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7 **Pastoral Care in a Lonely World** By Rev. David C. Fleming

Since our Lord proclaimed, before the fall into sin, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18), it’s clear we’re meant to be together. However, we live in largely lonely times. Loneliness has been on the increase in the United States for decades. Before COVID-19, the majority of Americans reported being isolated with the youngest adults (18–22 year-olds) being the loneliest of all. The lockdowns because of COVID-19 only exacerbated this isolation. What might we learn from the challenges of COVID in our already lonely society?

10 **What Is It to “Be the Church”?** By Dr. Adam C. Koontz

In the distant land of pre-coronavirus America, some congregations would take a Sunday off to “be the Church” in their community. The Divine Service was replaced with community service, with the understandable but misplaced idea that the Church is defined by what the members are doing, not by what the Lord is doing among them. For many Christians, the church is what the Church does, not whom the Lord gathers. The Church is defined by her Head, Christ Jesus, as the branches live from the Vine. Where He is, there she is. If He is preached, she is there.

For the Life of the World

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Worship Coming



The date was June 3, 2020. We had been in pandemic lockdown for almost three months at that time. The governor of California had just lifted the restrictions on the shelter-in-place order, so we would be having worship in person for the first time since the second Sunday in Lent. It was going to be Trinity Sunday.

Everything was still new at that time. How would it work with masks, social distancing, wiping down *everything*, and the general fear that we all felt about COVID-19? Was it fear or was it anger? Or sadness? Or joy in anticipation? Maybe all of it was there and much more.

On June 3 I asked the leadership of my congregation to gather so that we could have a practice Divine Service. We needed to figure out how to do everything over again. We were standing and doing “continuous style” communion distribution. Our elders and I had decided to continue the practice of

Out of the Pandemic

Todd A. Peperkorn

the chalice as well as individual cups. Our sanctuary is a bit crowded on the side aisles, so we decided to use a side exit and have people parade around the side of the building to come back in through our fellowship hall after distribution. The pew pads had to be removed and the hymnals. There were a million little details that we had never thought of before. Would it even feel like church? Would anybody show up? What about registration? What are we forgetting?

The evening of our practice service came. There were about 40 people present. They came in uncertain of how to act or behave in church. It was like we were children, learning where to stand and what to do all over again. Right up until the moment we started.

“In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

“Amen.”

With the invocation of God’s name upon us, everything rushed back into place. I know who I am again as a pastor. I’m not a video producer of a religious show once a week. I have people. I preach. I celebrate the Sacraments and deliver them to God’s dear flock in Rocklin, California. My elder knew how to do the readings. My musicians knew how to play the organ with people in the pews. And my people knew how to receive the gifts. Was it everything we wanted? No. But we received the gifts, and that is what really mattered.

Since that time, we have gone outside to worship, we have gone back online to worship, and we have made tweaks and changes to how things are done. However, it is worthwhile to ask the underlying question: what have we learned through this past year and more? I’m sure each of you has your own answers to that question. Here are my top five:

There is no substitute for being there.

We, like almost everyone, have bent over backwards trying to care for people who were hidden away behind closed doors. I would do it all again. But gathering together is what it means to *be* the Church. We are called out (*ekklesia*). We gather together (*congregatio*). We receive the gifts, and we give thanks (*eucharisto*).

We have to act with charity toward our brothers and fellow congregations.

Everyone has been trying to figure this out from day one. As we have tried to work through and make sense of all of these things, decision fatigue can easily set in. Because of that, remembering how to show charity toward brother pastors and our sister congregations has never been more important. Melancthon was right when he wrote, “*Harmony in the Church cannot last unless pastors and churches mutually overlook and pardon many things*” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article V). Unless a practice is clearly wrong and sinful, in these times we really have to ask, “how can I help?” before going down the road of accusations.

Unity is more important than getting your way in matters of adiaphora.

In the Church, doing things together is more important than doing things your way. Do we have to wear masks? It depends. But when we make a decision as a congregation, I want that decision to be made together, so that we don’t have to second guess and start judging one another over things that ultimately do not matter. The devil loves nothing more than to see the Church divided and at odds with one another over

The evening of our practice service came. There were about 40 people present. They came in uncertain of how to act or behave in church. It was like we were children, learning where to stand and what to do all over again. Right up until the moment we started. “In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.” “Amen.” With the invocation of God’s name upon us, everything rushed back into place.



When everything is upside down and changing from day to day, the steady rhythm of the liturgy gives hope in a way that few things can. Although perhaps it is obvious, I have come to appreciate how clear and straightforward our liturgy and worship can be. Cut out the extraneous and get to the point. It does not have to be stark. Simple can be the most beautiful thing in the world. By focusing on the simplicity of the gifts, it may be that we will more easily receive them.



things that may not matter. That might mean we have to stand for communion distribution instead of kneel. It might mean worshipping outside when there is a perfectly good building next door.

Being clear and straightforward matters.

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Do what you can to connect however is possible.

While doing the livestreaming and recorded services was and is hard, it is also important for two different reasons. First, connecting—even imperfectly—is better than not connecting at all. Second, it demonstrates to the congregation that they matter, and that the pastor—and whole congregation—are doing everything possible to keep connected with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 🏡

The Rev. Todd A. Peperkorn (toddpeperkorn@mac.com) has recently accepted a call to serve as the Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

