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For the Life of the World

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

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The liturgy is the heart and center of the church's life, the very thing to which the lost are called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. That is to say, the liturgy is not simply a "means to some other end," but it is the very Kingdom of Heaven here among us in the Word and works of Christ Jesus. Apart from that liturgy, there would be no point or purpose to the mission of the church.

7 Servants Formed to Reach: Confessional Theological Education Arthur A. Just Jr.

Faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ *in a person's own language*. Through Seminario Concordia El Reformador, the Livonian Lutheran Project, Concordia Theological Seminary Taiwan, and mission outreach in Eurasia, former CTSFW students are playing a central role in forming confessional pastors and deaconesses to reach the lost in a language they can understand.

10 Servants Formed to Reach: The Witnessing Community Mark Wood

Every One His Witness was designed to "equip Lutherans to be Third Article witnesses telling the Second Article story using their First Article gifts." It makes a clear and important distinction between the work we do as the Church Gathered (i.e., outreach) and the work we do as the Church Scattered (i.e., witness). But it dismisses the idea that evangelism is a work that we do on our own.

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Servants Formed to Reach: Through the Litu

I began my seminary studies in the fall of 1989, which was perhaps not the most ideal time to do so, as others may recall. There were various rumblings within the Synod and even on the Seminary campus at that time, which impacted our formation as future pastors in various ways. No doubt the Lord worked all those things together for the good of His church and for His people, His pastors included, and part of that benefit would surely be the clarifying and sharpening of our understanding of His good gifts.



Understanding “the liturgy” to be the Lord’s good and gracious work of preaching and the Sacraments, shaped especially by the administration of His Supper in accordance with His Word, the first point to be made is that the liturgy is the heart and center of the church’s life, the very thing to which the lost are called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

Among other things, the so-called “worship wars” were really just heating up at that point and causing some division and confusion within the life of the church. For my part, I grew up in a conservative family and was therefore comfortable and familiar with the traditional Lutheran liturgy in a basic and general sort of way. But I didn’t really have a good grasp or understanding of the importance or significance of that liturgical heritage and practice. A deeper appreciation of those treasures would come with time.

Regrettably, in my early years at the Seminary I harbored the false impression that one could be *either* “liturgical” or “missional” in attitude, outlook, and practice. That unfortunate perspective was common in those days, going hand-in-hand with a similar false dichotomy between confessional commitment and evangelical outreach, as though such things were antithetical and incompatible. I wince at the memory of how, as a young seminary student, I more or less accepted such dichotomies as a given. Thankfully, one benefit of our seminary process was that I had the time and opportunity to learn and grow.

A particular point of clarity came in my fourth year at the Seminary, in a missions class with Dr. Gregory Lockwood, which afforded me the chance to look closely at the life and ministry of Wilhelm Loehe. That is when I recognized that, far from being at odds with one another, the liturgy of the Gospel and the mission of the church are really of one piece and in perfect harmony with each other. Indeed, the mission of the church is centered in the liturgy of the Gospel and continues from there into the world.

In the midst of a liberal and rationalistic age, Pastor Loehe was a staunchly confessional Lutheran in theology and practice, an avid student and practitioner of the historic liturgy, and an ardent proponent and active supporter of outreach and missions at home and abroad. His preaching, pastoral care, and tangible works of mercy were exemplary. He was directly and personally involved in preparing men for the mission and ministry of the church in the United States, and he was instrumental in establishing our own Concordia Theological Seminary as well as helping to start The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He understood that the truth and faithfulness of our pure doctrine is exercised and actualized in the liturgy of the Gospel, and that our confession of the faith is both the impetus and the content of the church’s evangelistic efforts within the life of the congregation and to all the nations of the world.

In Wilhelm Loehe I found a beautiful example of what I had already begun to sense in my classes, in the chapel, and

Liturgy of the Gospel

D. Richard Stuckwisch

in my fieldwork and vicarage. Theology, liturgy, and the pastoral office were intimately connected and working closely together in the catechesis and confession of Christ Jesus. And these very things were not only edifying my faith and nourishing my life as a Christian, they were forming me to be a pastor of the Lord's church, to pray and to practice the faith, to preach and teach the Word of Christ, and to administer His precious means of grace to the glory of His name and for the salvation of the lost.

The truth is, the Lord's liturgy of the Gospel in the preaching of His Word and the administration of His Holy Sacraments is so fundamental to and intertwined with the inner ministry and outward mission of His church, it would be redundant to identify all the ways in which the one informs the other. But given the confusion and false dichotomies that have prevailed at various times and still persist in some places to the present day, it is worth pointing out some of the broad and basic ways whereby the liturgy fuels the church's evangelistic outreach and actually works to form servants for the reaching of the lost.

Understanding "the liturgy" to be the Lord's good and gracious work of preaching and the Sacraments, shaped especially by the administration of His Supper in accordance with His Word, the first point to be made is that the liturgy is the heart and center of the church's life, the very thing to which the lost are called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. That is to say, the liturgy is not simply a "means to some other end," but it is the very Kingdom of Heaven here among us in the Word



Photo: Flickr, Tribble

and works of Christ Jesus. Apart from that liturgy, there would be no point or purpose to the mission of the Church. But as it is, we reach out to the lost for the sake of calling them into the life of the church in the liturgy of the Gospel.

Not only that, but what happens in the liturgy—what is preached and heard, given and received there in the liturgy—is what continues to happen in the lives of God’s people within their respective callings and stations. The Word of the Lord which they have heard in the Divine Service is the Word they pray and confess with their families, friends, and neighbors in the world. And the gifts they have received in the Divine Service bear good fruits after their own kind in the charity and good works of the faithful. As they are washed and fed, healed and forgiven, comforted and strengthened by the liturgy of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, so do they likewise wash and feed, heal and forgive, comfort and strengthen those whom the Lord has laid at their gates and placed alongside them in this body and life on earth. And they are prompted to do so in joyful thanksgiving for the gifts Christ freely gives in the liturgy.

To hand over what we have received from the Lord in doctrine and practice is, of course, precisely what we are given to do—and what we rightly aim to do—in evangelism, outreach, and missions. For what do we have to give that we have not first of all received? And that is true for pastors and laity alike, each of us in his own place. Accordingly, pastoral formation really begins and continues with the experience and exercise of the Christian life in the hearing of the Word of Christ as it is preached, in the washing of the water with His Word in Holy Baptism, in the confessing of sins and the receiving of Holy Absolution, and in the eating of His body and the drinking of His blood in the Holy Communion. This is why fieldwork and vicarage are not just practically and pedagogically important, but fundamental and essential to the formation of future pastors. We cannot do or give what we ourselves are not receiving and relying on.

What is more, to the point at hand, the faithful administration and conduct of the liturgy, in keeping with the Lord’s Word and in continuity with the church’s traditional teaching and practices, is already the primary exercise

of evangelism, which continues in outreach and the overall mission of the Church. There is such a beautiful continuity between the liturgical work of the pastoral ministry within the life of the congregation and the evangelical life of every Christian within their respective callings and stations.

I am so profoundly thankful for those professors who not only taught me the truth of the pure Gospel in the Seminary classrooms but also exemplified and practiced that confession in the chapel, and likewise for my fieldwork and vicarage pastors who faithfully practiced the Church’s traditional liturgy. As those men preserved and handed over the faith once delivered to the saints, they were teaching me and training me to be a faithful pastor, and they were preparing me to give those gifts of God in Christ Jesus that fill up His people and overflow to the joy and edification of countless others over time. 🙏

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