

# Don't Think



*Abundant Life Lutheran congregation provides braille and extra-large print bulletins and studies to the Charlotte community and has about a dozen blind or visually disabled members. Pastor Stout talking with Belviea (right), who recently fell asleep in the Lord, and Jane. Neither would have been Lutheran if it had not been for this service provided by a blind member of Abundant Life who has an embossing machine.*

# About It!

By Christopher T. Stout

“Don’t think. Just do.” I often heard this from the mouth of Dr. Nordling in my summer Greek class during July and August of 2008. He was referring to the importance of understanding certain specifics about the Greek language (parsing verbs, for example) so well that you didn’t have to think, you just did. He wanted his class to understand parts of the language so well that it became a part of us. If it became a part of us, then reading Greek would become a joy and not a burden. If we had to think too much, we would quickly become burdened. If it became a burden, it might quickly be neglected once we were in a parish setting.

During my time at Concordia Theological Seminary (CTSFW), Fort Wayne, Indiana, I was formed. That is to say, certain things became a part of me. There were truths that were emphasized so clearly, practiced so consistently by both staff and student body and preached so well in simplicity and faithfulness that they just became a part of me.

In preparing for this article, I came across this quote from Francesco Petrarca, an Italian poet from the 14th century, “I ate in the morning what I would digest in the evening; I swallowed as a boy what I would ruminate upon as an older man.” Stating this truth in a more familiar way, we often might pray for the Lord to help us “inwardly digest” our Lord’s Word. That is to say, we pray that the Lord’s Word penetrates into our conscience, our morality and our ethics.

At CTSFW, I swallowed truths that I now ruminate on as a young pastor. After leaving the Seminary in May of 2012, I

left not only knowing more of the truths of the Christian confession, I left with many of those truths being a part of me and growing into even more of those truths.

I don’t always have to think much about the need for my hearers to have the comforting truth of our Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection when they are near death or when they have experienced the death of someone they love, I just do it. This wonderful truth became a part of me, not only because it was taught in the classroom, preached in the chapel and discussed over coffee, but also because it was rubbed into my ears by dear Seminary professors when my wife and I experienced the death of our first child in a miscarriage. I don’t have to think much about how a note of comfort or consolation will be received by a member of my congregation. I often just do it because I know how it was received by me during times of trial and tribulation when I was a student.



*The miracle of our adoption as children through Water and the Word. Pastor Stout is with Miracle and her mother, Areille, after Miracle received the gift of Holy Baptism during an Easter Vigil service in 2014.*

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*Members of Mount Calvary and Pastor Lloyd Ginn of Center Grove Lutheran Church, Kannapolis, North Carolina, helping the children through the liturgy.*

**The Lord’s desire for His Word to be proclaimed to those still dead in their sin, the necessity of always being prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have within us and the call for us and our congregations to be intentional in outreach to our communities were given for us to digest inwardly at the Seminary. My love for the Lord’s Word, my meditation on it and my way of hearing the comforts that come from it have all become a part of me as I was formed at CTSFW.**

*Pastor Stout teaching children the faith during a Matins service at a Summer Reading Program called ThyWORD. Mount Calvary began this program in 2014 and uses Scripture to teach the children in the community reading comprehension, vocabulary and the language of the faith.*



I don’t have to think much about proclaiming our Lord’s all atoning death which won for us the forgiveness of sin and God’s favor, I just do it because I was on the receiving end of hearing the absolution in chapel, in the classroom and in conversation. This sweet absolution gave to me a clean conscience before God. It was a comfort as I struggled in my vocations as a student, husband, father, son and friend. It is a comfort as I struggle in my vocations as pastor, husband, father, son and friend, and so I know it will be comfort for the sheep which our Lord has given me to undershepherd as they struggle in their many vocations.

The formation I received at CTSFW came not only from the faculty, it also came from the student body. As certain truths became a part of me, so also certain friendships became a part of me. I don’t always have to think much about whom I am going to call or email when I am experiencing a difficult time in the congregation, I just do it because of relationships built with students who are now pastors with me. These friendships that were formed at the Seminary continue to form me now. And even more, I know that friends that my wife met at CTSFW are now a part of her. They were formed by the truths of the Christian faith and together they formed and continue to form each other. They provided and continue to provide mutual support and trust. They are now a part of each other.

The Lord’s desire for His Word to be proclaimed to those still dead in their sin, the necessity of always being prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have within us and the call for us and our congregations to be intentional in outreach to our communities were given for us to digest inwardly at the Seminary. My love for the Lord’s Word, my meditation on it and my way of hearing

the comforts that come from it have all become a part of me as I was formed at CTSFW. My mind, my conscience, my piety, my prayer life, my preaching and my family life were also formed at the Seminary. My love for the Lutheran Confessions, my love for our hymns, my love for Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Walther and Giertz are all now a part of me because I was fed these fathers in the faith in order that I may ruminate on their confessions for the rest of my life. And when I fail at loving all of these gifts, comfort and forgiveness are found in the confession of my sins—yet another gift given and formed into my life from the communion of my brother pastoral students and professors at CTSFW.

Because the Seminary community confessed and practiced the call for us to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16) and to store up our Lord’s Word in our heart, that we might not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11), I was formed in the Lord’s truth. I was fed truths in the classroom, in the chapel and over coffee by both faculty and students that I digested inwardly (sometimes intentionally and more often unintentionally) and will continue to be nourished by it for the rest of my life. As I continue to read many of our fathers in the faith and continue to listen to many pastors and teachers in the Synod, I also realize how much formation I still have yet to go on this side of seminary. 🙏

*The Rev. Christopher T. Stout (CTSFW 2012) serves as pastor of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church ([www.mountcalvarylutheran.net](http://www.mountcalvarylutheran.net)), Kannapolis, North Carolina, and Abundant Life Lutheran Church ([www.abundantlifelutheranchurch.org](http://www.abundantlifelutheranchurch.org)), Charlotte, North Carolina.*

