did not restore peace. Mediation is used when representatives from both the parties go voluntarily before a council in Jerusalem. The mediators ask questions and give advice, but it is still up to the parties to decide on a final solution. Arbitration is used when the parties cannot agree with the help of a mediator. They explain their views before one or more church-appointed arbitrators, who are given the authority to render a final and binding decision on the matter.

The parties in Acts 15: 1-35 could not find agreement through individual counseling so they took the next step which is mediation. Did the parties in Acts 15: 1-35 settle their dispute through mediation or arbitration? I am in the mediation camp. First, they went to

⁸⁶ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers, Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*, (Westminster Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997), 48

the council freely, second, there was discussion and third James gave his opinion and fourth, the parties agreed to a settlement. James did not have authority to settle the case, but merely gave his opinion or counsel.

How many believe that the Jerusalem Council used mediation to settle the dispute? Why?

However, based on the English reading one can state that James acting as leader of the council (arbitrator) commanded that the parties follow his judgment (vv. 19, 20), second, that Silas and Judas were sent to make sure the arbitrator's decision was carried out (v. 27).

How many believe that the Jerusalem Council used arbitration to settle the dispute? Why?

Acts 15: 1-35 was an example of biblical peacemaking. Sadly, this process has been neglected for decades, depriving Christians of the help they need to resolve their differences in a godly manner. That is the purpose of this module, to guide people through conflict.

Guiding People through Conflict uses four principles:

1. Glorify God, seeks to please God and not ourselves by depending on His wisdom.
2. Get the Log out of your own eye, seeks to place responsibility for our own actions on ourselves and not on our opponents.
3. Go and show your brother his fault, seeks to talk directly with another in private and if that is unsuccessful bring along others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.
4. Go and be reconciled, seeks genuine peace and reconciliation through beneficial solutions to our differences.

By God's grace, we apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will remember that success, in God's eyes, is not a matter of specific results but of faithful, dependent obedience.⁸⁷

Church Conflict Dynamics

Intra-church conflict has its origins in a number of dynamics, including the following:

Theological cleansing is illegitimate or inappropriate correcting and disciplining of believers who are in error. A significant indicator is vindictiveness. Unwillingness to negotiate or demand punishment demonstrates a cleansing campaign.

⁸⁷ Ken Sande, *Guiding People Through Conflict*, (Peacemaker Ministries, Billings, MT. 1998), 15

Infrastructure collapse refers to how conflicts that once occurred among extended families in rural churches in whatever time-honored method had worked in previous generations. They had a disagreement and they went to that family member to settle it. This no longer is happening because family members have moved away.

Eldership is where we no longer respect the opinion or leadership of our elders in the church. What we have lost is the patient, sensitive, thoughtful “cool” that wise elders can provide but is no longer respected by younger members.

A volcano effect happens to churches that experience declining membership, budget problems, and a lack of spiritual discipline. Frustration builds on frustration, until there is a boiling effect that becomes an eruption.

Anger is a normal response to violate expectations and is automatic. When healthy anger management models and habits are not present, anger becomes hurtful.

Negative socialization is when church members have not learned healthy skills for managing provocation and destructiveness.

Litigiousness is the adversarial approach to conflict. This is where the secular has influenced the sacred. This approach has added impetus to contentious attitudes in the church.

“Called” vs. “Hired” demonstrates the church in many locations has succumbed to the business model. The pastor has become an employee. That means the pastor is to keep the members happy. This is the opposite of a healthy church. A healthy church has God’s purposes in mind.⁸⁸

To learn the value of healthy conflict let’s take out our workbook, *Guiding People through Conflict* and turn to page 4.

The above dynamics of conflict are being played out more and more in our churches. The response is to escape or to attack. Impulsive reactions to conflict will not please God and will not produce a constructive solution. Escape responses (page 4) are denial, flight, and suicide. Attack responses (page 5) are litigation, assault and murder.

The escape and attack responses to conflict almost always damage relationships and delay just solutions to their differences. When disagreement begins the people in our churches need to commit themselves to following the three steps of peacemaking: discussion, mediation and arbitration.

⁸⁸ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers, Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*, (Westminster Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997), 48-54

Discussion means going to Matthew 18: 15-20 for guidance as well as going to other Christians for their advice in dealing with a dispute.

Mediation is when people are unable to resolve a dispute in private, they are to seek one or more people to meet with them to help them communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions.

Arbitration is when the parties cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a substantive issue, they may appoint arbitrators to listen to their arguments and render a decision. Each of the peacemaking responses is to find a just and mutually agreeable solution to a conflict.

In the list of 8 church conflict dynamics (above) place each of them (as they have been handled in the past) in one of two responses: Escape or Attack (page 4 and 5).

Now, let's take each of the 8 church conflict dynamics (above) and use a peacemaking response (page 5 and 6).

We are ready for some practical application.

Movie Discussion

A documentary crew followed the band Metallica for the better part of 2001-2003, a time of tension and release for the rock band, as they recorded their album *St. Anger*, fought bitterly, and sought the counsel of their on-call psychiatrist.

What can we learn from the movie *Metallica, Some Kind of Monster*?
Even a monster wants to learn how to handle conflict in a healthy manner.

What scenes in the movie portrayed attack responses?
What scenes in the movie portrayed escape responses?
What scenes in the movie portrayed conciliation responses?

How did the movie characters handle their conflict?
Who will the psychiatrist be for the rural church?

Instead of bringing in a psychiatrist, we will use the three healthy responses to conflict (discussion, mediation and arbitration). Conflict comes and goes. Ability to overcome conflict equals a healthy church. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6: 1, 2). We create the culture that honors Christ.

Module Evaluation Form

Please fill out your evaluation form and turn it in before leaving. Thank you! See you at the next module!!

Homework

Preview of Module Four: Forgiveness

Read *The New Freedom of Forgiveness* by David Augsburger (Moody Press, Chicago, 2000). When you register for the course you will receive a copy.

View the movie, *Dead Man Walking* (DVD, Director: Tim Robbins).

Read Matthew 18: 15-20.

Module Four- “Hope from Forgiveness”

Leader’s Edition



“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”
1 John 1: 8, 9

“Confess your sins to each other” James 5:16

Preparation:

Prior to the event participants should...

- Read *The New Freedom of Forgiveness* by David Augsburger, (Moody Press, Chicago, 2000).
- View the movie, *Dead Man Walking* (DVD, Director: Tim Robbins).
- Read Matthew 18: 15-20

Module Topic: Forgiveness

Main Concept: Forgiveness is a gift of love

Intended outcome: When we are empowered to forgive we regain the other as a Christian sister or a Christian brother.

Introduction

We begin with this prayer:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” Psalm 19:14 ESV

Please look at this picture of Jesus dying on the cross. On the bottom of the picture is a caption, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

What do you sense the picture depicts?

When I look at the suffering Christ on the cross and realize that He died for me, it is as though a knife cuts an emotional path to the core of my being. Shock, resentment, bitterness, denial, panic, numbness, rage, anguish are removed from me and replaced by forgiveness, acceptance and Christian maturity.

The scene is Jesus dying for humanity and all humanity does not care if he lives or dies. Humanity from all-time has placed Him on that cross by their sins and yet He forgives! They do not want forgiveness and yet He forgives. And a small group of followers of Jesus are there experiencing some of the same negative emotions. He forgives them as well.

Jesus can be seen as our example. Others see Him as a model. He is all that but Jesus empowers us to forgive because He forgives. He gave His life for us. He gives meaning to forgiveness. He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) by which we are empowered by God through His salvific activity on the cross to forgive. Without that all atoning love we cannot forgive. Romans 5:5 says that, “...because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Forgiveness is God’s activity. We are the instruments of healing grace when we prescribe the remedies God has given us.

It’s time to quit fooling ourselves into believing that we are “just fine’ and that things are “just fine” and that everything will turn out “just fine.”⁸⁹

What is forgiveness?

Forgiveness by definition, is the mutual recognition that repentance is genuine and that right relationships have either been restored or are now achieved. The two Greek words for forgiveness are translated most clearly as “to release or set free” and “to offer a gift of grace.”

⁸⁹ Harold L. Senkbeil, *Dying to Live, The Power of forgiveness*, (Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 1994), 24

Bible Study

A key biblical text which gives us a pathway to healing and love is Matthew 18:15-20: If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

What does Matt. 18:15-20 say about forgiveness? Jesus is the future of mankind; He is the breaking-in of the new creation, the only life in a dying world. He came to forgive. He does not show favoritism in His acts of mercy. He heals the sick, young, old, rich, Jew and Gentile. He offers physical, emotional, mental and spiritual healing. He welcomed all as He sojourned toward the cross. Jesus died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6)

Christians are to forgive not to benefit oneself but to “regain your brother.” So many times we forgive and cannot forget. Are we forgiving? Or are we saying, “I know how to overlook a wrong but not to forgive it.”⁹⁰

The message of reconciliation is salutary not only for unbelievers but also for believers. All need to hear that eternally sweet news that we are His chosen ones, brought near to Him through the blood of His own Son. (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

Confession is a human necessity. Truth is as necessary to us as air. Integrity is the nourishment of all healthy relationships with others and with God. We discover and experience release from our guilt (which we will talk about later).

From the writings of Corrie Ten Boom who was imprisoned with her family by the Nazis for giving aid to Jews early in the World War II:

Her elderly father and beloved sister, Betsie, died as a result of the brutal treatment they received in prison. After the war Corrie was at a church service in Munich, Germany that she saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of her jailers that she had seen since then. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie’s pain blanched face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and

⁹⁰ David Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 2000), 51

bowing. “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,” he said. “To think that, as you say, he has washed my sins away!” He thrust his hand out to me and I kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? I prayed, “Lord Jesus, forgive me and help me to forgive him.” As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current passed from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. So, I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness the world’s healing hinges, but on Him. When he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, with the command, the love itself.⁹¹

Corrie ten Boom was in conflict. She was experiencing emotions of anger and resentment as she faced a man who brought up horrific mental images of prison life. Not just prison life but of the deaths of loved ones by this man’s doing. She was trapped by those images. She was in emotional pain. The past is alive and in her heart of hearts she is not well. Can she move past the pain?

Once forgiveness was asked for and granted both she and the former prison guard were able to begin to move forward and begin the healing. Both Corrie and the former guard begin the painful journey toward healing.

Corrie could have let her negative emotions control her and many would not fault her. This marvelous story is intriguing since it is, on careful reflection, not about forgiveness; it is about love which is a gift that Corrie received from God.⁹²

Forgiveness is not an act—it is a process. It is not a transaction but a series of steps. Instant solutions tend to be the ways of escape, avoidance, or denial, not of forgiveness. Forgiveness takes time—time to be aware on one’s feelings, alert to one’s pain and anger, open to understand the other’s perspective, willing to resolve the pain and reopen the future.⁹³

How does Corrie begin the journey of forgiveness?
What gift do both of them receive in the granting of forgiveness?

⁹¹ David Augsburger, (Moody Press, Chicago, 2000), 47

⁹² Ibid, 47

⁹³ Ibid, 48

The Five Steps of Forgiveness

According to David Augsburger, there are five steps of forgiveness:

1. Restoring the attitude of love. (love is extended)
Forgiving cannot begin until love has been re-extended to the offender. To love another is to see that person as full of worth and precious regardless of any wrongdoing.
2. Releasing the painful past. (the past is recognized as past)
To hold the past between us as if it could be undone or to demand that what was done must be redone is fantasy, not reality. To come to terms with reality is to accept the past as past. We are not our past; we are equally free to change if we accept the freedom that is within us. To affirm that freedom is the next step of forgiveness.
3. Reconstructing the relationship. (remember the pain together)
To review the pain of offense within each of us and between the both of us is not easy. As we shed that anger and pain through trusting each other we recognize the genuineness of each other's intentions. Our repentance needs to be authentic.
4. Reopening the future. (recognize real repentance together)
As the wound is healed a new level of relating to each other has been reached. Both parties are to decide if they will continue the conversation or part company.
5. Reaffirming the relationship. (agree to forget together, recognize real repentance together)⁹⁴
Reconciliation is to end in celebration, or the process has not ended. To celebrate the mutual recognition that right relationship has now been restored or achieved.

I want you to get into groups of 3:

Share a story with your group of forgiveness from your own life.
Which steps of forgiveness did you experience?

Consider the following story:

A group of students asked their teacher, "Rabbi, how can we know when the night has ended and the new day has begun?" "What have you been taught?" he asked. "It is the moment when one can tell the difference between a sheep and a goat," one said. "No, it is the moment when one can differentiate between a white thread and a black one," reported a second. "Neither are right," the rabbi replied. "It is the moment when you look in the face of someone you have known as your enemy, and you can see that it is

⁹⁴ Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*, Moody Press, Chicago, 48-50

your brother or sister. Until that moment, no matter how high the sun has risen, it is still night in your soul if you cannot see who is standing before you.”⁹⁵

We must see Christianity not as the love of ideas and principles but the love of people—people who differ markedly from us, even our enemies. We should not be too sure of our being Christian until we have found Him in that part of humanity that is most remote from our own.⁹⁶

Movie Discussion

Dead Man Walking is about a nun, Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) who ministers to a death-row inmate, Matthew Poncelet, (Sean Penn) and results in the fact that she is faced with a moral crisis. She tries to reconcile her anti-death penalty views with the truth of the inmate’s actions and the pain felt by the victim’s family. *Dead Man Walking* refers to what the people on death row are called as they take that final walk towards their execution.

What does this movie have to say about forgiveness?

Matthew Poncelet is a nasty piece of work -- an arrogant, trash-talking racist. But, beneath all the bluster, he's lonely and frightened, as Helen discovers when she starts to probe. Helen is the one we identify with, and the person around which all the moral and spiritual crises revolve. How can she lend comfort to someone like Matthew Poncelet? How can she, as a servant of God, *refuse*? And, if she remains firm in her resolve to stand by his side, how can she face the parents of the murdered boy and girl? She is exposed to everyone's pain: Matthew's ("Sister, you're all I've got"), his family's, and that of the victims' relatives (looking for "simple justice for their unbearable loss"). It's almost more than one woman can bear, but Helen is strong -- strong enough to offer love to one of the most detestable human beings she has ever met. This story argues that all human beings, even the most corrupt, can be redeemed, can be touched by compassion. While consequences must come for crimes, there is still room for healing, for forgiveness, for love.

Does Helen show love in forgiveness? And which step(s) of forgiveness does she exhibit?

Let’s talk about the emotional side of forgiveness.

What emotions are experienced when a person is offended or hurt?

⁹⁵ David Augsburger, *The New Freedom of Forgiveness*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 2000), 55

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 107

Possible answers include shock, resentment, bitterness, denial, panic, numbness, rage, anguish are negative emotions).⁹⁷

General discussion-

Which emotions did you observe in the movie and who exhibited them?

Denial protects us from many kinds of hurts especially the emotions we experience when someone has wronged us. However, denial may protect for a time it denies our true feelings that need to be experienced for us to forgive.

Who in the movie used denial?

What is your definition of anger?

Are there different kinds of anger?

Destructive anger drives people apart, servers relationships, settles into the floor of the soul, contaminates all other feelings and through them thoughts, choices, and acts. Destructive anger freezes the normal processes of grieving into pathological mourning and ices over the depths of the soul.

Constructive anger seeks to break through the walls, yearns to remove the barriers, presses to open communication, mobilizes energy to work at injustices, and searches for opportunities to reach out to the other in genuine contact.⁹⁸

We have a choice between destructive anger and constructive anger. Central to the work of forgiveness is the task of working through our feelings of destructive anger. Destructive anger turned inward creates guilt or shame.

How did Helen work through her emotions? How have you been taught to deal with anger?

When you feel anger mounting, ask yourself,

What is my demand?

How am I demanding change?

What do I want?

An honest answer is like a dash of cold water to the temper.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ H. Arthur 1991, 36 and Augsburg, 18-20

⁹⁸ Augsburg, The New Freedom of Forgiveness, Moody Press, Chicago, 2000, 60

⁹⁹ Ibid, 67

Anger is not prohibited in the Bible. It is affirmed when it is channeled.

“If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry—don’t give the devil that sort of foothold...Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks. Be kind to one another; be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32)

Commentary on anger:

Be angry—but beware. You are never more vulnerable to evil than when you are angry. In anger, self-control is stretched to its ultimate capacities. Common sense works better at low temperatures. Reason decreases as your emotions rise.

Be angry—but be aware. Anger soon soars to illusions of power, sinks to resentment, and turns bitter. It can lead to temper, hatred, and malice.

Be angry—but be caring, the text concludes. The anger that is motivated by love of neighbor, love of the right, and love of God is worthy; it is worth the risk.¹⁰⁰

What is your definition of guilt?

Guilt is a much-maligned emotion. It is painful. For most people, the normal and healthy capacity to feel guilt is something to be prized, and the content of our guilt deserves to be explored, expressed and released.

We need to get beyond the conflict to deal with the negative emotions. Once we have put the negative emotions behind us we can move to forgiveness, acceptance and maturity. Repentance and forgiveness which are components of confession bring true reconciliation, healing, and the renewed ability to love both God and our neighbor.

Did you see this happen in the movie?

The Holy Spirit entitles you to give absolution in the name of God by these words, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (Jn. 20:21-23)¹⁰¹

You and I through the Holy Spirit have been given His peace. The question is can we live out that peace and carry that peace to others as we experience conflict? Did Helen give that peace to Matthew or to anyone else in the movie? Explain.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 66

¹⁰¹ Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace*, (Harper and Row, New York, 1962), 205

Role Play

Find a partner and think of a current situation in which forgiveness needs to be given. Imagine the conversation in which it is requested and granted, using the five steps of forgiveness as you dialogue. Then, two of you will volunteer to act out your dialogue for the rest of the group.

What did you hear and see in those dialogues?

How can confession and forgiveness best be nurtured and processed in a congregational setting?

If we take Jesus' concern for forgiveness as going to the brother or regaining the sister, then we will not reduce forgiveness to an attitude instead of an action. This workshop is to get us to invite the other to conversation about hurtful actions.

Learnings:

I must respect the other's right to refuse to converse.

I remain open for real forgiveness to happen sometime in the future.

I will recognize that the new relationship will be different from the previous one.

I must unlearn past ways of forgiveness that are not effective.

I will learn to forgive for the restoration of relationship and the renewal of community.¹⁰²

Module Evaluation Form

Please fill out your evaluation form and turn it in before leaving.

Thank you!

A Blessing—

Now, as you leave here may the peace of Christ which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as you go forth. Amen.

¹⁰² David Augsburger, *The new Freedom of Forgiveness*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 2000),

Resources for Rural Churches

A Checklist for Change:

Below are the questions you should review before attempting changes within your congregation. When the questions can be answered with a yes, change tends to be easier. Questions that can only be answered with no (or maybe) usually indicate that change will be difficult.

Yes No

- | | | |
|-------|-------|---|
| _____ | _____ | Will this change benefit the follower? |
| _____ | _____ | Is this change compatible with the purpose of the church? |
| _____ | _____ | Is this change specific and clear? |
| _____ | _____ | Are the top 20 percent (the influencers) in favor of this change? |
| _____ | _____ | Is it possible to test this change before making a total commitment to it? |
| _____ | _____ | Are physical, financial, and human resources available to make this change? |
| _____ | _____ | Is this change reversible? |
| _____ | _____ | Is this change the next obvious step? |
| _____ | _____ | Does this change have both short and long-range benefits? |
| _____ | _____ | Is the leadership bringing about this change? |
| _____ | _____ | Is the timing right? ¹⁰³ |

Reasons We Resist Change:

There is nothing more difficult to undertake, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than introducing change. We need to understand the reasons we resist change because unchanged leaders equal unchanged congregations.

1. The change isn't self-initiated.
2. Routine is disrupted.
3. Change creates fear of the unknown.
4. The purpose of the change is unclear.
5. Change creates fear of failure
6. The rewards for change don't match the effort change requires.
7. People are too satisfied with the way things are.
8. Change won't happen when people engage in negative thinking.
9. The followers lack respect for the leader.
10. The leader resists change because of personal criticism
11. Change means personal loss.
12. Change requires additional commitment.
13. Narrow-minded thwarts acceptance of new ideas.
14. Tradition resists change.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 62

A Demographic Resource

When a ministry wants to know more about its community, obtaining demographic information is a good place to go. This demographic study is offered through the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. This is a tool for the motivated congregation to find out where the mission field exists. Congregations need adequate data to assist them in making important mission decisions. Any congregation that does not reflect its community intentionally in its strategic planning will eventually plateau, decline and die.

This is a computer based program that can be sorted to reflect any specified geographic location. Data is then gathered about what kind of people, businesses and organizations are located in your locale. Included is information where the people live, how much money they make, their level of education, race, marital status, and age. One part of the study provides information about the buying habits and lifestyles of the residents in your area.

The purpose of all this information is so that a congregation or ministry can make an informed decision about its future direction. Population numbers are based on U.S. Census data and are updated for the current year and five-year estimates are updated every six months.

Five pieces of information that the demographic resource offers is who is our neighbor? How many are there? What are they like (culture)? Where are they? How do we reach them? This tool helps the congregation get to know its community. From this information a strategy can be planned.

Resource Contact

Mr. George Miller, Vice President, Lutheran Church Extension Fund, Minnesota North District office, 7264 Fairview Road, Baxter, 56425.

¹⁰⁴ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 56-61

Worship Litanies

This project offers worship services for the congregations. The goal for Christians is to seek reconciliation. There is no better way than once conflicted parties come together and find accord that they turn to God in worship and praise. This is done with a Worship Service of Reconciliation that has been used in our Minnesota North District.

In ending with hope a congregation will at times come to a decision to end the ministry in that place. The Worship Service of closing has been used in our Minnesota North District.

A SERVICE OF RECONCILIATION

As We Gather

In some ways congregations are like trees. Like the fig tree in today's Gospel lesson, there are congregations that are missing some sweet fruit. People live in conflict and doubt that the church can do much to help them resolve their differences. Other congregations are like trees blossoming in the spring. People understand God's peacemaking commands and promises and believe that His ways will work in today's culture. There are congregations that are like a tree being pruned and cultivated for greater productivity. People want to put off worldly ways of resolving conflict and take steps to learn how to respond to conflict biblically. There are also congregations that are like trees producing a rich harvest. People are eager and able to resolve conflict and reconcile relationships in a way that clearly reflects the love and power of Jesus Christ. Finally, there are congregations that are like a tree spreading its seed and reproducing. People delight in expanding God's kingdom by showing other people and churches how they, too, can be peacemakers.

(thoughts from "Transforming Your Church" by Ken Sande)

Pre-Service Music

Words of Welcome

Hymn: "Jesus Sinners, Will Receive" LW #229 or TLH #324

Invocation

We worship in the name of God the Father,

Who created us, gives us life and breath, and provides for us.

We worship in the name of God, the + Son,

Who has redeemed us and offers forgiveness to us.

We worship in the name of God, the Holy Spirit,

Who created faith within us, who sustains our faith, and who enables and empowers us to practice our faith in life.

Psalmody: Portions of Psalm 103 *(a paraphrase)*

My heart is bursting with praises to God;

Every fiber of my being reaches out in rejoicing!

How can I ever forget His many blessings?

He forgives all my sins;
He touches my afflictions with healing;
He snatches me back from the gaping jaws of hell;
He covers me with concern and love;

He fulfills my deepest desires and gives me meaning for life and purpose for living.

God is a God of justice and judgment, but He is on the side of those who need His help.

He is angry with those who persistently rebel against Him, but He pours out His love upon those who turn to Him.

He does not give us our just deserts or pay us what we well deserve.

He is grieved when we so miserably fail, but He quickly draws us to His forgiving heart and accepts us just as if it never happened.

He looks with tenderness upon His faltering children;

He knows and understands our fallible natures.

Shout His praises, you who are His children and you who serve as His ministers and priests.

There is no time for despair and discouragement.

Whoever and wherever you are,

lift your hearts in praise to God.

Salutation and Prayer of the Day

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. O Lord, you are so amazingly good to us! You have sent Your only Son to die for our sins, including those that have been committed in the midst of conflict. You have not treated us as we have deserved, but have been patient, kind, gentle, and forgiving with us. Give us the strength, Lord, to do the same with each other. So be with us Lord. Enable us and empower us to rejoice in You as Savior and Lord. We pray this, Lord, in Your holy name.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson: Job 38:1-7

(God reminds Job that His perspective is bigger and fuller than ours)

Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

This is the Word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Colossians 3:12-17 *(what it means to incarnate the love of Christ)*

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This is the Word of the Lord!

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Lesson: Luke 13:6-9 (*the parable of the fig tree: judgment delayed*)

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

This is the Gospel of the Lord!

Praise to You, O Christ!

An Affirmation of our Faith and the Purpose of God

We affirm our belief in the one eternal God, Creator and Lord of the World, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who governs all things according to the purpose of His will.

He has been calling out from the world a people for Himself, and sending His people back into the world to be His servants and His witness, for the extension of His kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of His name.

We confess with shame that we have often denied our calling and failed in our mission, by becoming conformed to the world or by withdrawing from it.

Yet we rejoice that even when borne by earthen vessels the gospel is still a precious treasure. To the task of making that treasure known in the power of the Holy Spirit we desire to dedicate ourselves anew.

Hymn: LW #330, or TLH #297, "The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace"

Sermon: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 "A New Creation"

The Offertory

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit. Amen

The Offering

The Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Lord God, our Heavenly Father, You are a good and gracious God. You have blessed us in so many ways. You have forgiven us all our sins. You have removed our guilt and remember our sins no more. Lord,

Receive our thanks and praise. To God be the glory.

Lord, in the midst of conflict you always call us to first look inward – to look at our hearts and our actions. Lord, it can be so difficult to do that, because sometimes we are afraid of what we will see – our sinful desires and actions, our slander, and the hurt we have caused. Lord,

Enable us and empower us to honestly reflect on our desires and actions.

Help us get the log out of our own eye.

Lord, You are so gentle with us. When we have come to you in confession You have always restored us. You have not treated us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities. Instead You have crowned our lives with love and compassion. You have give us the assurance that we are still counted as Your children. Since You so gently restore us, Lord,

Give us the strength to gently restore those who have sinned against us. Empower us to love as You have loved us and forgive as You have forgiven us.

Lord, when we were lost, You found us and reconciled us to Yourself. When we strayed from Your Word, You called us back to Yourself. You call us to also do that with each other. Lord, give us the strength to go to those we have offended and those we have been offended by.

Lord, give us the opportunity of confession and hearing confession. Give us also the joy of forgiveness and forgiving. Lead us to reconciliation.

(special intercessions)

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Hymn of Confession: LW #234, “To You, Omniscient Lord of all”

**To you, omniscient Lord of all, With grief and shame I humbly call;
I see my sins against you, Lord, The sins of thought, of deed and word.
They press me sore; to you I flee: O God, be merciful to me!**

**My Lord and God, to you I pray, Oh, cast me not in wrath away;
Let your good Spirit ne’er depart, But let him draw to you my heart
That truly penitent I be: O God, be merciful to me!**

**O Jesus, let your precious blood, Be to my soul a cleansing flood.
Turn not, O Lord, your guest away, But grant that justified I may
Go to my house, at peace to be: O God, be merciful to me!**

*To You, Omniscient Lord of All
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A Litany of Repentance and Reconciliation

"How good and pleasant when God's people live together in unity" [Psalm 133:1].

Fellow redeemed in Christ, we pause now in remembrance of our Baptism into Christ to be peace-builders in His name, as He has commanded us. We call upon Him to help us:

Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in steadfast love.

Come to us now, we who have been wounded and have wounded, hurt and have hurt, and broken apart by sin.

Cause us to remember our Baptism wherein You made us Your sons and daughters, members of Your body, the church, through water and Your Word of promise.

Remember Your new creation in us once more, that we can forgive each other as You have forgiven each one of us.

At this moment we confess particularly those sins by which we have brought division and injury to Your church – by our silence when we should have spoken, and by our loveless words when we should have kept silent.

Help us to pursue peace and harmony in the church which You have purchased with Your blood. Lead us by Your Word and Spirit that we can be compassionate with each other. Cause us to love one another as You have loved us. Empower us to contend earnestly for the Gospel which You have entrusted to us, but may we do so as Your redeemed children, bound together by the bond of Your grace.

So now be present among us to forgive and bind our peace-breaking sins to this moment, to recreate us in Your bond of peace, to renew and energize us to build on Your gift of grace, in the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus says to His people: "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven. His death paid for the guilt of your sins and the sins of the whole world. Do you believe this?"

Yes, I believe this.

Upon this your confession, I, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you. It is in His place and by His command that I forgive you for all of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Almighty God, so bless the bond of peace among us and through us now and forevermore.

Amen.

Blessed are you whose sins are forgiven, whose conflict has been bound. The Lord Jesus Christ has made you free of its power!

All: O Lord, my God, I called to You for help, and You answered me. I thank You for the love You have shown me in Jesus Christ, my Savior. Through Him You have rescued me from the guilt of my sin and given me the peace of forgiveness. Help me fight against temptation, correct whatever wrongs I can, and serve You and those around me with love and good works. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"

[Ephesians 4:3].

Go in peace. The Lord be with you!

Hymn: LW #279, or TLH #364, Vv. 1-3, 5. "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds"

The Preface to Holy Communion

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Blessed are You, Lord of heaven and earth, for You have had mercy on us children of men and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. We give You thanks for the redemption you have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts that He may establish in us a living faith and prepare us joyfully to remember our Redeemer and receive Him who comes to us in His body and blood.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Words of Institution

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

The Distribution

Hymns:

LW #240 TLH #307, "Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord"

LW #359 TLH #388, (2nd tune) "Just as I Am, Without One Plea"

LW #272 TLH #339, "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

LW #351 TLH #373, "By Grace I'm Saved"

Post-Communion Prayer

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this healing gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace! Amen.

Closing Hymn: LW 443, Vv. 1.3 or TLH 36, Vv. 1.3. "Now Thank We all Our God"

**Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices;**

**Who from our mothers' arms Hath blest us on our way
With countless gifts of love And still is ours today**

**All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heav'n adore;
For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore.**

Announcements
Post-Service Music

Holy Trinity Celebration & The Closing of Our Savior's

PRELUDE & CHOIR *"Hear Our Prayer Oh Lord"*

WELCOME & SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

GREET ONE ANOTHER

AS WE GATHER

Today is about our one true God: the Holy One of Israel, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the One who is the beginning and the end, the One who is and always will be, the One who is the only way to heaven. When, by the power of the Spirit, you believe in Him you are born again and are set for life, eternally!

So, as we worship together in this church for the last time, we are reminded that The Holy Trinity is still in control and promises to be with us until the end of time. Let us then remember what The Holy Trinity has done for us ... The Father has created us, The Son has redeemed us and The Holy Spirit has sanctified us.

Therefore, it is only appropriate that we begin this final service in The Trinity's name:

LITANY OF INVOCATION AND PRAISE:

Pastor: Our God is more than just great!

People: He is the beginning and the end.

Pastor: He is our beginning and end.

People: He is the only God.

Pastor: He is the way, the truth and the light.

People: He is the only way.

Pastor: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

People: We worship You,

Pastor: We worship You Alone!

People: Through the waters of our baptism

Pastor: And by Your Spirit

People: We have been born again!

Pastor: Now we are set for life.

People: Eternally set for life.

Pastor: Life given by a great and Holy God

People: He is Holy, Holy, Holy!

Pastor: Come, Holy Spirit of the Living God

People: Touch our hearts, change our lives.

Pastor: Great and Holy is our God.

People: Great and Holy are You God!

All: Amen! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN “Beautiful Savior”

LW #507

*[*NOTE: “Beautiful Savior” was sung at Our Savior’s Dedication Service on April 25, 1982]*

1. Beautiful Savior, King of creation, Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I’d love thee, Truly I’d serve thee, Light of my soul, my joy, my crown.
2. Fair are the meadows, Fair are the woodlands, Robed in flow’rs of blooming spring;
Jesus if fairer, Jesus is purer, He makes our sorr’wing spirit sing.
3. Fair is the sunshine, Fair is the moon light, Bright the sparkling stars on high;
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer Than all the angels in the sky.
4. Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, Praise, adoration Now and forever more be think!

CONFESSION

Pastor: Our God is Holy and requires us to come clean before Him. Through His Son He made the way for us to come to Him. Let us then come before Him and confess our sins. His Word promises that if we come to Him and confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

People: Holy Father, Son and Spirit, You are the true God the Holy One of Israel. Thank you for providing the way to come to You. Through Christ You paved a way for me to come to You, and You drew me with cords of love. In spite of Your love, I have knowing and unknowingly chosen to sin. I’ve rebelled in my thoughts, in my actions and in my mind. Neither have I done the things You set before me to do. I’ve worked so hard at getting myself “set for life” by the things of this world. But I need to continually be renewed by You again and again that I might set my thoughts on the things above. Please forgive me though I don’t deserve it. I ask you to have mercy on me because of Jesus.

ABSOLUTION

Pastor: Our heavenly Father has had mercy upon all of us. Because of His Son, Jesus, He forgives you. Your sins are forgiven because Jesus paid the price. Because of Jesus, you are free – free to live for the true God, the Holy One of Israel. Because of Jesus you are set for life ...eternal life! Because of Jesus and the work of the Spirit you have been born again of imperishable seed! Today God is renewing you through His Holy Spirit. Be refreshed! Be renewed. Be filled. Be set free. Celebrate His forgiveness. Thank Him for all He has done.

SONGS OF PRAISE

MEDLEY: “He Touched Me”

Shackled by a heavy burden 'Neath a load of guilt and shame, Then the hand of
Jesus touched me and now I am no longer the same.

Chorus: He touched me, oh, He touched me, And oh, the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I know, He touched me and made me whole.

Since I met this blessed Savior, Since He cleansed and made me whole, I will never
cease to praise him; I'll shout it while eternity rolls.

Chorus:...

"His Name is Wonderful"

His name is Wonderful, His name is Wonderful, His name is Wonderful, Jesus, my
Lord;
He is the Mighty King; Master of ev'ry-thing; His name is Wonderful, Jesus, my Lord.
He's the great Shepherd; the Rock of all ages, Almighty God is He;
Bow down before Him, Love and adore Him, His name is wonderful, Jesus my Lord.

PRAYER

Pastor: Let us pray. . . Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge
the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the unity in the
power of the Divine Majesty, Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for
You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (*The only true God desires to love and to be loved.*)

⁴Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵Love the Lord your
God with all your heart. And with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These
commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them
on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along
the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your
hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your
houses and on your gates.

SOLO *"I Surrender All"*

Marguerite Wegner

EPISTLE Romans 8:14-17 (*We can address God with the familiarity of a child's love.*)

¹⁴Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a
spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of
sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our
spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs
of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed, we share in his sufferings in order that we
may also share in his glory.

HOLY GOSPEL John 3:1-17 (*The Spirit gives birth to spirit.*)

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³In reply Jesus declared, "*I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.*" ⁴How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

⁵Jesus answered, "*I tell you the truth, No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is Born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again. ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear it's sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*" ⁹How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "And do you not understand these things?"

¹¹*I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him."*

CHOIR "*Family of Christ*"

SERMON

THE CLOSING OF OUR SAVIOR'S

[The Congregational chairman reads the resolution of closure adapted by the congregation: After the resolution he says]

Chairman: Reverend President, on behalf of Our Savior's Lutheran Church I ask you to close this congregation.

President: By the grace of God, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ has been proclaimed and the Holy Sacraments have been administered here at Our Savior's Lutheran for the past twenty-seven years. We are here today for the closing of this congregation. While saddened by the closure of this congregation, we are mindful of the blessings of God which have been poured out so richly upon us all who have worshiped here and are confident that our gracious God will continue to gather His people so that with all the saints they may enjoy the eternal blessings promised to those who are His. The Lord be with you!

People: And with your spirit.

President: Let us pray . . . Lord God our heavenly Father we thank you for the many blessings which You have showered upon Our Savior's especially for the Gospel and the Holy Sacraments and for Your continued presence with Your people. Forgive us where we have been slow to receive Your Word and unwilling to obey it. We rejoice in Your goodness and in the promise that You will never leave us nor forsake us. Grant that no one among us may be left without the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments.

Bless Your Church throughout the world so that she may give faithful witness to Your people at all times, and bring them at last to the heavenly home which You, Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

A Brief Congregational History is Read

The Congregational Records are Presented

Chairman: These records are evidence of what God has graciously accomplished in this congregation. Receive them and arrange for their safe keeping so that the work of God and His people may not be forgotten.

DISPOSITION OF A CHURCH BUILDING

President: Brothers and Sisters in Christ. This church and its furnishings and vessels has been used for divine services since it was opened in 1981. As we now close this place of worship, we remember with gratitude to God, all the blessings He has given us and to those who have gone on before us.

A PSALM

Pastor: We have thought, O God, on Your loving kindness

People: in the midst of Your temple.

Pastor: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain.

People: Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of north, the city of the Great King.

Pastor: God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge.

People: As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the City of our God: God will establish it forever.

Pastor: We have thought, O God, on Your loving kindness in the midst of Your temple.

People: According to Your name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness.

Pastor: For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Pastor: We have thought, O God, on Your loving kindness,

People: in the midst of Your temple

Pastor: The Lord be with you!

People: And with your spirit.

Pastor: Let us pray . . . Lord God, heavenly Father, the unfailing Giver of good gifts, we give thanks to You for Your presence in this place, and we implore you continually to dwell among us with Your Word and Sacraments, so that by Your Grace we poor sinners may be converted to You and saved eternally; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, on God, now and forever.

People: Amen

The Furnishings Are Removed . . .

At the Baptismal Font

President: All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ
(Gal 3:27)

The Baptismal Bowl, Paschal Candle and other Baptismal Appointments are removed.

At the Lectern

President: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ." (Rom. 10:17)

The Bible and Paraments are removed

At the Pulpit

President: We preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jew and Greek, Christ the Power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23-24)

The Lectionary and Paraments are removed

At The Altar

President: May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2)

The missal stand and service book are removed

President: Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

The candles are removed

President: Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26)

The Communion vessels, Altar Linens and Paraments are removed

President: Mary I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal. 5:14)

The Cross is removed

PROCESSION

President: Let us go forth in Peace

People: In the names of the Lord

The congregation processes out and gathers in the parking lot

President: This Church building and Our Savior's congregation are now closed in the name of the Father and Son and of the Holy Spirit

People: Amen.

The doors are closed and locked.

President Let us bless the Lord

People: Thanks be to God

CHOIR

"The Lord Bless you and Keep You"

BLESSING

President: The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The Love of God the Father and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all!

People: Amen and Alleluia!

CLOSING HYMN

"The Common Doxology"

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