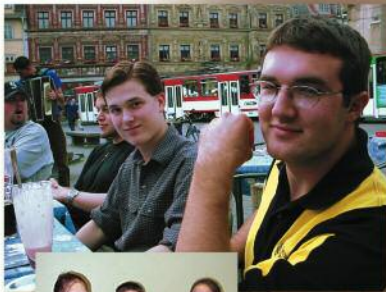


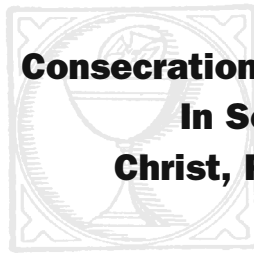
For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

January 2003. Volume Seven, Number One



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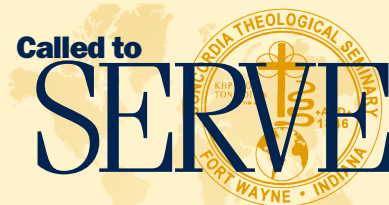
When Christians move into a new community and look for a church to join, they might be confused. The list of different denominations is enormous, and many congregations no longer conform to the traditional teachings of their church body anyway. These days, the name “Methodist” or “Baptist” or “Lutheran” on the signs out front may tell the newcomer very little about the churches in his neighborhood. So the question, “Where is the true Church?” becomes a very practical one.

### 10 Christ, Pastor, and Congregation

By the Rev. Dr. Ron M. Garwood, President, Wyoming District

It’s been said that every pastor ought to have six weeks of vacation each year, because if he is a real good pastor, he deserves it; and if he is not a very good pastor, his congregation deserves it. This is intended to be a joke, but in fact it reflects very real concerns about the relationship between congregations and their pastors.

### 13 What Does This Mean?



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# Consecration at



# and Calling of Ministers

By the Rev. Philip G. Meyer

Someone once said that getting married is like putting two dimes together and getting a quarter, the sum being greater than the parts. It has been said that the relationship between pastor and congregation resembles a marriage. If that is so, then the sum of the two must be more than the parts.

Married couples begin a relationship in which the two of them grow together. The couple takes vows “until death parts us.” Marriage is a lifelong commitment. In a sense, so is the relationship between pastor and congregation. Unfortunately, what happens in many congregations parallels what happens in many marriages, namely, when a crisis arises, the couple decide to divorce. Yet, in every marriage there will be crises and rough patches. We encourage husbands and wives to stay together for the sake of the marriage, not for their own individual satisfaction. Something more important than the two separate interests is at stake. The marriage is at stake with all that this means. The couple’s willingness to stay together testifies mightily to their friends and neighbors.

That’s how it should be also between pastor and people. However, too often, we have adopted worldly ways instead of God’s ways. When there are growing pains, pastors or congregations or both of them together throw in the towel and call it quits. Long pastorates are rare today. If the pastor is dissatisfied, he looks for another congregation; if the congregation

is dissatisfied, it looks for another pastor. Both seem to forget the “vows” that were taken by both of them at ordination/installation. One or both of them seem to think that this divine relationship has an expiration date, yet our ordination/installation rite has no such language!

The rite of ordination in *Lutheran Worship Agenda* asks: “‘Do you solemnly promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these Confessions, or Symbols, and that all your teaching and your administration of the sacraments will be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the aforementioned Symbols?’” The pastor vows, “I do.” And then the rite continues:

‘Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine; will you forgive

the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you; will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying; will you demonstrate to the Church a constant and ready ministry, admonishing the people to a lively confidence in Christ and holy living?’ The pastor vows, ‘*I will with the help of God.*’

As the newly ordained pastor rises, the symbols of his office are placed on him, the chasuble and stole. The presiding minister then asks the congregation:

‘Will you, assembled here as God’s people and speaking for the whole Church, receive [name] as a servant of Christ, a minister of Word and Sacrament, given the Church to serve God’s people with the Gospel of grace and salvation? If so, answer: *We will.*’”

It seems as though the only words missing are “until death parts you!” In the rite of installation, the same

words or variations of them are spoken by both pastor and congregation.

**We encourage husbands and wives to stay together for the sake of the marriage, not for their own individual satisfaction. Something more important than the two separate interests is at stake. That’s how it should be also between pastor and people. However, too often, we have adopted worldly ways instead of God’s ways.**

It has been 29 years since I became the pastor of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church. During that time pastor and congregation have grown together. Admittedly, it has not always been easy. There have been the frustrations and hurts common to all marriages, yet we have stayed together for the sake of the Church/marriage. Our relationship is not a CEO/corporation model. The pastor is not hired, he is called. The congregation is not made up of shareholders, but of individual members of the body of Christ. In this relationship there is knowledge. We know each other well. That can be a liability or an asset, depending on whether or not one is looking for a way out of the relationship.

In the past few years my wife and I have seen our children grow, finish school, get married, and have children of their own. In the congregation, too, some whom I have confirmed have gotten married and had children. These children of the children I confirmed 29 years ago are now my catechetical students. A few of them I have also married. I have felt as though they were my own, and in a certain

sense they are! And, of course, there are many faithful members of the flock whom I have buried. We have laughed and celebrated together, and we have been sad and wept together. There have been successes and there have been failures. In short, the relationship between pastor and congregation is like a marriage. I am certain that there have been times for both of us when we wished to walk out on the other, but we have stayed together for the sake of the Church, for the good of both of us. Because of that God has blessed us richly with a full life together. It has not always been measurable by worldly standards because there are always those congregations which seem to grow faster or have bigger budgets or

more programs, but we have grown together, pastor and congregation.

There is a level of trust which takes time to develop. Young marrieds know that keeping close to their spouses is important. Perhaps the need to be reassured that the spouse is not going to run out remains strong for some time. As time passes one realizes that the level of trust has grown and that each trusts the other. So it is between congregation and pastor. We learn to listen to each other and learn to know each other's needs, and as in a good marriage, we respond to them as best we can, in love. Blessed are congregation and pastor where concrete expressions of



**Pastors who move often from congregation to congregation miss out on so much! Congregations who push their pastors out the door to other congregations miss out on so much! The life of the Church must be richer than the simple addition of the two parts. It must be more than the sum of the two!**

love are spoken and shown, and what a blessed example they provide to the world and community around them! Surely, as we admire a marriage that has lasted 25, 30, 40, or 50 years, we must also admire congregations and pastors that have lived together under God's blessings for long periods of time.

This seems to be most beneficial for the life of pastor and congregation. Pastors who move often from congregation to congregation miss out on so much! Congregations who push their pastors out the door to other congregations miss out on so much! The life of the Church must be richer than the simple addition of the two parts. It must be more than the sum of the two!

Both pastor and congregation must be committed to learning together. I would not go to a physician who, once out of medical school, never read another medical article or attended a continuing education conference. So, too, pastors must continue to learn so that they may be even better shepherds of their congregations. Congregations should encourage their pastors to continue learning, attend theological conferences, and participate in worthwhile

workshops. And congregations must continue to learn, too, being eager students of God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions so that they may be better congregants. Pastors should encourage their congregations to take advantage of the opportunities to grow in faith in Christ. Such an arrangement helps ensure that the Word of God is proclaimed purely and that the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution because both have grown in their understanding. One of the most salutary practices begun in our congregation has been the study of the Lutheran Confessions. We have offered summer studies in the Confessions for our laity so that they might understand what the pastor is continually referencing. At our Board of Elders meeting, one section of the Lutheran Confessions is read and discussed. At our last meeting we finished Article XII of the Formula of Concord. We have read aloud all 636 pages of the Tappert edition. We compare it with the Kolb-Wengert edition and even with *die Bekenntnisschriften*. It remains the highlight of our meetings!

Change is sure to happen. We live in the midst of change, most of it very rapid. Change happens in the Church, too. Pastors change and congregations change, yet that need not be a negative thing. While our doctrine and our practice dare not change, the way we rise to meet the challenges facing the Church is important. Neither one of us is going away as we move forward under our Lord's blessing. Longevity is a salutary thing.

Looking back over our marriage, my wife and I see many, many joys. Our lives have been full, taking in an amazing cycle of life. Looking back over 29 years in this place, I see many joys, too, and an amazing cycle of life. The Word has been purely proclaimed and the Sacraments have been rightly administered. Many have been born into Christ through Holy Baptism. They have feasted at His altar. They have grown in faith in Him. They have been taken to the nearer presence of Christ where one day we shall join them. This is our family which God has given us. I am enjoying the life cycle of congregational life. Surely, this is the way God meant it to be!

*The Rev. Philip G. Meyer is pastor of Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Terre Haute, Ind.*