

For the

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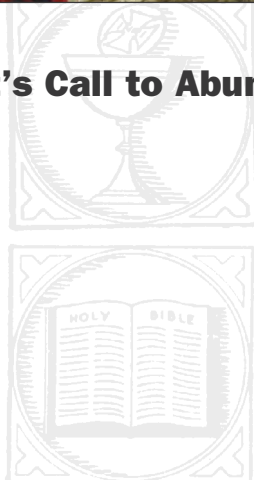
**Renewal of the Body:
Christ's Call to Abundant Health in This Time - p.4**

Renewal of the Mind - p.7

Renewal of the Spirit - p.9

Called to Serve - p.14


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CONTENTS



FEATURES

4 Renewal of the Body—Christ’s Call to Abundant Health in This Time

By John D. Eckrich, M.D., Founder and Director of Grace Place Lutheran Retreats, Saint Louis, Missouri

Lutherans, particularly Lutheran clergy, continuously burn themselves up trying to balance, integrate, and negotiate personal life with commitment to their Call, as if the two could be unraveled. In fact, I would suggest that vibrant and lengthy Christian service springs from balanced, ordered, and integrated personal health, centered and empowered in one’s personal relationship with Christ and rehearsed in the family and home life.

7 Renewal of the Mind

By Dr. William C. Weinrich, Academic Dean, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

If one wishes to consider the “renewal of the mind” and what that includes, one would do well to read and to contemplate the wisdom literature of the Scriptures, especially Psalm 119 and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which is in the Greek Old Testament (called the Septuagint). Note *Wisdom* 6:11: “Set your affection upon My words; desire them, and you shall be instructed.” The formation of the mind (instructed) is not apart from affection and desire for the words of God. The mind is renewed in that it “hears” the speaking of God.

9 Renewal of the Spirit

By the Rev. Paul E. Shoemaker, pastor of Emanuel Lutheran Church, New Haven, Indiana

While I may learn many things and share in wonderful insights from commentators and my own personal study of the Word in preparation to teach the Word or to proclaim the Word, there is a difference when I take time for personal, private devotional time. Renewal of the spirit begins with spending time with the One who gives and sustains spiritual life through His Word.

12 What Does This Mean?

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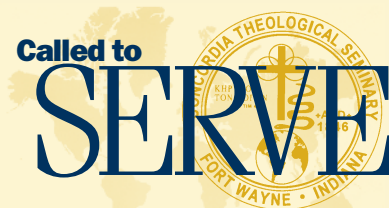
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Continuing to Share the Faith p. 16

Baptism, Preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and the New Curriculum p. 18

2005 Marks 160th Academic Year p. 20

Advent and Lenten Preaching Seminars p. 23

Renewal of the Body

**Christ's Call to
Abundant Health
in This Time**

By John D. Eckrich, M.D.



What is the state of *health* of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod clergy and laity as we enter the 21st century? As a practicing Internist in St. Louis for 30 years, my medical life has been woven intricately with the lives of seminarians, parish pastors, teachers, synodical judicatory, Lutheran laity, and their families. My observation has been simple and reproducible: Lutherans, particularly Lutheran clergy, continuously burn themselves up trying to balance, integrate, and negotiate personal life with commitment to their Call, as if the two could be unraveled. In fact, I would suggest that vibrant and lengthy Christian service springs from balanced, ordered, and integrated personal health, centered and empowered in one's personal relationship with Christ and rehearsed in the family and home life. This is one instance where the "fish bowl" of pastoral life can instruct us all.

The reality is that the pastor's life, both in his work and in his home, reflects the lives of the flock he serves, perhaps more today than ever before. Therefore, the pastor's struggles and anxieties serve almost as a case study for the trials of God's people which then can enrich our understanding of health and abundant living in all of us. Might the following description of life's stresses and disorder apply to your life?

Numerous studies in both Lutheran and non-sectarian literature document clergy shortage and potential etiologies for the current pastoral workers' crises (Klaas, 1999; Alban Institute, 2001). Clergy shortages in all mainline denominations are widespread, due to both lack of career candidates and professional burnout and the result of *unhealthy* work environments. Among causes for *unhealthy* professional settings are pastors "beating up" on their brothers, mismatching of pastors and congregations, lack of seeking or accessing counseling for pastors and their families, and poverty-level clergy income, to name a few.

The mountain of challenges to clergy's personal health, health as exemplified by vibrant personal pilgrim walks and lengthy and satisfying professional service, seems almost insurmountable. Yet, we understand that Christ came to restore health and order to our personal life as well as the life of the world, and to restore it with abundance (John 10:10). Certainly that abundance is meant for clergy and laity alike.

We know that the process of restoration begins and is fulfilled completely in the grace of Christ Crucified. But have we, *grace-grasped*, also been given *response-ability* for our health? When I use the word health, I would suggest not just physical

good-standing, but also emotional, spiritual, intellectual, relational, vocational, and leisurely health. I would entreat you further to the notion that the Law and Prophets, as well as our dear healing Savior, invite each of us to this *health response-ability* growing directly out of being *grace-grasped*.

The Old Testament instructs us about health and order by first defining for us dis-ease and dis-order. (We don't know how vital our thumb is to hand function until we experience a paper cut; we don't realize how miraculous a regular, subtle heart-beat of 72 times a minute is until we experience palpitations or angina.) We move quickly from the order of "God saw all that He had made and it was very good" of Genesis 1:31, through rebellious Adam to the cosmic disorder of Genesis 3:17 where "Cursed is the ground because of you." Adam's illness, the Old Man's Disease, is noisy and painful to body and psyche, and is characterized by cutting off the sufferer from relationships, both personal and societal. However, all of the Levitical or holiness laws could not guarantee human health. Law could

prescribe a course of therapy of

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living in order “not to become sick” but could not heal. We leave Malachi 4:2 with the promise that the Messiah would “. . . rise with healing in [His] wings.”

Dramatically in 41 distinct healings in the Gospels and 16 healings in Acts we learn of this unprecedented young rabbi and physician erupting upon the Middle East. He is healing the unclean, compassionate to the whole person—body and spirit—and He even “takes up our infirmities and carries our diseases” (Matt. 8:16-17). He touches the inner and outer life and restores order to the kingdom of God (Luke 4:18-19).

Specifically, Jesus restores Shalom, a peaceful and right relationship with one’s self, neighbor, and God. The angels announce this Shalom to the shepherds of Bethlehem, and Christ proclaims this Shalom twice as He greets His followers immediately after the resurrection. Also, He outlines this beautifully as He responds to the scholars in Mark 12:29-31. Jesus begins His instruction with the Shema: The Lord our God is One. (First, be in restored order with God, and He will accomplish this with His obedience on the

Cross.) Then, love the Lord with all your heart (emotions), soul (spirit), mind (intellect), and strength (physical being). I would suggest these to be ordered relationships with self. Finally, love your neighbor as yourself (restored relationships to others).

How does all this “health and dis-ease” talk apply to dis-order or un-health in Lutheran clergy and laity? In broad terms, dis-order in all of us is a result of chronic stress. Chronic stress is a description of all of the persistent adverse forces working against effective Christian service and vibrant personal living. Chronic stress produces **anxiety**. Anxiety produces whole-being reactions characterized by

somatic complaints and illness (physical), depression (emotional), tunnel vision (intellectual/vocational), isolation (relational/leisure), and often anger at God (spiritual). Anxiety produces “Old Adam Dis-ease.” It is sorrowful and it is disordered. The natural end-point of “Old Adam Dis-ease” is, at the least, professional burnout; often, and even worse, life-threatening illness and death. Re-written, the wages of sin is, indeed, death!

However, thanks be to God, Christ is calling us to a different walk, a grace-grasped path, leading to abundant living. What’s more, He gives us His Holy Spirit to make

possible this new walk. It is His very **GRACE** that gives us the response-ability to this alternative life-style. This new Adam life-style involves our whole being and it is integrated. We can *invest* physically by proper diet and weight control, regular exercise, fasting, appropriate rest, and medical visits. We can emotionally *live in hope and joy* realizing the cure of the Cross. Intellectually, we can persist in *study* of His Word and all the magnificent art and literature of His renewing creation. Relationally we can *forgive* and drop the grizzly burden of bad neighbor-baggage. Most importantly, we can continue in *prayer*, in corporate and personal worship and devotion, in Christ-centered meditation, all especially gathered around our own families. These are discipline-gifts of Grace which can assist us along the promised journey of abundant living. Each of these health opportunities can be practiced first and foremost in our personal lives and the lives of our homes, and then carried in an authoritative yet servant fashion into our professional careers and to all the people God has entrusted to our care.

Will stress and anxiety cease? No, and Romans 5 reminds us that we can rejoice even in our challenges, which produce “perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope,” given to us through the Holy Spirit.

Grace alone gives us the *response-ability* to deal with these challenges to health, claim abundant living in personal and family life, school us and embolden us for the work in the harvest field. I believe as we grasp back to Christ’s unbreakable grip and claim this *response-ability*, we can make steps toward healthy, vibrant, and long-serving pastorates and lay service in the Lutheran Church and teach our people about God’s grace-grasped gift of health to us. Each of us can then truly recognize an additional dynamic to our Gospel call in St. Luke in chapter 9 verses 1-2:

When Jesus had called the twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Dr. John D. Eckrich is a practicing Internist and Gastroenterologist in St. Louis. Five years ago he founded and now directs Grace Place Lutheran Retreats. Grace Place offers Lutheran clergy and all professional church workers a “pause point” in their ministry walk, five-day and five-night wellness retreats, to learn preventative health skills and attitudes. Grace Place retreats are held in beautiful retreat and resort facilities all across the U.S. many times each year, and are heavily underwritten by foundations and individuals who love their church workers and want to support their work in the name of the healing Savior. Grace Place has been the recipient of several grants from the Lutheran Foundation of Fort Wayne to retreat clergy and their spouses from the Fort Wayne region.



Thanks be to God, Christ is calling us to a different walk, a grace-grasped path, leading to abundant living. What’s more, He gives us His Holy Spirit to make possible this New Walk. It is His very GRACE that gives us the response-ability to this alternative life-style.