



First Things – August, 2022

The Theology of the Cross

The WELS has its synod conventions at the end of July of every odd-numbered year. So, there isn't one this year. Recently, however, I ran across words that President Mark Schroeder spoke to the 2009 convention, the first one after he was elected president. They remind us of an important truth.

As our synod carries out its mission of sharing the gospel with the lost and caring for the souls of the found, we dare never forget that our success will not be measured in terms of numbers or statistics. Ours is a theology not of glory — striving for mere outward achievement or measurable accomplishments for their own sake. Our success will be measured only by our faithfulness — to God, to his effective and powerful Word, and to the work he has called us to do.

Rather than a theology of glory, ours is a theology of the cross. Our theology centers on a message that came to us wholly and completely because of the love of Christ. It proclaims a message that calls sinners to repentance, directs them to the cross, and that assures them that in Christ and his love all of their sins find full forgiveness.

Admittedly, the theology of the cross is not attractive in our postmodern, self-gratifying world. Unlike the theology of glory, the theology of the cross makes no promises of instant relief for the ills of life in a sinful world. It does not beckon people with the lure of financial or personal or professional success. It does not seek validation of its success in terms of numbers. It does not offer a practical “how-to” manual to achieve temporal happiness or to mine the depths of human potential. The message of the cross cannot be packaged to be palatable and cannot be soft-pedaled to be acceptable. It is a message that this world does not understand and does not desire.

*In fact, our message — if we are faithful to it — will always be regarded as utter foolishness, just as Paul reminds us, “**The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The unbelieving people in our world look for things that make sense to their own way of thinking; they crave a message that reinforces the Matt Evenson, in his own self-centered view of life. They will not find that in the harsh preaching of God's law. And unless God changes their hearts, they will not appreciate the sweet message*

*of grace in the gospel. If we somehow make the message of the cross attractive and reasonable to those who are perishing, we will have changed the message — and will have failed in the mission God gave us. God help us always to say with Paul, “**We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God**” (1 Corinthians 1:23).*

In summary, Pastor Schroeder is encouraging us to do what Holy Scripture encourages us to do: *Just be faithful and God will take care of the rest.*

Update From The Quarterly Meeting

1. **Finances** – at the quarterly meeting on July 17, it was reported that through the end of June,
 - a. offerings and other income totaled \$129,585,
 - b. total expenses were \$123,661, so

that gives us a surplus of \$5,924 heading into the traditionally lean months of July and August. That’s something to thank the Lord for!

2. **First Steps Early Learning Center**

- a. The ELC Business Team consists of Dan Buchholz, Marcus Erickson, Matt Evenson, Tami Kistler, Tim Nelson, and Carol Schroeder.
- b. The ELC is running at, or near, capacity at all times.
- c. Income and expenses are balanced most months, and government grants allow us to continue to make improvements in the center.
- d. The ELC is coming up with a plan to improve the preschool playground (the one by the alley) and is investigating various grants to fund this.
- e. We are grateful to our dedicated staff, which numbers between 15 and 20, for all they do. Today when practically every business has a “help wanted” sign on the door, it is increasingly more difficult to fill positions when staff members leave.
- f. The ELC will host various events during the year. We hope that First Lutheran members will take these opportunities to come and get acquainted with the families of the ELC children.

3. **Roof Fund** – The total of donations and “matching funds” is \$31,389, almost what we need. We hope that work will begin soon. Thank you for your generous support on this project!

The New Blue Hymnal

Each of our pew racks now contains a Bible, one red hymnal, and one new blue hymnal. Over the next two months or so, we’ll begin each non-communion service with a brief introduction to a portion of the new blue hymnal.

Hymns – Approximately 450 of the hymns from the red hymnal are in the blue hymnal. Hymns will be chosen – both traditional and new – which fit the theme of each Sunday. When those hymns are found in both hymnals, we’ll use the one from the new blue hymnal in order to make use of Service Builder, the time-saving service slide preparation available online. When possible, the choir or soloists will introduce new hymns.

Orders Of Service – We plan to continue to use two orders of service from the red hymnal:

- The **Service of Word and Sacrament** (page 26) on one communion Sunday each month
- The **Service of the Word** (page 38) on one non-communion Sunday each month

On the other communion Sunday each month, we will use **The Service: Setting One** from the blue hymnal. It is very similar to The Common Service on page 15 of the red hymnal.

- The words with which we confess our sins and hear God's promise are new and we pray that their newness make fresh impression on our hearts.
- The music of **The Service: Setting One** is very much like The Common Service of the red hymnal (and very similar to Page 5 and Page 15 in the 1941 *The Lutheran Hymnal*).

Initially, on the other non-communion Sunday we'll use **Corporate Confession and Absolution** in which the entire liturgy is spoken.

We will gradually introduce other orders of service through the choir, soloists, or small groups.

Psalms – The red hymnal introduced congregations to singing psalms in worship. The blue hymnal contains new psalms. And in fact there is a companion volume, *The Psalter*, which allows congregations to sing all 150 psalms...in multiple ways. This is another area where we will rely on the choir and soloists to introduce us to the new psalms in the hymnal **gradually**.

There's no getting away from it, it can be a challenge for people – especially when we're no longer young – to become accustomed to new hymnals. But rest assured, we'll go slow. And in this connection, allow me to share two memories:

- I was at the 1993 WELS convention where the red hymnal was first introduced. I can still remember the words of the 71-year-old outgoing synod president Carl Mischke: *"I want to make it clear that I don't need a new hymnal. I'm happy with the old hymnal, and by that I don't mean the 1941 The Lutheran Hymnal. I'm happy with the 1917 Book of Hymns. No, I don't need a new hymnal, but my grandchildren do, and so do many others who were not born and raised in the WELS."*
- I can also remember struggling through this new liturgy song in the new red hymnal when it first came out. *"This is awful. This is never going to catch on,"* I remember saying. And what was that awful, unsingable liturgical song? *Oh Lord, Our Lord* from The Service of Word and Sacrament, one that I now dearly love.

CrossTalk

We're hoping to start the CrossTalk children's ministry on the Sunday after Labor Day. Furthermore, we're hoping to expand it to two groups. If you're interested in teaching, helping, or just providing "crowd control," please get in touch with Pastor Rieke.

Entryway

Plans are being made to give the entryway a cosmetic makeover. Through some paint, moving some things around, and a couple of minor purchases, we're hoping to make this space:

1. more welcoming for guests,
2. more conducive for fellowship, and
3. help us better communicate church news and events

We're also looking at replacing the First Steps sign on the outside of the building with a new "church" sign that contains worship times, our website address, phone number, and WELS logo.

Area WELS Update

St. John's of Nodine still remains vacant. They will call again on August 7. St. Matthew's of Winona will be installing their new pastor, **Rev. Stuart Turner**, on August 21. Other area congregations which are vacant are: 1. Rock of Ages in Rochester, 2. Our Savior's in Kasson, and 3. Good Shepherd in Holmen. St. John's in Caledonia is calling a second pastor. And the Rochester multi-site congregation – called Resurrection and Life – is calling a third pastor. Please remember all of these congregations in your prayers.

Other Area Events

Women's Retreat – St. John's Lutheran of Lewiston will be hosting a one-day retreat entitled *Flourish By Design* on Saturday, August 27. Find more information and/or register online [HERE](#).

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) – there's a local group of WELS members over 55 who meet at First Lutheran (the East or Wisconsin Campus) in La Crosse on a monthly basis. OWLS from across the country will be flocking to Stony Creek Hotel in Onalaska for their annual convention, October 11-13. Check out what will be happening online [HERE](#).

The Month Of August

Sunday Mornings – **Worship** at 9:00 AM – there will be **NO Sunday Bible Study OR CrossTalk** during the summer months

Mondays – **Evening Worship** @ 6:30 PM – **NO Monday Bible Study** during the summer

Thursdays – **First Women** will meet on Saturday, August 13, 10:00 – 11:30 AM.

Women of the Word (WOW) will meet on Thursday, August 11 & August 25 at 6:30 PM

Board for Lay Ministry – will meet on Monday, August 22, after the evening worship service

ELC Business Team – will meet on Tuesday, August 23 at 6:30 PM

God Bless,

Pastor Mark