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Lutheran Church Muskegon



NO OTHER PLAN

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My fellows in Christ:

It is a privilege for me to enter your home by means of this small booklet. If it were at all possible I wish I could personally visit with you. Since such a visit is not possible, may I ask that you give this brochure the same gracious reception which you would give me.

You are a member not only of a congregation, but also of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The operation of your Synod comes a bit closer to you as the Synod holds a convention within your District. You will be represented at this convention by both a voting layman and your pastor, just possibly by some visitors as well. Yet, I believe you are interested beyond sending someone in your place. I believe you feel a responsibility for Kingdom work which you cannot and do not want to assign to others.

The question arises: "How can you learn more about your Synod, about its work, about the role you can play to advance the cause of Christ through your congregation and your Synod?" This brochure is part of the answer. It is designed to help you see more clearly what God's plan is and what your part in this plan should be. It explains how your congregation and your Synod work together to carry out the commission which God has assigned to the church. It tells you how you can carry out the responsibilities God has given you as His child. In addition we are providing each parish with a packet of materials which will bring you a brief edition of my report at your convention. The packet contains three filmstrips, two recordings, and a fact book. Your pastor and your delegate will use these materials as a method for reporting to you on the convention. You will want to use the materials for detailed study and as a guide for action for yourself and your congregation.

Finally, I ask that you join us in the prayers at the close of the booklet. Since God has assured us that "the prayer of a righteous man availeth much," we implore the blessing of God on one another and on the service we render in His name and to His glory.

Cordially yours,

Oliver R. Harms, *President*
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Philippians 2:5-11, KING JAMES

Let this mind be in you,
which was also in Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

No Other Plan



THERE IS A FAMILIAR OLD LEGEND which reports a conversation Christ had with His angels after His ascension. They asked Him: "How will it now go with Your kingdom on earth? What plan do You have?" Christ pointed to His disciples who were then on their way home from the Mount of Ascension, bewildered and uncertain. "I have My disciples," Christ told the angels. Somewhat doubtful, the angels asked further: "But if they fail, then what plan do You have?" He answered simply: "I have no other plan."

Christ was right. The church has not ended in failure any more than Christ ended in failure. The church has not ended in failure because Christ did not end in failure. History is proof that Christ has kept His promise: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it [My church]." (Matthew 16:18)

All of this is important for those of us who are now members of the Christian church, disciples of Christ in the latter half of the 20th century. Personally, it's a life-and-death matter for us because our living and dying depend on Christ. Now the question simply is: Does Jesus Christ provide security and resources for the kind of lives we must now live?

If science now enables us to see better how wise and great God really is, then should we not be rejoicing even more at the opportunity to discover the endless dimensions of God's goodness and grace through His Word? If science has made it possible for us to enjoy the gifts of God more fully, should we not be even more grateful for the opportunity to enjoy the Giver of every good and perfect gift in the Word and sacraments? Do we have things so good that we've fallen in love with things? Are we giving up God for idols as we "worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever"? (Romans 1:25)

We look at ourselves in the mirror of God's Word, and what do we see? Like Peter we may dare to walk on water until we hear the sound of the storm and see the sight of the angry waves. Then suddenly the security of our memorized faith and our performance records is swept away. Then we begin to understand the true meaning of the apostle's warning: "Work out your own



salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

And while we tremble because our willpower won't turn off the winds of temptation and our strength can't overcome the power of sin, we hear the echo of Christ's voice in legend: "I have no other plan." Christ is saying that, humanly speaking, the future of His church on earth, His reign among men, depends on us! We are His church in our time.

State of the Church

AND WHAT'S THE REAL STATE OF THIS CHURCH? Nowadays in our country the church has impressive buildings to attract people, quality services to move them, efficient organizations to serve them, and even air conditioning to make the whole process more comfortable. But the evidence points up the fact that most Americans find life outside the church more appealing than inside. Many people in the church agree with those on the outside. Around the world the Christian church is mistrusted and hated. Pagan religions, with little more than mental gymnastics and superstitions to offer, are more welcome than is the Christian church. Godless political systems are winning the hearts of men to loyalty and sacrifice with promises

of a heaven on earth that turns out to be only abject slavery. Meanwhile the church seems quite helpless even though it can promise and deliver the sure grace of God for life on earth and for heaven in eternity.

These are a few of the thoughts that flit about persistently especially before church conventions. We can't silence the questions that nag for answers:

- What good really comes out of the talk at church meetings?
- With all the money and men invested around the world, what are we in the church really accomplishing?
- Does our indifferent congregational life make very much of a difference either to the members or to the rest of the community?
- If God has no other plan for the world, then what is wrong with us, with the church, that we should so often be sinking in the sea of despair?

Peter in his despair on the sea turned to Christ. This is where the church must always turn. Christ is our only Hope. But Christ is not only our only Hope. He is our sure Hope. The future of the church is assured. Christ is the Head of the church, which is His body, and we are members of that body. Christ is the only sure Hope of the world. And we are the people to whom God has given the privilege of sharing His rescue, His forgiveness, His eternal presence.



Christ Serves Us

SO WE TURN TO CHRIST. We find Him — as Peter also did — on His knees with a towel about His waist asking to wash our feet. Like Peter, we protest: “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” And Christ reminds us too: “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.” (John 13:8)

The life of the church and of the Christian begins on bended knee. We mean the bended knee of Christ. No, this is not a reference to prayer. We are saying that no one has the proper relationship to God until he is willing to let Christ come as his suffering Servant on bended knee. We can't call Him Lord until we have accepted Him as Servant.

A few words of explanation are in order. The Bible makes it clear that Christ became Lord over our sin by first becoming a servant to our sin. “God has made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). It all began when the Son of God laid aside His divine power and glory to become a man. “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8). Christ put it this way: “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28)





God's First Man

THE COMING OF CHRIST is a reminder of the creation of Adam. God's first man had status too. He had been made in the image and likeness of God. He was both the last and highest of God's creatures. God honored Adam by giving him authority to subdue and have dominion over all creation. Thus Adam became the first steward. But this was where the problem started. Adam didn't want to be a steward. After Satan had talked to him, Adam wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. This desire became his master and he became a slave. Not content with the status that God had given him just a little lower than the angels, Adam lost everything. To get a bit of creation, he gave up the Creator.

Adam set the pattern for all the children of men. Perhaps the best illustration is the parable of the prodigal son. By every standard of his times this young man had it made. He had a good life, and it was sure to stay that way. All he had to do was to play the role of an obedient, patient son. But he couldn't wait. He wanted the world on a silver platter, and he wanted it now. His goal was to have his every wish fulfilled at his command. He was convinced that he could manage his affairs already now and manage them better than his father. So he asked for his share of the inheritance. But the young man forgot his place. Because he forgot, he ended up not as master of his world but as a servant of pigs. Their hunger, their needs, their wishes became his command as he became a servant in a pigsty.

And this is the life which Christ came to live out. He came as the second Adam. Though He was the Son of God, He left His place and glory and power to become a man. "He made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The Son of God was obedient! Even when the Father asked Him to enter the pigsty man had made of life, Christ went. He didn't ask what He might get out of it but what He might give. A comment of St. Paul at this point is almost unbelievable: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." (Hebrews 12:2)





God's Plan - Christ's Part

ALL OF THIS IS TO SAY that the life and death of Christ were not some sort of grandstand attempt for cheap publicity. It was rather all part of a plan – God's plan – God's plan for you. Christ saw His part in that plan. The gospels report how He carried out this part. He never used His power to get status. Rather He subjected Himself to the power and curse of sin in order that He might fulfill all righteousness, in order that He might obey God. He announced His servant role at the age of twelve: "I must be about My Father's business." When He was tempted at the beginning of His public ministry just as Adam had been tempted to be more or to do something else than God wanted, He responded with conviction: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Even when His service finally called Him to death on the cross and forsakenness by God, He was prepared: "Not My will but Thine be done."

And so Christ's word to us comes not as He speaks from a command post or headquarters in heaven. It comes instead from the frontline trenches of life. He speaks to us as one of us, for He came to our place in life. Best of all, He came to take our place, to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He came as the second Adam to right the wrongs brought on by the first Adam – and by us. "My meat," He said, "is

to do the will of Him that sent Me." "The Son of Man," He said, "is come not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." When He had emptied Himself completely and had laid aside everything all the way to death and hell, only then could He finally say in victory: "It is finished!"

When the Son of God was done, then the Father acted: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Because Christ willingly assumed the place of Servant, the Father gave Him the place of Lord. By this act the Father said that the greatest and most glorious thing about His Son was His service. Christ went to the throne by way of slavery and the pigsty of sin. The world may not have recognized Christ and may have ignored or rejected His claim that "the Father and I are one" while He walked on earth as a man. But the Father did not let it stay that way. He raised His Son from the dead on the third day, showed Him alive by many infallible proofs, and then received Him back into His presence, where He placed all things, including final judgment, under His feet.

Our Reaction?

WHAT IS OUR REACTION to all that has happened? That depends. We can look at Jesus Christ as He lived among men and see exactly what Isaiah describes: "He hath no form or comeliness; and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2). We can look at Christ and see more than this: "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). If we see Christ only as a tragic human figure, the victim either of His own delusions or other people's prejudices, then we too hide as it were our faces from Him. If we see Him as the Son of God who left His place to take our place, then even when He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted—even then we will esteem Him. In fact, we honor Christ especially because

we know Him as the suffering Servant of our sin. There are no other terms on which we can call Him Lord except as Servant.

We can never get along without Christ. Conventions of Synod recognize this as they open with worship services and also with Holy Communion. Even when Satan attempts to persuade us that we can go it alone, our defeats and weaknesses and fear bring us back. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me," Christ insists. And our response comes as we kneel at the Lord's Table: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." At this place Christ comes with His body and blood to cleanse us with the word of forgiveness. The same Christ who invited common beasts and men to come near to Him in a manger can be approached in the manger of His Word and sacrament. Thus broken relationships are restored.



The Lutheran Church

What It Is

These two pages have been placed into the middle of this booklet quite intentionally. The comments on these two pages belong here. A description of our church body has its place in the very heart of a Scriptural study about the 20th-century disciple and the relation which he has to Christ and to His church.

We are Christians by conviction. We are also members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by conviction. Our faith in Christ binds us together into the holy Christian church and into congregations of believers. Our convictions as Lutherans bind us together more specifically into Lutheran congregations and into Synod. Plainly, then, it's because we believe as we do that we are committed Christians and that we are members of congregations which hold fellowship in Synod.

The Congregation

The congregation is a divine institution. God ordained the church and gave it authority: "Jesus breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20: 22, 23). The congregation is the assembly of God's people at one place. This is the place of God's presence: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." God brings His people together into congregations for a purpose. Here God's people come together around His Word and sacraments to grow in knowledge and love and faith. Here they are to build one another up in order that they might go out for witness and service.

The Synod

The Synod is a human organization. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was established in 1847 by a handful of conservative but zealous Lutheran pastors and congregations. It was their aim to join forces for several important purposes:

1) to preserve and promote the unity of the true faith;

2) to do better together what God has asked each congregation to do, in training church workers, in the joint extension of God's kingdom, and in the production of materials for use in Kingdom work;

3) and to provide a better system for using for the benefit of all the many gifts God has given the church.

These are still the basic purposes of Synod. There is nothing sacred about the organization of Synod. The important thing is that all members keep in mind what God is asking them to do and that they do it. When members understand God's purpose, then they are free to organize themselves in the best way possible to get the job done.

Purpose of Synod

In other words, our Synod is a man-made organization which is set up to carry out God's purpose. Our Synod is made up of congregations which hold the same faith and who have agreed on certain methods, rules and procedures. Our congregations hold membership in Synod because we believe such membership gives us the best opportunity to carry out our God-given responsibilities.

Because Synod is a man-made organization, it can be changed. Changes are made when the members decide they can do God's work better in a different way. As good stewards, the members of Synod constantly seek better ways for strengthening one another in the Christian faith, better ways to improve the quality of church workers, better ways to use the gifts God has given His people, and better ways to proclaim the Word to the world and minister to those in need.

Synod holds a place of tremendous importance because it is set up to carry out God's purpose. It is very important because it is the framework in which we as members discharge our responsibilities to God. We love, nurture and serve our Synod because it is a means for sharing the blessings of God's wonderful redemption with one another and with the world.

ch—Missouri Synod

How It Operates

Even as a beautiful automobile is of little value to a person who doesn't know how to operate it, so our Synod can do very little for members who don't know how it operates. And the operation of Synod is vastly more important because this is a means by which members are edified and by which they can carry out part of their mission to the world at large.

Since our Synod is made up of more than 5,000 congregations, there has to be a good piece of machinery for it to work well. Part of this machinery is the organization. Briefly, the congregations elect officers like President, Vice-Presidents, and a board of directors which is responsible for carrying out the wishes of the members.

The Districts

Synod's congregations are spread all over this continent. In order to simplify supervision and management Synod has divided itself into 34 Districts in the United States and Canada. Each of the Districts also has officers. They are to carry out the will of Synod within the boundaries of their Districts. Further, of course, they carry out responsibilities assigned to them by congregations within a particular District.

The Districts, in turn, are also divided into smaller units, called circuits, made up generally of ten to twelve congregations located in the same general area. The counselor in charge of such a circuit represents both the President of Synod and of the District to the congregations in his region.

Conventions

Congregations participate in the affairs of the Synod through conventions. In 1964 Synod holds conventions in each of the Districts. In 1965 Synod will hold its national convention in Detroit. Congregations of Synod are represented at all conventions, whether national or district. Each parish sends a layman and the pastor to serve as representatives at District conventions. When national conventions are held, a layman and a pastor are chosen from each circuit to represent the congregations in the circuit.

Many items appear on the agenda of the

convention. There are opportunities for worship, for doctrinal study, and for deliberation on the business affairs of the church. The business portion of the convention deals with the broad range of activities carried on jointly by the congregations. Reports and recommendations are submitted by officers of Synod and District, as well as by official boards and committees. Congregations, individuals, and other units in the church also submit items for consideration.

Delegates

The agenda and business of a convention is always sent out in advance. Neither the members nor the delegates can participate intelligently or well in the affairs of Synod unless they spend time studying and discussing items up for consideration. While delegates are not instructed how to vote, they should be in a position to reflect the opinions and wishes of the people they represent. And as members consider the business of Synod their aim should be to seek the welfare of the Kingdom.

Delegates should participate actively in all phases of activity at the convention. They are to listen and they are to express themselves by voice and by vote. There are many opportunities. Floor committees, appointed to review all proposals, conduct open hearings before they submit their recommendations. There is opportunity for discussion and decision when the resolutions are presented to delegates for action.

Action

Important as conventions are, the most important things take place after conventions. This is the time when delegates report back to their congregations. This is the time when congregations seek to put resolutions into action.

Synod is at work when the members are at work. Kingdom work goes on when God's people are about their Father's business on their own, or when they work through their congregation, District, or Synod. They even carry on Kingdom work all over the world by training and sending workers, by supplying leaders, money and tools for service.

Our Status in Christ

SINCE CHRIST HAS GONE HOME to His glory, we can also now forsake the pigsty of slavery and sin to go to our home. When we prodigal sons come home to the Father's waiting arms, the fatted calf, and the golden ring, we can only respond with a song of joy: "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." The status God gave to Jesus belongs also to us. It is for this reason that St. Paul speaks of all that God has done for us in Christ in the past tense and in those words reminds us that God has already glorified us. We were raised in the Christ who rose from the dead. His victory belongs to us. Whatever may come, we shall overcome. If we should ask, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" then God answers us: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height

nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39) In Christ we have been made lords even as He is Lord.

It is precisely at this point that the Father asks us to lay aside all status to become servants. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." As soon as Christ had finished washing the feet of His disciples He said: "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13: 14, 15). The mark of the disciple is the mark of the Lord who came as the suffering Servant in order to minister.

When God wanted to make His grace and truth known to men, He sent His Son into flesh and blood at Bethlehem. Now God makes His grace and truth known by becoming incarnate again. He enters your flesh and blood and you become His carrier, His courier, for you are His epistles written in human hearts, known and read by all men.



The Glory of Service

OUR GLORY IS THAT WE CAN SERVE. God does not need us. He could easily accomplish His purposes without our money, our buildings, our meddling fingers. But God honors us by using us even in our weakness and imperfection. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," but the treasure is still God's precious forgiveness and life. It is a treasure even if it is conveyed through us who are vessels of clay. The highest glory we can give our God is not to sing with chorus and orchestra "and He shall reign forever and ever," but that we confess Him to be our Lord by becoming His servants. The life of the Christian truly begins on his bended knee.

When we come back to the Father's waiting arms on bended knee, we find we are not alone. Like the disciples at the Last Supper and like the prodigal son we find our brethren there too. No doubt we have not been and are not getting along too well with all of these brethren. But only from bended knee-can we ever have the right view toward one another. From this vantage point we see that all of us are sinners in need of forgiveness.

With His reminder that we should follow His example Christ is telling us that we need one another. Christ announced to the angels: "I have no other plan." He was leaving the affairs of the church, humanly speaking, in the hands of the disciples. Only a few weeks before the ascension these disciples had been bickering over places and positions of power in the Kingdom. What was it that changed them from shortsighted, selfish lords to a selfless, servant community? By His grace Christ made them kings and lords - but in the church. They were willing to adopt anonymity because they discovered the joy and blessings of community. God took, in the language of the New Testament, legs and arms, eyes and ears, muscles and bones, and out of these He fashioned a body which is the church of Christ.





Sacrifice for Gain

WE ARE A PART OF THAT CHURCH, a part of that body. Our sin cuts us off from one another with pride and hurt feelings. Our sin sets us against one another in greed and selfishness. Our sin drives us onto islands to live like proud but unhappy hermits. But our sin also drives us back to the throne of grace for forgiveness. And there we find our brethren, ready to forgive and bless. In the church we give up our aloneness in exchange for fellowship.

God has a purpose in His plan for the church. Even as a body lives and thrives by each of its members, so we in the church all profit as we serve one another with the gifts God has given us. The secret of our success depends on our willingness both to give and to take in the family, home to home, man to man. And always there is the promise: "He that loseth his life for My sake and

the Gospel's shall find it." We have only what we lose. As we lose ourselves, in confession and surrender, we gain everything. We gain God and the fellowship of the church.

Because Christ was a servant, now we can be faithful stewards. Because He carried out His part of God's plan, we can do our part. He supplies us with every need: "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work, being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God." (2 Corinthians 9:8, 11)

In order to live out life as the body of Christ, God's people gather into congregations and form church bodies. Part of the purpose is to insure that members will build one another up in knowledge and faith through Bible class and Sunday school, through worship services and home visits. Materials and programs are only tools to help Christians live out their lives for the goal which God Himself has set: "That we all

come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:13)

God Has a Plan

"I HAVE NO OTHER PLAN," Christ told the angels. But by these words He announced that there was a plan. The plan has been summarized in different ways. In one place the Scriptures tell us: "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." In another place the Scriptures reminds us: "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." The vital key to God's plan is the Holy Spirit, who works mysteriously and unceasingly.

God's plan also calls for us to play our part as disciples in our time. The heavenly Father says: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Then He gives us the keys of the Kingdom. God's people are made stewards of His plan. Like Eliezer in the home of Abraham or Joseph in the home of Potiphar, God has given us the keys and put us in charge of the entire household. We are free men, lords of the Kingdom, ap-

pointed to be servants of God to carry out His plan. There is no higher goal for us than to adopt the motto of Paul: "I am become all things to all men, if I might by any means win some."

Thus forgiveness is the first business of the church. By forgiveness God restores us to Himself. By forgiveness we sustain one another in the church. By forgiveness we bring God's prodigal sons back to the Father's waiting arms. He who washed us clean asks us to wash one another. The water of baptism which He gives us, the bread and the wine which He places into our hands — these become by His command and promise the channels by which we can bring forgiveness, life, peace, hope, and joy to men.

Our glory is that we are co-workers with God. God does not consider us as His audience. We are not only spectators to see what He is doing or listeners to hear about His work. We are colaborers in His plan, vital to the success of His plan. There is an urgency about it all: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Romans 10:14, 15)





Our Plans for His Plan

GOD HAS HIS PLAN for restoring His creatures, perfect in creation, now under the curse of sin. As He gives us the keys of the Kingdom and names us stewards of His plan, He is saying that we should also have our plans. Our plans must be designed to carry out His plan.

Our congregations and Synod are organized in order to plan our work and then to work our plan. Like our Father, we want to go outside the gates to meet our returning brothers. We are the servants sent out into the highways and byways to compel men to enter the Father's banquet hall. But for the sake of time and effort we don't all want to be crowded into the same few streets, leaving many places unreached. Together we work out our plans. Together we prepare our leaders and workers. Together we give them materials. Together we support them. Together we carry out our strategy, our plans for implementing God's plan.

Yet we are not cogs on a wheel, each going around in the same circle doing the same thing. God has given gifts to His church: "He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11). By the gift God gives each one of us He indicates the kind of service He wants: teaching or preaching, singing or painting, writing or waiting on tables. Even as the body functions best and is a glorious thing to watch when each member plays its role, so the



church is at her best and a glory to behold when every member uses his gift for God's purpose. Whatever limitation God places on us, this is our glory, for these limitations are an expression of God's gracious gift.

We Are Important

WHATEVER WE DO AS INDIVIDUALS is of great significance. Each of us is God's workmanship, the creation by which He wants to show His goodness to the people around us. Life for us should be a sacramental life as our earthly lives and living become the means for bringing God's grace to other men. We are important, not because of what we are or do but only because of all that God has done for us and all that God can do through us. If we want to take Christ to others by our words and works, then we must first draw Him into us.

"I have no other plan," Christ says. By these words He underscores the importance we have for the Kingdom. God has so often used men. The Law came by Moses. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. God used prophets and priests throughout the Old Testament to be His intermediaries, the carriers of His Word, the couriers of His judgment and grace. In the New Testament God has made us all priests to bring our brothers' needs to the throne of grace and to bring God's grace back to the brethren.

Even as the Gospel is foolishness to all men and is mysterious beyond all understanding for Christians, so the Christian life is mysterious and perplexing to the world around us. But the quality of our life is itself our witness. We are not only to bear witness. We are to be witnesses. The Holy Spirit does the rest as He wrestles with the spirits of men to bring them to faith and obedience. The results of our witness are always in God's hands. Our concern must be that we truly give witness to Him who is our Life and that we give our witness in such humility that the sound of our voices echoes no voice but the voice of the waiting Father, that men can always look through us to see Jesus Christ.



Christ in the Brethren

THERE ARE DAYS AND THERE ARE DUTIES that seem so very remote from God — when we straighten out books for the congregation, straighten the bedding for an aged mother in a nursing home, or try to straighten out the dirty details of life for a juvenile delinquent. But to be with Christ always means to be with the least of His brethren. God is not just waiting for us in heaven. He waits for us to visit Him in prison, to clothe and feed Him in far-off lands, to bring words to

Him in the loneliness of a mansion or a grim hospital. The joy of service is double: We serve Him who first served us; we serve the least of the brethren.

“I have no other plan.” Who would want another plan? Here we let go of our holdings to be held of Him who is our Fortress. Here we are stewards of Him who asks only that we invest, and He will do the rest. Here we live out life from the vantage point of final victory even in the midst of apparent defeat. Here in Christ we enter the bondage that frees us from all other bondages. Here we are made free, as Luther says, from all the impossible tasks of making our salvation — for the blessed joy of taking salvation.



To Thee, O God,

*Who hast made and dost sustain us,
Who hast redeemed us by Thy blood,
Who hast given us a new, holy life:*

We pray,
for Thy Word delivered to us by
apostles and prophets, that it may
bring forth fruit one hundredfold;

We pray,
for the Sacrament of Holy Bap-
tism, that it will continue to bring
Thy life to sinners;

We pray,
for the Sacrament of Holy Com-
munion, that it will strengthen us
in faith and love;

We pray,
for the virtues which come by
Thy Spirit, that we may truly
reflect Thy grace and truth to
men;

We pray,
for all the gifts Thou hast given
to men, that we may use them
joyously in Thy service;

We pray,
for Thy name, that it be hallowed
among us and by us;

We pray,
for Thy kingdom, that Thy gra-
cious rule be strengthened and
extended among men;

We pray,
for Thy will, that it be done
among us as it is in heaven.

There Is More—

A well-known passage of the Bible says: "We love Him because He first loved us." Whenever God's love makes a deep impression on us, we react immediately with a desire and a decision to express our love to Him.

This isn't as simple as it sounds. How can the farm family in North Dakota or the secretary in Washington, D.C., best show their love? How can the plumber in Toledo or the engineer in Houston best serve God's kingdom with the skills they have? How can any of us fit best into the service which God's people give to His blessed cause?

There are answers to questions like these. We suggest that you ask your pastor or lay delegate for an opportunity to view the filmstrip, to hear the recordings, and to study the fact book they received at the convention of your District. These materials were produced to help you understand the work of your church and to find a role of service which you can play in the Kingdom.

When you have used these materials you will rejoice to see how intelligently and aggressively your church is pursuing the task God has given. You will also discover the endless opportunities for you to find a place and to give your service.

We pray,
for Thy church, Thy children in
all places and conditions, keep
them with Thee and each other;

We pray,
for rulers of nations and peoples
throughout the world, that they
will seek justice and peace;

We pray,
for the leaders of our Lutheran
Church—Missouri Synod, that
they remain faithful to Thee and
their trust;

We pray,
for our colleges, seminaries, and
institutions of learning, that they
be enlightened by Thy light;

We pray,
for pastors, teachers, and all who
serve in our church, that they be
faithful shepherds to Thy flock;

We pray,
for foreign missionaries, chaplains,
and those far away, that they
sense Thy presence in special
measure;

We pray,
for all members of our congrega-
tions, that they be kept in the
unity of the faith;

We pray,
for all who hear and receive our
ministrations, that they may be
led from darkness to light and joy.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

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