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Volume Twenty-Four, Number One



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### 7 Why Your Congregation Is More Important Than Ever By Dr. Dale A. Meyer

The congregation where you worship has always been important. It's the place where the faithful gather around God's Word and Sacraments. As eternally important as that is, changes in American life make our weekly gatherings at church more important than ever. If you're concerned about the challenges facing your congregation in these changed times, remember our hope is Jesus, the Lord of the Church. We need to trust He's leading us.

### 10 Take Care of the Souls and Do the Work of an Evangelist By Dr. K. Detlev Schulz

The Church is not the end itself. She is placed in a world and community and there becomes God's instrument into which outsiders are invited and welcomed. And the pastor is accountable to the Lord Himself for upholding that divine prerogative of reaching out to others so that through teaching and preaching about it and demonstrating it in practice, the members will be motivated to participate in their own respective ways.

## For the Life of the World

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*For the Life of the World* is mailed to all pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in the United States and Canada and to anyone interested in the work of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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# Take Care of and Do the Work of an

“The Church will remain forever.” We hear this statement, and similar ones, quite often. It comes from the Augsburg Confession and it wants to give assurance to Christians that the Church, in spite of all the setbacks and challenges, will always remain. What optimism! Can the Church really not die?

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**The Lord does not want His Church to be idle. Before He returns, He obliges the Church with two tasks that need to be done by the pastor: take care of My souls and do the work of an evangelist. One leads to the other; they are inseparable and equally needed. For if the Church remains then the call to serve also remains. God needs agents who preach, teach, and administer His Word. That task promises the Church’s future, because she receives the food that keeps her alive.**

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What if the 16th Century confessors had been able to take a peek into the 21st Century to see what churches in the West are currently going through? Would they not have been more cautious? The list of worries is endless: dwindling membership, the low birth rate and old age, reduced tithing to the central office, a drop in student enrollment at both seminaries, shrinking congregations that can’t afford a full-time pastor, and, last but not least, an outside world that seems to have turned its back on the Church and her message. Putting all these factors together, the future looks bleak for a graduating seminarian. His ministry will entail struggles, burials may well outnumber baptisms, and his congregations will likely either plateau or decrease in membership.

And yet, “the Church will remain forever.” We certainly are in need of that comfort. Indeed, the Lord does not, nor will He, abruptly stop His own work on His Church, nor decide to turn His back on His children. “For I will be with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Thus, where the Word is preached, taught, and administered, there faith will be awakened and strengthened. For this

reason, the Lord does not want His Church to be idle. Before He returns, He obliges the Church with two tasks that need to be done by the pastor: take care of My souls and do the work of an evangelist. One leads to the other; they are inseparable and equally needed. For if the Church remains then the call to serve also remains. God needs agents who preach, teach, and administer His Word. That task promises the Church’s future, because she receives the food that keeps her alive.

But we are not here saving ourselves; it remains the Church’s task to save others. The Church is not the end itself. She is placed in a world and community and there becomes God’s instrument into which outsiders are invited and welcomed. And the pastor is accountable to the Lord Himself for upholding that divine prerogative of reaching out to others so that through teaching and preaching about it and demonstrating it in practice, the members will be motivated to participate in their own respective ways. Being the instrument in the mission of God, a church does not adopt mission when it is opportune or decide against it at her own will and

*Opposite page: The Rev. Dr. Douglas Spittel, senior pastor of First Trinity Evangelical–Lutheran Church, Pittsburgh, prays with recipients of First Trinity Homeless Ministry, part of Pittsburgh Area Lutheran Ministries.*

# f the Souls Evangelist

**Preparing the  
Seminarian for  
Ministry in the  
Church and to  
the World**

**Klaus Detlev Schulz**



Photo courtesy of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod/Erik M. Lunsford.






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**Feed my sheep and do the work of an evangelist is what the Lord calls His ministers to do. Differently put, preach, teach, and care, but also defend, translate, and commend the Gospel. The Church will remain forever, but so also will these tasks.**

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time; she is already in God’s mission even if she is reluctant to accept that fact.

Thus, both tasks of feeding and doing the work of an evangelist are priorities for every graduating seminarian. He is committed to feed the Lord’s children with excellence and to turn to a world out there and extend to it an invitation to come and see something that is special. An African proverb says it well: “Where there is sugar, the ants will come.”

But what exactly does that mean to raise one’s focus to the world outside, beyond the walls of the Church? How can a seminarian be prepared in class to address it? The key issue is to learn to ask questions, the right ones; they are those that occupy all people’s minds, albeit answered in different ways.

The apologist Ravi Zacharias mentions four areas on which all humans seem to converge, Christians and non-Christians alike. First, they think about their origin. Where do humans come from? There are only two options: either from God, the creator, or from mere matter. Second, meaning. What is the true meaning and purpose of my life? Do I exist to praise and serve the Lord of life, or is it to seek pleasure and enjoyment for my own self? Third, morality. Around which moral principles do I shape my life and from whom have I received them? From God, or are they products of society? Fourth and finally: hope. What do I look forward to when my life ends? To be in the company of the creator, or will it end in void and darkness?

The ability to ask the right questions in a world searching for answers is a learned and practiced skill, and they must be relevant to an audience that lives in the 21st Century. We do not speak to people as if they are made out of stone. To that end, we heed the advice of a notable theologian who once said: “Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.” (Karl Barth) There is a different way of putting it. Every student ought to be bilingual, not in the sense of being conversant in both English and Spanish or German (though that too would be good), but bilingual in the sense that he can speak the never-changing biblical truth to an ever-changing world by translating it to the

minds and experiences of the audience.

But of what is the world out there comprised? Is there a way of boiling down society’s multi-configuration to something that is less intimidating and overwhelming? Rev. Timothy Keller, a leading theologian among the evangelicals and a successful church planter of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, not only calls denominations to focus on urban ministry but to be aware of encountering there, in this ever-changing society, essentially two groups: those who belong to a religious group of one kind or another, and those who are the skeptics. In terms of the first group, we should be aware that there are all types of people in the cities (and elsewhere) such as the Hindu, Muslim, or Orthodox Jew. And then there are the skeptics, those with the “buffered self,” who are less inclined to be approached with advice from a religious leader because they have largely rejected every religion and replaced it with their own. For this dubious postmodern, who has created the world on his/her own terms, the Christian solution, too, is not an option.

Given this diversity in society, Keller’s advice is fitting: “You can’t have a little outline that you use on everybody.” However, it seems that the best entry point into an audience is the First Commandment and to inquire about people’s god. Luther once said: “That to which your heart clings, is your God.” We can and should inquire from someone, regardless of race, color, or standing: “Is God in the center of your life or is it something else that has taken His place? And what does that God or something else look like?”

Feed my sheep and do the work of an evangelist is what the Lord calls His ministers to do. Differently put, preach, teach, and care, but also defend, translate, and commend the Gospel. The Church will remain forever, but so also will these tasks. 🏠

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