

## Encouragement on Christian Education Coming Out of the Pandemic

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Vicar year I had just finished teaching what I thought was an excellent class on the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment and Christian Stewardship, when one of the participants spoke up: “That was great, but you could have said it all with just Psalm 23: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.” While I took his comment graciously, on the inside I thought, c’mon it’s more complicated than that. Many years later, and perhaps with some increase of wisdom, I now recognize what a good point he was making, that so much of Christian stewardship is both implicit in as well as empowered by that single verse. In the same way, the reflections and encouragements I want to share with you on Christian Education can all be found in the verses that provide the theme for this convention: **Let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching** (He 10:25).<sup>1</sup>

The Biblical Greek word for “**encourage**”<sup>2</sup> is derived from words that literally speak of someone called to another’s side. The word picture is that one who encourages does so by literally coming alongside another to speak to (and for<sup>3</sup>) them. This requires being together, meeting together (He 10:25), taking time to know, be with and speak to them the words they need. The phrase ‘**each other**’ is a good reminder none of us stands only on the side of giving encouragement, but that we<sup>4</sup> also need encouragement from our brothers and sisters as well.

Encouraging requires a message to speak. The verses that precede the famous “**encourage each other**” verse” speak about the Gospel message (confidence through Jesus blood –v. 19) and Baptism (v. 22). Therefore, the tools we use to encourage one another are the means of grace—Gospel in Word and Sacrament. While we may think this goes without saying, it is perilous to take this point for granted, as the record of Biblical and Church History demonstrate how often the Word has been neglected and sidelined.

It is also worth noting that the same root word for **encourage** is used to speak of the Holy Spirit and His work. The Spirit is the promised Counselor<sup>5</sup> (or we could also translate Encourager) who comes to our side through Word and Sacrament to speak needed comfort, exhortation, rebuke and encouragement. So just marvel, that though the Lord doesn’t need any of us, He gives us the high honor not only as ministerial instruments who proclaim the Word through which the Spirit works, but even describes that role with the very word that Christ uses to speak of the Spirit’s work.

As noted in the previous presentations, such coming to one’s side to comfort and encourage is also the pattern Jesus so often used in His own ministry. Our Lord ministered to individuals and small groups just as often as he preached to large crowds.

It is also foundational to remember that the Word of God does not merely impart information to us about our Lord, but it is the means through which the Lord actually comes to us. The Apostle writes: **--The life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the**

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are EHV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *parakalew*

<sup>3</sup> This Greek word can also carry other shades of meaning such as; appeal, exhort, comfort, counsel, console, and even ‘defend’ as in a lawyer or advocate.

<sup>4</sup> Yes, called workers, pastors and teachers need this too!

<sup>5</sup> John 14:16, 26; John 15:26; John 16:7 - EHV & NIV 84 – “Counselor” NIV 2011 – “Advocate” ESV – “Helper” KJV – “Comforter” CW 862:3- “O Comforter of priceless worth” Sometimes this same word is transliterated and left untranslated as: “The Paraclete.”

**Father and has appeared to us. We are proclaiming what we have seen and heard also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ** (1 John 1:2-3). Christ, *the eternal life* is actually proclaimed to us so that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son! Therefore, Luther wrote: “Remember that God has said: ‘When the Word of Christ is preached, I am in your mouth, and I pass with the Word through your ears into your heart.’ So, then, we have a sure sign and know that when the Gospel is preached, God is present and would have Himself found there<sup>6</sup>.”

Put it all together: we need the Word and we need one another to **encourage each other** with that Word. Indeed, this is why the Lord did not just give us the Bible, but has also given the public ministry as Augsburg V testifies<sup>7</sup>.

Let also note the phrase: **All the more**. Let us seek to **encourage each other** with the Word and do so with End Times urgency that recognizes that great **Day** is coming. There is no need to look for some other answer, solution or gimmick, but a need to more and more come alongside each other to encourage and be encouraged with the gospel. With these key points in mind we’ll take a look at three main areas of observation and application in the realm of Christian Education<sup>8</sup>.

## **I. Thank God for the way Lutheran Schools<sup>9</sup> provide Gospel encouragement<sup>10</sup>.**

Encouragement is not always about starting new. It can also be recognizing what we are doing well, thank God for it and then strive to do so “**all the more**.”

### *Why our Schools exist*

We can say it a number of ways: not private, but parochial; not an alternative to the public school, but a Lutheran Elementary School; not a school that happens to include a religion class during the day at some point, but a school that is built upon and centered around the Word of God with its message of Christ the Savior.

Ten out of eleven schools I contacted in preparation for this presentation saw an increase in new students related to the pandemic. That doesn’t seem to be an isolated finding given the RTTD notes “WELS school enrollments have increased significantly in the last two years<sup>11</sup>.”

Both from my experience at Peace and interviews I conducted with principals and teachers, it seems many of these families left public schools due to their handling of the pandemic in some way (desire for in person instruction, masking policies, etc.). Many families have also left the public schools because of school

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<sup>6</sup>What Luther Says, entry #4718.

<sup>7</sup>“So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel...” (Kolb/Wengert translation, p. 41)

<sup>8</sup> There are of course many other areas and aspects of Christian Education that could be discussed, but on account of time limitations the paper will limit to three areas (also because there may be opportunities to make these three areas intersect)

<sup>9</sup> As I serve as a ‘school pastor’ in a ministry with a school and early childhood center I will be speaking much about the LES and Early Childhood, but some points can well carry over to Sunday School and other education ministries.

<sup>10</sup> And then let us strive to do so **all the more**.

<sup>11</sup> Report to the Twelve Districts, p. 4.

climate and various objectionable agendas. A number of these parents, though unchurched or de-churched, spoke of how with everything going on in the world, they really needed God in their lives<sup>12</sup>.

Thus, as one ministry colleague put it, we are able to give to them ‘more than they bargained for.’ They may have come to us to get away from virtual learning, or for a more organized classroom, or even so that their children have a better idea of right and wrong, but we are able to give to them something infinitely greater – the eternal gospel.

After all, that is the greatest strength of our schools for us to treasure and use **all the more**. The conclusion of the first section of the Augsburg confession (following article XXI) puts it this way: ‘*This is nearly a complete summary of what is preached and taught in our churches for proper Christian instruction and the comfort of consciences as well as for the improvement of believers.*’

Our chief purpose is not merely to teach morality, but to proclaim Christ’s forgiveness for *the comfort of consciences*. We want to keep the gospel as our central focus so that we may steer clear of the all too appealing traps of moralizing and Pharisaism.

Of course, at the same time, we need to be aware of the opposite and equally enticing dangers of antinomianism and licentiousness. So we also provide *proper Christian instruction... as well as for the improvement of believers*. We will teach good works in their proper setting as the necessary fruit of living faith. Essentially, this means not taking for granted, but rather embracing the proper distinction of law and gospel and striving to do so **all the more**.

### *In person*

Prior to the events of the past two plus years, thanking God for the ability to meet in person might not have been at the top of our gratitude list. How times have changed!

Many teachers I interviewed spoke of the frustrations of virtual learning, quarantines and closures. Even as things slowly opened up (and shut down again) there were less special events and opportunities to be together. One teacher noted how that created a difficulty in “connecting with students, inquiring about their lives outside of school, building meaningful relationships, building rapport, checking for social growth/strain in students.”

I have heard many lay people speak about their appreciation for gathering together in person after having to do virtual worship. The same is true when it comes to in person school. One teacher mentioned the blessing of “a new appreciation for ‘regular school life.’ Another teacher mentioned: “once we were back in person it was wonderful to take time to be thankful for the family of believers we have... and how encouraging it is to gather together.”

Let us use this not only as an opportunity to thank God for the important blessing of being in person with another, but also use it as a teaching opportunity. We need to be in person with others, not merely because it is easier to teach, but because we need one another. We need to be meeting together with others so that we may encourage and be encouraged with the Word. Of course, this also happens as we gather in

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<sup>12</sup> Yes, of course, we always need God in our lives and these families needed Him before all the events that came with 2020 and following... but that is one of the areas of growth we’ll speak about later.

other ways beyond the classroom and worship space<sup>13</sup>. Let us be ready to use every time we are together to encourage one another<sup>14</sup>.

### *Our teachers*

Closely related to the thoughts of *in person* is to be grateful to the Lord for our teachers and to recognize that important in person role they have, not merely as educators, but as servants of the Gospel. Our teachers play an important role on the ‘front lines’ when it comes to encouraging in Education, not only in teaching the Word, but in building relationships with students to be able to encourage (and yes also rebuke and exhort) with the Word.

I have known two people in twenty years, whom the Holy Spirit brought to faith in Christ by their sitting down and reading the Bible on their own and then they sought out fellow believers. Yes, it can happen. But I’ve only known *two*. Most often the Gospel is brought to others through pastors and teachers and those whom the Lord uses pastors and teachers to build up for works of service (i.e. parents, grandparents, even little children<sup>15</sup>). This means you have a truly important and glorious purpose as part of Christ’s Church whom he sends to proclaim the gospel and gather disciples.

While we name the ministry with the broadest scope in our fellowship (parish) ‘pastors’ (shepherds), our teachers also have an important pastoral (shepherding) role. The teacher’s flock is especially their classroom, though I have witnessed many teachers continuing to show shepherding care for other students in the school beyond their own classroom (and even beyond the student’s years in school).

Shepherds know their sheep and care for them not just as a flock, but as individuals. In doing so teachers, you become an essential instrument in the encouragement of those students, since you have excellent insights to their struggles and needs. Pray for them by name. Ask them questions about how they are doing (and not just the surface level ones). Especially with the upper grade students and where age appropriate, ask and talk to them about anxiety and depression, especially since mental health findings show us many of them are dealing with it<sup>16</sup>.

Pastor McKenney shared how in his research he learned that students and teachers are two groups that are especially dealing with a rise in mental health struggles. One principal noted the same thing I’ve also noticed among students where I serve: “We had a much higher number of students who struggled emotionally and socially. We are still working with many students who continue to struggle today.”

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<sup>13</sup> I think of a very important conversation with the mother of a student new to our school in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year in the 21-22 school year that took place at the reception for our 8<sup>th</sup> graders after graduation. They came to us for in person school, but in the mother’s words, the Lord brought them to have peace in Christ. Her husband spent months in the hospital and recovery from Covid complications. Their daughter was baptized this spring. My associate and I had just talked about his plans to follow up with them again after Memorial Day about his offer to have the three of them take BIC together. The Lord heard a prayer in that conversation and provided that opportunity for follow up then and there as the mother spoke of their gratitude for all the school and church and support of God’s people had meant for them and how they were eager to take the class.

<sup>14</sup> Technology is a great blessing from God, but the pandemic has shown us that like every human attempt to bring a utopia in this broken world, it has fallen short of providing the answers it promises. We have a deep need for one another and a deeper need to encourage each other with the ‘one thing needed.’

<sup>15</sup> I’ve seen firsthand and heard many times how preschoolers and kindergartners bring the gospel from the classroom to the home to bring mom and dad (and sometimes grandma and grandpa too!) to worship and BIC.

<sup>16</sup> Yet shockingly a study referenced by one of the presenting brothers at one of our meetings together mentioned that in one study, only 10% of youth mentioned that their faith leaders reached out to them.

Pastors (now I'm speaking to the parish pastor shepherds) and lay leaders, pray for and encourage your teachers. Pastors, rely on the teachers for those insights they have to their students' struggles and utilize those frontline pastoral gifts our teachers bring to the students in their care. The work we do together and the encouragement we get to bring is of the utmost importance. We have the privilege of not just modeling Christ like love and care for those entrusted to our care, but through the encouragement of the Word we actually bring Christ and the Spirit to those whom we serve. Let us work together **all the more** to encourage each other and to work together to encourage the children and their families.

## II. The need for ongoing growth in the Word

As noted earlier, many of our schools and churches have seen an influx of souls to our care during and following the pandemic. It's not been uncommon for me to hear of pastors conducting multiple BICs at the same time, especially for those with Lutheran Elementary Schools. What a blessing for us to recognize and for us to give God the thanks and the glory.

At the same time this can present a number of challenges as well. Many of these families have been long de-churched or are brand new to the faith. There is a great need to help these new Christians grow and mature in their faith. At the same time, I doubt that any of us would disagree that many lifelong WELS members (and preachers, this one especially) have plenty of need to grow in depth and maturity, especially as all of us to one degree or another have absorbed some level of trauma through the past years of the pandemic and the ongoing turmoil in our world today.

No matter how awesome and in depth the BIC is, there will always be need for continued growth and maturing that often takes time. Hence, the multiple Scriptures that teach us we need to continually be in the Word.<sup>17</sup> Recall what we spoke about earlier, that the Word of God does not merely impart information, but is a means of grace through which God Himself comes to his people. Therefore, I'm not just talking about the importance of growing in doctrinal instruction, but simply of being regularly in the Word, where the Spirit has promised to nourish faith.

Thus don't think that for ongoing growth we have to always be presenting in a giant, spectacular, novel or extremely deep way. Teaching simple Biblical narratives in a simple way doesn't just work, but is how the Lord so often teaches us through the Scriptures. On more than one occasion, I've heard from parents of children in the school, that one reason for them pursuing BIC is that they 'want what their children have,' or want to know the Bible as well as their children are learning it. That means we also need to teach the parents the narratives of Scripture<sup>18</sup>.

Of course, we always want to grow in the whole counsel of God, but the influx of new members with little church background and the lessening of Biblical literacy means there is a need to teach, model and encourage what it means to be an active congregation member, especially in regards to regular use of the means of grace. What is important for our newer members is just as important for long time members, especially when the pandemic upended so much of what we would consider normal church life.

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. John 8:31, Joshua 1:8

<sup>18</sup> Teaching narratives doesn't preclude teaching doctrinally. One of my favorite Bible classes in my ministry was an evening class with a group of people who just wanted to dig in deeply as we went through individual books of the Bible. We often got into great doctrinal discussions and in going through the Gospel of Mark hit on pretty much every single topic we teach in BIC, but in its setting within Biblical narrative.

I'm convinced this means we need to especially work on the area of member assimilation. I think this has always been the case, but it is needed more than ever as we often see new members come in and then drift right out again. Yes, of course, the Holy Spirit will work when and where He pleases, and we will never do better than our Lord Jesus who had disciples walk away from Him, but we will do well to acknowledge we need to do all we are able to do to **encourage** these new (and old) members.

Assimilation can be used to speak about many aspects of discipleship. It could be the subject of a presentation in itself. However, here I am chiefly speaking of ways to make sure we get our new members connected regularly into receiving the means of grace as well as getting to know and be known by others in their church family, so that they may be equipped to encourage each other<sup>19</sup>. It is worth taking time to evaluate where we are at in the area of assimilation and considering what we can do **all the more** so that precious souls don't slip through the cracks, but are encouraged, and by their presence are there to encourage others<sup>20</sup>.

One more area that we can use our various agencies of Christian education to teach is what it means to have a pastor (or alternatively – what it means to be a sheep in the flock<sup>21</sup>). Pastors - how many times do we find out after the fact that someone was in the hospital, and we wished we could have visited them to encourage them, but they didn't let us know? Or wouldn't it be nice if the couple came to us when they first started struggling in their marriage rather than reaching out to the pastor as one last 'hail Mary' before getting a divorce (if they even do that rather than just letting you know they are getting divorced)? Part of the problem may be that in a less Biblically and ecclesiastically literate culture, we need to teach the people what pastors do and how pastors are there to visit and care for the sheep as individuals<sup>22</sup>.

### III. Reclaiming the 'Home Altar'

One can argue if this is really another area to emphasize or just an extension of the need for us to be continually growing in the Word. Either way, I don't think it will be controversial to say this is the area of education we would all agree needs to happen more among our families, and **all the more as we see the day approaching**.

Home devotions and personal Bible study are one of the most natural applications of **encouraging each other**. After all, the Christian home is a place where believers come along side of each other daily and can use that as an opportunity to **encourage each other** with the Gospel. Therefore, Moses commanded: **These words that I am commanding you today are to be on your heart. Teach them diligently to your children, and speak about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you get up** (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

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<sup>19</sup> Once again, this doesn't have to be overly complex. As one brother mentioned he encourages his BIC graduates with the advice that the best way to be assimilated into the congregation is to come weekly to worship to be regularly in Word and Sacrament.

<sup>20</sup> Here we can remember how simply being together in worship, meeting together is indeed encouraging, as you are not alone, there are others in whom the Spirit has created the miracle of faith. Interestingly, in 1 Peter 5:8-9, the Apostle makes a similar point, not only directing us to resist the devil by standing firm in the faith, but also by remembering that "your brotherhood" throughout the world is experiencing the "same kinds of sufferings."

<sup>21</sup> I will mention him in the resources and practical ideas section, but here I am much indebted to Pastor Moldenhauer who during a circuit meeting study of Harold Senkbeil's *The Care of Souls* introduced this concept and shared resources from a Bible study he has prepared to teach this very topic to the saints at Our Redeemer, Madison.

<sup>22</sup> Another disservice of the "mega-church" models is that the pastor is the teaching coach rather than a shepherd, and it seems many of our people (and clergy) may be tempted to think this way too.

Once again, this need not be overly complicated. We can teach making use of a simple order of service, a Scripture narrative, a reading from the Small Catechism (embracing Luther's "*in a simple way in which the head of a house is to present them to the household*"), the Lord's prayer, a hymn, etc. The new blue Christian Worship hymnal along with a Bible could provide all that is needed since the new hymnal includes the Daily Office (allowing a simple service for any time of the day) and the Small Catechism.

I am purposely not going to say more about this topic here, not because it is unimportant, but because I don't think we need to lay the basis to say this is an area of critical importance, because we would agree on that. The bigger question is how can we actually accomplish the goal of getting more of our people into the Word? I'll try to address with some of the practical ideas and resources, but also now in the wrap up—

### **Bringing it all together... literally.**

To go back to the beginning, **encouraging each other** requires the Gospel and **each other**. Simply put we need each other and we need to encourage each other and to do so **all the more**. One good way to put this into practice for the good of the body would be to bring all of these strands we've touched on – encouraging in the classroom, congregation, home, and then weave them together so that they support and build off each other.

Namely, we could look at ways to use our classrooms, teachers, Bible classes, pastoral home visitation, lay leadership to all deliberately work together to foster a culture of growing in the Word and having the Word in our homes. After all, to quote one of the principals I interviewed: "The triangle is a strong geometric shape – so is the Church-School-Home when they work together and support each other." For example, the teachers, the Sunday School, the pulpit, Bible study, (and there might be a great place for some technology use here too) could all be mobilized to teach, encourage and model a simple plan and pattern for worship in the home and a culture of growing in the Word, so that God's people are equipped to **encourage each other** and **all the more** as we see the day approaching.

## **IV. Ideas and Resources**

In this final section/appendix, I offer some brainstorming ideas and resources that might be helpful. I do not offer these as a comprehensive list, but a starting point for brainstorming among the brothers. I pray this presentation may be of some help for you, but perhaps the best resource I can offer you is to speak to one another about these things. Make the time to have brotherly discussion about what you've experienced and learned: the good, the bad, the ugly. The best part of the privilege to present to you today was getting to work together closely with the other presenters and Pr. Brauer, to meet together several times around a table *in person*, to discuss these things, pray about them and through our conversations to provide mutual **encouragement**.

Though the stack of ministry challenges in my place of service seems unending, yet I have felt more energized, excited, and focused for future ministry than I have in a long time, and while that is a gift from the Lord, I am convinced the way he has delivered it is through that time of mutual encouragement with the brothers. So keep the conversation going beyond today in your circuits, faculty meetings, and in small groups with a refreshing beverage with the prayer and goal to **encourage each other**.

Lord help us do it! Amen.

+Use and promote the new hymnal and its resources for personal and home devotions especially:

- the Daily Devotions (the Daily Office) 235- 247
- Daily Lectionary 248-253
- The Small Catechism 286-296
- Corporate Confession and Absolution 278-281
- Individual Confession and Absolution 282-283
- the Christian Worship Psalter

+Additional resources that could be folded into a simple daily office home worship –

- CPH's *The Story Bible - 130 Stories of God's Love*<sup>23</sup>
- The Story of God's Love – A Summary of the Holy Bible (EHV)*
- Meditations*
- The family devotions based on the lectionary e-mailed by Adult Discipleship
- Marriage Moments e-mailed by Adult Discipleship
- Five Minute Bible Studies* series from NPH
- and many, many more possibilities!

+Mobilizing ministry to encourage the home altar

- encourage a congregation wide participation in home devotions for a set period (with encouragement to continue beyond it)
- what I'm envisioning is something along the lines of the format of the Synod's 10 for 10 emphasis<sup>24</sup>
- teaching on a number of levels leading up to Sundays when the emphasis is made and then a time of encouragement for the period when the congregation is making the concerted effort
- teach and model a home devotion utilizing the Hymnal's Daily Office as outlined above to all ministry leaders: teachers, Sunday School teachers, lay leaders
- gather input from and interview the families you know are already conducting home devotions and consider sharing the blessings and challenges they've found in doing so
- utilize the teachers to promote and model this in their classrooms before and during the emphasis, utilizing the young children's enthusiasm to encourage their parents in carrying this out<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This is especially great for families with children. If you're not familiar with this work, please check it out. It is simplified ESV, with a glossary for possible unfamiliar terms, prayer and activity with each lesson, beautiful realistic art. Our outreach team gives these out as a gift with baptisms and the children are always drawn to them. I've heard many parents and grandparents speak about how the children love their Bible books and want to read from them.

<sup>24</sup> We conducted 10 for 10 at Peace with our own changes to the services, combining the sermon and the Bible study portion concept into one sermonic Bible class. While we would not want this to replace the role of the sermon and only do this sparingly, it was interesting at how well this was received and my associate and I have mused if we couldn't make an occasional use of a similar format for other aspects of ministry and discipleship – e.g. friend and neighbor outreach, or family devotions to reach a broader audience than normal Bible Study.

<sup>25</sup> I write this thinking of the huge impact our teachers can have on their students teaching them about worship – as a result of our Kindergarten teacher instructing her class about Ash Wednesday and the imposition of ashes we had the largest number of people stay for the imposition of ashes I'd ever seen, many of them kindergartners whose desire to come to the service brought their families who had not usually been present before during midweek services.



-this might be a great time and place to bring in technology to aid the families for whom this seems like a foreign language... use a video recording of the pastor leading through a devotion that the family can play during their devotion to see it modeled and then to imitate on their own

+While we've seen and experienced that technology cannot replace the way we need to meet together to encourage each other, might there be other uses of technology that could supplement in person gathering and encouraging rather than supplant it.

-perhaps a short and simple series of *in congregation* videos or perhaps podcast by the parish pastor(s) on some key concepts of congregation membership, discipleship, area where we perceive need for growth

- Yes, I know there are already many excellent confessional Lutheran resources like this out there, from Synod, fellow pastors in our fellowship, etc. who will do a far greater job at this than I ever could (and maybe even better than you could), but the fact is while we rejoice for those brothers and their gifts, those men are not the pastor who will be visiting them and serving them, and therefore there is something you can bring them as *their* pastor that no one else can.

+There has been a growth of growth groups/small group Bible classes in our circles that are well organized and monitored. These can be an excellent resource to teach and encourage fellow believers<sup>26</sup>. Much has been written about this topic on the benefits and cautions of small groups by others. Some growth groups dig into the sermon text, perhaps a video teaching series as mentioned in the previous point could serve as study material to combine that connection with the pastor who serves them but at the same time get the benefit of members coming alongside each other to encourage each other.

+Pastors, if you have not read Harold Senkbeil's *The Care of Souls*, I highly recommend picking it up and giving it a read as a great reminder, refresher, re-focuser of what pastoral ministry is all about.

+Related to *The Care of Souls*, read his encouragement in the theology of blessings and making greater use of blessings (pages 108-114). Consider teaching about blessings and encouraging especially parents and grandparents to bless their children and grand-children.

+Ask Pastor Philip Moldenhauer for a copy of his "What it means to have a pastor" Bible study and use or adopt it to your circumstances or create your own. Pr. Moldenhauer's class is constructed around the excellent teaching concept that what you receive from your pastor in the Divine service (baptizes, absolves, preaches, prays, distributes, blesses) is also what you may get from him as an individual – "My pastor brings Christ to me in Word and Sacrament."

+Consider how we might utilize our teachers and gifted lay leaders in mentoring roles, especially our male teachers and Sunday School teachers to be godly role models for young men<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. RTTD p. 24- Congregational Services "look ahead" includes an online small group ministry module to share "various ways to approach using small groups to help address the need... (of) many WELS members lack(ing) a strong connection to their church and each other."

<sup>27</sup> This already often happens naturally, but can we do more to do so intentionally?

## For Discussion

1. To come along side each other, to do a lot of individual ministry takes time. Visitation of members takes time. This is the elephant in the room... none of us have enough time. Besides repenting of all our own favorite time wasters, taking comfort in Christ's forgiveness and striving through Gospel encouragement to grow in sanctified use of our time, what can we (pastors, teachers, lay leaders working together) do to provide more time for this important coming along the side to encourage each other?
2. How can we encourage people to be in the Word without falling into the either the ditch of an *ox opera operato* going through the motions or the opposite ditch of pietism that supposes spiritual benefit depends on inward feeling, experience (or even must always be brand new intellectual insight)?
3. When Pastor Moldenhauer read my "near final" draft, he gave a great insight and set of questions. To spare you a long paper already being longer, I am going to include his comments here for discussion, along with a few of my initial thoughts. I'd love to hear insights from the brothers on this question.

"I'd love to hear more about the specific needs you see for Christian growth via education due to pandemic experience/trauma. I'm thinking beyond biblical illiteracy which is a problem distinct of the pandemic). Is it Fourth, Fifth, Eighth Commandment stuff? Learning how to lament and mourn? Avoiding idolatry of science and fear of death? Coping with uncertainty? All of the above? For me, I think the pandemic made me realize the difference between knowledge and wisdom, or maybe even more the distinction between intellect and character. Is it fair to say that Christian education aims at character growth?" - PM

My initial response: All of the above definitely comes to mind. That said, from our experience at Peace (in Dane County) and from what came up again and again on the principal and teachers' interviews, there is definitely a need to teach fourth commandment obedience to authorities, though at the same time balance it with a true Christian freedom (as Luther teaches in *The Freedom of a Christian*) and a concern for struggling consciences (on both sides of pandemic related issues). The COP has already addressed that a bit with their "Pastoral Letter on Christian Freedom." There are number of thorny interwoven issues at play for which we will do well to dig deeply into the Word and ask for wisdom in dealing with each situation.

I think you are also spot on with your wisdom verses knowledge comment. Without a doubt, Scripture's wisdom literature addresses this very point in any number of psalms and proverbs, as well as just about the whole book of Ecclesiastes taken as a whole. And yes, I'm confident that also breaks down into Christian Education aimed at (godly) character growth. Paul's comments regarding suffering in Romans 8 fits that well, as well as any number of the Proverbs and NT exhortations (this topic could be a whole paper to itself!)

My runners up would be 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment issues (I know what isn't), making idols out of both sides of pandemic related issues and information.

4. What have you found works well in connecting people to home devotions/family altar?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What best practices have you found helpful in assimilation of new members?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What resources are you aware of that you would recommend on the topics in this presentation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How can we keep the conversation going so that we continue to learn from our experiences, observations and continue to encourage each other as brothers in the ministry?