

The

# EVANGEL

Luther's Small Catechism: 10 Commandments





# From the Editor

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Are you forgetting something? This question can either jog our memory or make us worried: “I don’t know – am I?”

Forgetting is such a simple thing. Each of us has done this at some point: forgotten to write an event on the calendar, gotten distracted, assumed we would remember, then suddenly we realize: we have forgotten something important.

Judges 3:7 tells us “The people of God forgot His ways...” How does that happen? How do God’s own people “forget” His ways?

Perhaps forgetting something in everyday life doesn’t seem so bad, but for the people of God, this was a major problem: The rest of Judges 3:7 tells us the people did evil things AND worshipped idols! Forgetting seems like a pretty big deal now, doesn’t it?

Like the examples in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, many things may lead to us forgetting God: the cares of the world, persecution or troubles, lack of good soil or roots, and more.

But God has not left us on our own; His Spirit keeps our faith strong through His Word and the Sacraments, gifts we can daily and weekly receive. John 15:5 reminds us: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

This edition is the first of 2025 and the start of a journey through *Luther’s Small Catechism*. The catechism contains the basics of the faith – reminders we ALL need. We pray these articles encourage you in your studies of Biblical truth.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and **forget not** all His benefits, Who forgives all your iniquity, Who heals all your diseases,” (Ps 103:2-3, emphasis added).

God’s peace be with you,

*Gretchen Baker*

Gretchen Baker  
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Editor: Gretchen Baker  
Layout & Design: Karen Young



## The Small Catechism: What You Must Need to Know In Order to Be Saved

By Rev. Dr. Cary Larson

I recently had a disturbing conversation with a Lutheran pastor who is not part of The American Association of Lutheran Churches. He was seeking counsel from me as he needed some guidance on how to pastorally respond to the harsh criticisms of his congregation's elders and council. The chief critique, he informed me, was that he was not teaching from the Bible. When a church council member told him this, he became greatly disturbed and asked for further details, to which he got a reply that shocked him even more. The complaint was that he was teaching from a book called "Concord." No kidding!

We are a Lutheran body that does not kid around about our extremely high opinion of the Holy Scriptures. We use words like "inspired," "revealed," and "inerrant" when we talk about the Word of God. Our constitution boldly expresses that we "joyfully

submit to [the Word of God] as the only infallible authority in all matters of life and faith." It would be best to appreciate that not all "Lutheran bodies" nor other Christian churches make this bold confession.

Another thing that sets us apart from many Lutherans in this country is that we completely subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord* "not insofar as but because they are the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and a summary of the faith of the evangelical Lutheran Church [emphasis mine]." <sup>1</sup>

Within the *Book of Concord* are several works, one of which we are all familiar with is *Luther's Small Catechism*. Regrettably, in my experience as a Lutheran pastor, many of us are guilty

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## Small Catechism continued...

that we studied the *Small Catechism* in our youth and have not touched it since. The revered Martin Luther would have that this work would be before us daily, not just in the season of our youth.

This year, I've asked that *The Evangel* focus on the chief parts of *Luther's Small Catechism* to encourage and inspire members of The AALC to return to the *Small Catechism*. The learned Luther would use his *Small Catechism* as part of his daily walk in Word of God. He would annually preach sermons on the chief parts of the *Small Catechism* in his career as a preacher.

Luther purposely arranged the *Small Catechism* in accordance with the Word of God believing that these parts accurately reflect the way of salvation. Luther wrote:

Three things a man must need to know in order to be saved. First, he must know what to do and what not to do. Secondly, when he recognizes that by his own power, he cannot do what he should, nor leave undone what he should not do, he must learn where to receive, seek and find such power and strength. Thirdly, he must know how to seek and obtain it. Just as a sick man must know first of all what his sickness is and what he may do and what he may not do. Next, he must find where the remedy is which may cure him so that he can do what any healthy person does. Fourthly, he must desire such remedy and seek and fetch it or have it brought to him. Accordingly, the Commandments teach man to know his sickness so that he may see what he can do and what he cannot do, and to acknowledge himself as a sinner and a wicked man. After that the Creed teaches him where to find the remedy that helps him to become godly and to keep the Commandments; it shows him God and His mercy, revealed and offered in Christ. Fifthly

the Lord's Prayer teaches him how to seek, fetch and obtain such mercy, namely through proper humble competent prayer; thus it shall be granted him, and he shall be saved through the fulfillment of God's commandments.<sup>2</sup>

Teaching confirmation classes for both young and old, and as I continue to lead Bible studies in congregations of The AALC, I remind all that the *Small Catechism* (as well as the *Book of Concord*) is not a second book that we Lutherans follow along with the Holy Bible. Instead, the *Small Catechism* works like a pair of eyeglasses. Eyeglasses do not change anything that the one who wears the eyeglasses observes. Eyeglasses have one purpose: to help the person see the subject clearly and sharply. The *Small Catechism* is spiritual eyeglasses that serve us to read the Word of God with clarity and confidence, and that what we read and hear is that which wins salvation for each of us, namely Christ Jesus and Him crucified.

I urge you to rediscover *Luther's Small Catechism* as you read this year's editions of *The Evangel*. If you don't have one, kindly ask your pastor for a copy. In my calls, I used to distribute them generously. Reading the *Small Catechism* will not only sharpen your understanding of God's Word but also enrich your Christian faith, leading to personal growth and spiritual development.


Oh, by the way, that pastor who reached out to me? He strongly desires to be a pastor of The AALC. He wants to be part of a church that takes God's Word seriously and holds fast to the Lutheran Confessions. Should it be in accordance with God's will, we will gladly welcome such a faithful Christian pastor. †

*The Rev. Dr. Cary Larson serves The AALC as the Presiding Pastor.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, Article III, 03.08.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism – A History of Its Origin, Its Distribution and Its Use* (Chicago, Wartburg Publishing House, 1929), 9.



*Our constitution boldly expresses that we “joyfully submit to [the Word of God] as the only infallible authority in all matters of life and faith.”*



# The Small Catechism



## First Commandment

By Rev. Joe Dapelo

Several years ago while preaching on the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 and Mark 10, I asked the congregation if anyone had been successful in not breaking the First Commandment to have no other gods. The question was meant to be rhetorical, but immediately one hand shot straight up. A lady in the congregation truly believed that she had never broken the First Commandment. I was taken aback by her boldness, while also trying not to embarrass her or react too flippantly about such a bold claim.

But this is the case often when we think about the Ten Commandments. It is easy for us to see where we break some of the commandments that belong to the second table of the law (those things we do toward our neighbor), but without proper perspective we might convince ourselves that the First Commandment is the easy one. “After all, I’ve been a Christian my whole life. I’ve not bowed down to the false gods of other religions. I’ve never left the faith in which I have been baptized. Surely, I’ve kept the First Commandment.”

But the First Commandment is not the easiest of the commandments. The First Commandment that calls us to “have no other gods before me” is indeed the most difficult of the commandments to keep and the root of our sinfulness and disobedience to God in all other areas of the Law. The simple words of Martin Luther in the *Small Catechism* cut us to the heart when we hear, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”<sup>1</sup>

If only it were that easy. Christians like to remind each other to “Love God and love others,” just as Jesus told us in Mark

12 when He summarizes the Commandments saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,” and, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But so often we fail to recognize that the Law which is meant for our good and shows us God’s good desire for humanity is also the Law that shows us our weakness, exposes our sinfulness, and tells us that we cannot be justified by works of the Law.

And the root problem is our failure to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. This began all the way back in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve failed to heed the Word of God and sought to become like God. It’s been said: In the beginning God made man in His image, and ever since then we’ve been trying to return the favor. Our sinful nature leads us to worship of self. We desire to be our own boss, make our own rules, and lead life the way we want to lead life.

In fact, every sin and breaking of the other nine commandments stems from this idolatry of self. We worship ourselves. We put our trust in ourselves. We may not always realize that, and certainly as Christians we still worship our Lord and recognize that He is the true God, but functionally we put ourselves above Him. Even when we recognize the idols of money (like the rich young ruler) or success, we recognize that the true idol in our life isn’t money or success but our own love and desire for those things. The true idol is self!

We have an idolatry problem. Luther spells this out for us in the *Large Catechism* when he asks the question “What does it mean to have a god?”

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## First Commandment continued...

A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God (Heb 11:6). Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god.<sup>2</sup>

Where in your life are you not trusting in God? What are the things that you put your trust in rather than God at times? Do you trust in your own security or abilities? Do you get worried and anxious about things that are out of your control despite the admonition of Jesus to not be anxious about such things? Do you fall into sin of thought, word, and deed demonstrating a lack of love and trust in God and His Word?

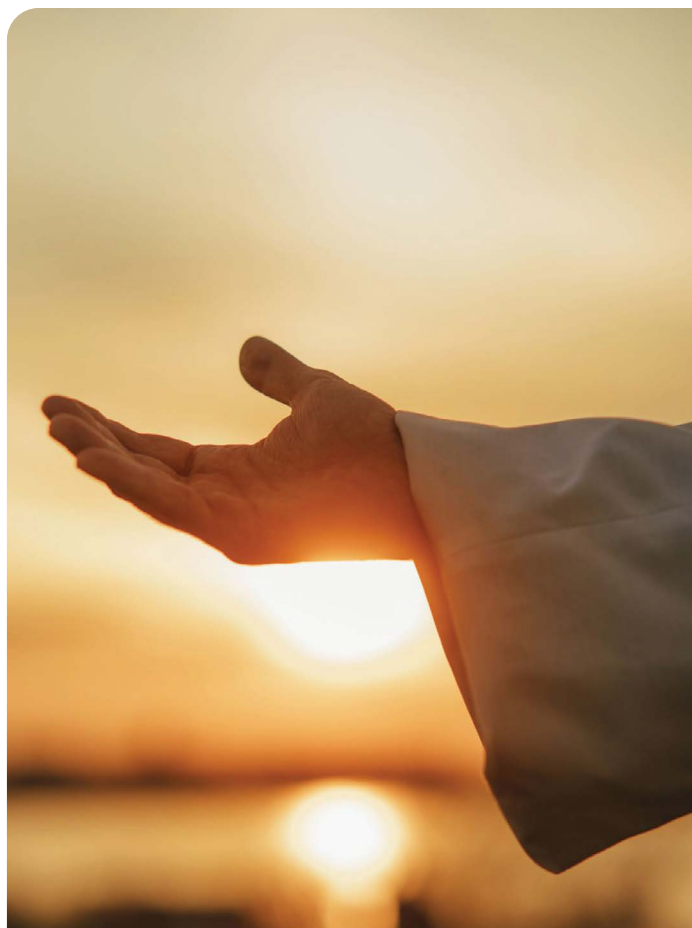
We are all First Commandment breakers. We are all sinners. Those sins are not simply sins against others, but just as King David says in Psalm 51, “Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight” (Ps 51:4a). Original sin begins with our inherited rebellion against God and His ways. No hands should go up claiming to be innocent of breaking the First Commandment. We create idols. Our chief idol is ourself.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 6:33). This is our calling. Fear, love, and trust in God above all things! This commandment and calling brings us to knees to confess. “Father, I do not put You first above all things in my life all of the time. Have mercy on me. Forgive and renew me.”

And once again, “Seek first the kingdom of God and HIS righteousness,” for it is the righteousness of Christ, who was perfectly obedient to His Father even to the point of death on a cross, that saves us from our sinful idolatry. The faith that saves is the faith that seeks the perfect righteousness of our Savior!

Returning to that rich young ruler, who worshipped and trusted in his possessions over all things, we fellow idolaters might ask, “Then who can be saved?” And Jesus’ words stand just as true today as they did when He spoke them to His disciples: “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27). We can’t do it, but by His grace He does it for us and calls us His own! Thanks be to God! †

*The Rev. Joe Dapelo serves St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Elk Grove, CA.*



*It is easy for us to see where we break some of the commandments that belong to the second table of the law (those things we do toward our neighbor), but without proper perspective we might convince ourselves that the First Commandment is the easy one.*

1 Dr. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 13.

2 Paul Timothy McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 359.





# The Small Catechism



## Second Commandment

By Karen Holst

Even polite people can have an unexpected slew of objectional words burst through at the most inopportune moment. A sudden injury, bad news, a scary moment or surprise brings on a temporary brain freeze of control and then everybody within earshot gets a vibrant picture of who you really are (or could be)! Of course, as Christians, most of the time we unthinkingly make these verbal mistakes, apologize profusely, and, if we are truly blessed, the incident is humorously laughed at and forgiven. Our heavenly Father knows what is truly in our hearts, what we will say and do long before it happens and has prepared for us a reconciliation far above anything we could ask for. When He gave us His Second Commandment, He knew that we would misuse His name out of sin from the temptations of this world. God also gave us His Holy Word so that we, as His dearest children, would avoid being counted as one where “His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity” (Ps 10:7).

Obedient in love, Lutherans are taught from a young age through *Luther's Small Catechism* to honor the various names of the Holy Trinity. Given to us in the scriptures and keeping them sacred, we thoughtfully voice God's given names only at appropriate times of worship and study. As followers of Christ, we are included with all those who are privileged to come together to “Let them praise the name of the LORD; for His name alone is excellent; His glory is above the earth and heaven” (Ps 148:13). How beautiful are the many age-old and newly created hymns available to our faithful pastors in remembrance of God's holy name throughout the church year to edify our liturgies and remind us of the rich blessings He continually bestows on His children!

With all of the omnipotent authority that the name of God wields, it is incredible to consider that there have been and still are people misusing the names of God in conjunction with performing satanic works. Every time God's name is said in a dishonorable way, is hatefully uttered against one another, and is urged by the devil to be used to mislead us through weakness to commit violence is an act of aggressive sin. Satan freely utilizes everything around us, all that is familiar and common to commit acts detrimental to our health, safety, and care of others. From the subtlety of a secular song or child-held toy to corrosive advertising and demeaning relationships, the insidious influence of evil begs us to call upon the name of God in all of our troubles, to “Lead me O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face” (Ps 5:8).

We are repeatedly rescued from this pitiable state of sin by our Heavenly Father through His means of confession and absolution and in the communion of Christ's body and blood with all the saints. With His promise of an everlasting life in God's Heavenly Kingdom when this short life on earth is over, it is with grateful thanksgiving that every Christian may join in the song “I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high” (Ps 7:17). Not many people realize the true depth of honoring God through the reverent use of His holy name. As we Christians demonstrate a living, loving relationship with our Heavenly Father among our friends, family, and neighbors, maybe, just maybe, more people will. Praise God the Father, Jesus Christ His Son, and the Holy Spirit, Three-In-One! †

*Karen Holst is a member of St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church in Jurupa Valley, CA.*



*Small Catechism*

# Third Commandment

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*By Rev. Robert Snitzer*



We live in a fast-paced rat race either keeping up with our neighbors or just trying to squeeze more activities in our day. No doubt there are an increasing number of opportunities to engage in work, leisure, and hobbies. That means trying to cram more and more things to do in our waking hours. I don't believe that is very healthy for our bodies, minds, or spirit.

When God gave Moses the ten most important laws to live by, laws that provide for personal well-being and social order, it appears from a human perspective that a command to rest seems least important compared to the other nine. Many people will say that the Third Commandment is about not working on Sunday and if you can go to church. What does the commandment say?



*Keeping the sabbath “holy” as Luther explains has little to do with not working and more to do with making time to be with other believers to offer praise, prayer, and worship to God and be instructed in God’s Word.*



It is easy to see it is talking about not working on the Sabbath and keeping it holy. There is a great benefit in taking one day off a week from work so our bodies can recuperate, our mind relax and be refreshed, so we can reengage in work, healthy relationships, and clear thinking.

I know firsthand what working seven days a week, eight to ten hours a day can do. In my late teenage years, I was working for a landscape company which I thoroughly enjoyed. This led to working seven days a week, at least ten hours in the hot sun doing hard physical labor until I became sick with a bad cold and laryngitis (It was my choice to work every day). I was down for a week. Those smarter than I realized I was working too much without adequate rest. Needless to say, I didn’t repeat the seven-day workweek, and I felt much healthier. God knows the why and what of His commandments far better than we.

However, is taking a day off from work fulfilling the Third Commandment? Is that the heart of keeping the Sabbath holy? No. Luther’s explanation says: “We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”<sup>1</sup>

There is one word that turns this command into something far more than ceasing to work on Sunday. Keeping the sabbath “holy” as Luther explains has little to do with not working and more to do with making time to be with other believers to offer praise, prayer, and worship to God and be instructed in God’s Word. It is a time to renew our faith, receive His free gifts of grace, faith, mercy, and forgiveness.

Luther says: “... so we do not despise preaching and His Word... but gladly hear it and **learn** it.” How many pastors can testify to having someone in their congregation say that the “sermon was too long, and we don’t sing more than four verses of any hymn and we must not go past the noon hour because dinner is in the oven”? I understand these comments because I’ve heard them all and more. However, I ask you: is that an attitude of keeping the Sabbath holy or gladly hearing and learning the Word?

“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it,” (Josh 1:8).

“Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and obey it,” (Luke 11:28).

God rested on the Sabbath Day that He Himself created as an example for us to follow. “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord,” (Lev 23:3).

Notice “a day of sacred assembly:” Why? God knew not everyone would take time from work to devote it to God in worship and learning. He also knew how important corporate worship can be. “Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching,” (Heb 4:12). We are to be an encouragement in the faith to others who may be struggling and/or to be edified ourselves.

Keeping the Sabbath Day holy is not simply one day a week in the life of a Christian. To keep it holy is to set a day apart from the rest of the week to hear God’s inerrant Word preached and taught that we may grow in faith and knowledge of God so we learn to become increasingly dependent on Him in all areas of life. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer,” (Acts 2:42, 46). We rest from our labor, but not so as to forbid any incidental work that can’t be avoided. We want to follow the spirit of the law and not the legalistic letter of the law.

Keeping the Sabbath Day holy has much to do with our attitude. If we see it as a duty to go to church, go through the motions and rituals of the liturgy, and not pay attention to the preaching and reading of God’s Word, then we have violated the commandment. Any non-Christian can go through the motions of worship; I fear there are many in churches today who pay lip service to the worship service.

We should examine our attitude as to why we attend worship service. Purposely pay attention to what is said and what we say in response. Pray for the Holy Spirit to open our ears to hear and not simply listen to His Word and how it applies to one’s life. After worship, we go into the world where we live, work, play, and attend school, we take the Word with us that it may flavor all we do and speak. †

*The Rev. Rober Snitzer serves Pilot Knob Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA.*

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 13.9.

# God Uses His Commandments in Three Ways

By Rev. Tylan Dalrymple



“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:1-3).

We are born of water and the Word. We partake of Jesus’ body and blood in Holy Communion. God operates through “means.” The means of grace are given and directed by His Word. The same is true of love. God’s commandments guide us to love one another. The first four Commandments explain what loving people do and the last six tell us what loving people “don’t do.” The parameters and principles that define love are lifted up in the Commandments of our Lord.

Jesus summarized the Commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **On these two commandments depend all the law and the Prophets.**” (Matt 22:37-40, emphasis added). Jesus didn’t replace God’s law with a new principle called love. He “summarized” what the Law proclaims in detail. For those who believe, the Commandments become a rule and guide for love.

How can what condemns us become a guide? First, we must understand a specific problem. The problem is not God’s law, but our sin. We have all broken the Ten Commandments. Therefore, we have failed to love God and our neighbor as we should. We are hopeless apart from God’s grace and mercy.

Second, there is reconciliation. In his second letter to Corinth, Paul writes, “All this is from God, Who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,” (2 Cor 5:18). *Our relationship with God is changed.* Our justification was for a purpose. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). The Lutheran Confessions explain this change by detailing three uses of God’s law.

<sup>1</sup> <https://bookofconcord.org/solid-declaration/third-use-of-the-law/>.

Of course, the law itself does not change. We are changed by the grace of God. The Formula of Concord Article VI sheds light on this change. The first, second, and third uses of the law are thus explained:

Since the Law of God is useful, 1. not only to the end that external discipline and decency are maintained by it against wild, disobedient men; 2. likewise, that through it men are brought to a knowledge of their sins; 3. but also that, when they have been born anew by the Spirit of God, converted to the Lord, and thus the veil of Moses has been lifted from them, they live and walk in the law, a dissension has occurred between some few theologians concerning this third and last use of the Law. 4 For the explanation and final settlement of this dissent we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that although the truly believing and truly converted to God and justified Christians are liberated and made free from the curse of the Law, yet they should daily exercise themselves in the Law of the Lord, as it is written, Ps. 1:2;119:1: Blessed is the man whose delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law doth he meditate day and night. For the Law is a mirror in which the will of God, and what pleases Him, are exactly portrayed, and which should [therefore] be constantly held up to the believers and be diligently urged upon them without ceasing.<sup>1</sup>

The first use of God’s law deals with the general order of society. God’s law is a **curb** to provide order amidst chaos.

The second use of God’s law is a **mirror**. We look in the mirror of God’s law and see a law breaker. We see our sin and thus our failure to love.

The third use of God’s law a **rule**. This is specific to those who have recognized the person in the mirror by God’s grace. This rule becomes a guide. The Holy Spirit points to the written Word.

Those who see their reflection clearly realize the need for a just, righteous, merciful, and loving Lord. So it is that we may personally take hold of a promise being fulfilled, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26). †

*The Rev. Tylan Dalrymple serves Christ Lutheran Church, Chetek, WI.*



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# Understanding the Role of the Provost at American Lutheran Theological Seminary

*Rev. Matthew Fenn*

This past summer, I was asked by our Seminary President, Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins, and with approval by the Commission of Higher Education, to serve as the new Provost of the American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS). As Provost, my main job is to provide leadership and support to ensure that our seminary continues to offer high-quality theological education.

For those unfamiliar with what a Provost does, I would like to share my role and how it serves the seminary community.

## **Collaborating with Seminary Leadership**

My role involves working closely with Dr. Leins and other seminary faculty. Together, we make important decisions about the seminary's future, including planning and budgeting. I also assist with financial planning to ensure that our resources are used wisely and that the seminary remains financially stable. I may also be called upon to chair the occasional staff or faculty meeting if the President is temporarily unavailable.

## **Ensuring Academic Quality**

One of my primary responsibilities as Provost is to oversee the seminary's academic programs. This means working closely with our faculty to ensure that our courses are rigorous and rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. I help implement the seminary's vision for what and how we teach, ensuring our programs equip men for the ministry in The AALC.

This has begun with updating and refining course syllabi. I have been working to ensure that each syllabus clearly outlines course goals, learning outcomes, and up-to-date bibliographies. These updates help students understand what they can expect from each class and ensure that our courses remain relevant and beneficial for their ministry preparation.

## **Supporting Faculty, Students, and Programs**

Beyond academics, I support our faculty and students. I have eagerly listened to the input from faculty who want to ensure that the students receive the best education possible. In this regard, it has become clear that regular faculty meetings need to be held before each quarter so that faculty can discuss how best to improve what we offer our students. My work in this regard includes regularly assessing how well our students learn and making adjustments to improve our programs. I have listened to students with good input and suggestions on enhancing courses they have already taken.

Additionally, I've been collaborating with Dr. Leins to begin the process of creating a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program. This new program will provide an advanced level of study for pastors who wish to deepen their knowledge and skills. It's an exciting step forward for ALTS, and we hope it will serve as a valuable resource for our Association's pastors.

## **Accreditation and Quality Control**

Another vital part of my job as Provost is overseeing accreditation. Accreditation ensures that our programs meet high standards, essential for maintaining the seminary's credibility. It involves meeting specific requirements set by external accrediting bodies, which review our curriculum, faculty qualifications, and overall effectiveness. In this regard, I have been working with Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey on state registrations and reviewing what policies and procedures need to be added or updated in our faculty and student handbooks. This work is crucial in maintaining clear, practical guidelines supporting our seminary community. As Provost, I oversee this process and ensure we are constantly working to meet and exceed these standards.

## **A Call to Serve**

Being Provost is a call from God to serve the seminary community. Like all pastors, my primary responsibility is the care of souls in my local congregation, but I aim to bring that same pastoral heart into my work at ALTS. Whether it's listening to a student's suggestions on a course, supporting a faculty member, or planning for the future of the seminary, my goal is to do so in a way that honors God and serves His Church. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve in this role.

I look forward to seeing how God continues to work through our seminary. †

*The Rev. Matthew Fenn is the Provost for the American Lutheran Theological Seminary and serves Ascension Lutheran Church, Waterloo, IA.*



# Women of L.I.F.E.

## Women of L.I.F.E. Reviews Handbook, Publishes Bible Study

By Karen Holst

The American Association of Lutheran Churches National Women of L.I.F.E. (WOL) met October 26, 2024, with the following officers and members in attendance: Siriana Franco, Missions Outreach Chairman; Traci McNally, Commission for Women Greater Heartland Regional Representative; Bonnie Ohlrich, Commission for Women Eastern Region Regional Representative and Katherine Hofinga and Karen Holst, Co-Chairs of the Women of Lutherans In Fellowship and Evangelism.

Following a beautiful opening prayer by Traci for our Heavenly Father's guidance and blessing, the meeting began with our first face-to-face ZOOM introduction with our newest board member, Siriana Franco. Siriana serves St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church (TAALC) as Financial Secretary and Cantor in Jurupa Valley, CA. She has been a life-long Lutheran and her husband also serves as Acolyte under Rev. Jon Holst of the same congregation. We look forward to incorporating her youthful enthusiasm and integrity into our future goals for W.O.L.!

Since 1987, The AALC's Commission for Women was created for "...supporting the Women of this Association in their Christian commitment, study, and work in local congregations, promoting area-activities (Regions), and for conducting national assemblies for the Women of this Association."<sup>1</sup> After preliminary discussions begun in May 2024, a consensus was reached to begin

a re-evaluation process of the handbook to better align with the original intentions as outlined according to the current TAALC Constitution. With Romans 8:28 as inspiration, "...for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose," this will be a thoughtful, thorough process. Pastoral and procedural guidance from the appropriate council will still oversee our activities, as we continue to profess that "...we have chosen not to be a separate entity unto ourselves..." and wish to continue to "be governed by the Constitution of The American Association of Lutheran Churches" (WOL Handbook, 1991). We look forward to completing this process before the next General Convention in 2026.

Additionally, this meeting approved of and is now offering a new member-written Bible study! This year's issue, "Ruth: A Love Story To Us From God's Heart," will be available for only \$6 per copy with an additional donation to cover shipping and handling. Look for the introduction and order form along with the first chapter and Table of Contents through TAALC website links and emails.

God's abundant grace and peace to all! †

*Karen L. Holst serves as the Women of L.I.F.E. Co-Chair and Commission for Women Western Regional Representative.*

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<sup>1</sup> B04.11.03 of TAALC Constitution and By-Laws, revised 2018.



# Congregation Feature



Submitted photo

## Trinity Lutheran Church, West Hempstead, NY

By Rev. Ray Lorthoir

In 1925, the Long Island Railroad electrified many miles of its territory through Nassau County, NY. This caused a housing boom across the rural landscape of the county. Thus, Norwegian Lutherans from Trinity Lutheran Church in Brooklyn left the city for the suburbs. Many settled in the rural areas west and south of the major village of Hempstead. Thus, Pastor Charles Crouch was sent to organize two congregations, one in each area.

In 1925, worship services were started in the western area along with a Sunday School and Ladies Aid group. Trinity Lutheran Church of Hempstead Gardens (West Hempstead) was legally incorporated in 1927. That year ground was broken for the present church building, which was completed and dedicated on Palm Sunday, 1932.

After World War II, pressure for single family housing transitioned Long Island's potato fields into some of the first suburbs. There was also a baby boom. In 1950, just under 400 children were registered in the Sunday School. Every square inch of the building was used for classes, including the boiler room.

Records show that Trinity reached its peak attendance of 200 per Sunday in 1958. But demographics were turning against it. Protestants were moving off Long Island and were being replaced by Roman Catholics. In 1953, a small Orthodox Jewish congregation was organized in West Hempstead. Seventy years later, this demographic has totally transformed the community.

Norwegian pietism played a major role in Trinity's early history. That strain continued in the post war years even as those of other national backgrounds filled the pews. The Bethel Bible Series was run for many years. In the 1970's, some at Trinity were influenced by the Charismatic Movement. Thus, Trinity found itself increasingly out of step with the liberal theological teaching that was overcoming the old American Lutheran Church throughout the 1970's and 80's. This all came to head with the formation of the ELCA on January 1, 1988.

Throughout Trinity's history pastors had come from the Midwest to serve it and then had returned to the Midwest. In 1985 a

Nassau County native, Rev. Ray Lorthoir, was called to serve. He had been trained as a theological liberal, but via the Charismatic Movement, he had become a biblical and theological conservative. Therefore, under his leadership, Trinity left the ELCA and joined The AALC on October 1, 1988. The move cost more than a third of the congregation and the Sunday School collapsed.

But word gradually got out that at Trinity, the Word of God was still the Word of God. So, conservative, Bible believing people have found their way to Trinity ever since. All was not easy, however. The congregation has gone through boom-and-bust cycles over the years.

In the spring of 2019, the first seeds appeared of a new boom cycle. Trinity was so small during Covid-19 that it could barely remain open. But the pandemic planted more seeds. The video channel work of Rev. Chris Rosebrough and Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper planted yet more seeds.

As the community transitioned to Orthodox Jewish over the years, fewer and fewer people from West Hempstead have attended. Today most people travel to Trinity from other communities. Some are willing to commute even an hour and a half to attend service and the Bible studies.

And then, there's Sunday after church. People who travel distances to church tend to stay. Recently, a group stayed until 6pm. As has been the case for many years, most present attenders have no Lutheran background. But they like what they see. Trinity even has four Messianic Jewish men in attendance.

Sunday service follows the agenda of the historic mass, and Holy Communion is offered every service. However, all service music is custom to Trinity. A mixture of historic hymns, older contemporary music, and even a few Evangelical hymns are used. As a Lutheran congregation, our task every service and meeting is to distribute through Word and Sacrament what Messiah Jesus has won for us. †





# Clergy Feature



Submitted photo

## Rev. Gary Koutsopoulos

A Q&A with an AALC Pastor

### When/how did God call you into the ministry?

God called me into ministry through His Word and by grace. It was most clear to me the day my youth director finished leading our youth group in singing, and called across the campfire, “Gary, you should go to LBI!” Later he explained what LBI was (Lutheran Bible Institute), and I felt called to apply to LBI. That was a time of growth and learning, and I began a call to follow, serve, and love others in Jesus’ name and according to God’s Word.

### Where are you serving now?

I now serve as a husband, father, grandfather, pastor, citizen, and recipient of God’s grace, as the called pastor at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Bremerton, WA. God is blessing me in preaching, teaching, discipling, and seeking the Lord’s will in our ministry and following Jesus. We are encountering many outside the church who need Jesus. That is exactly where I pray to be and ask for God’s guidance and grace in this calling.

### What do you most want your congregation to know?

Jesus and His Word: that everything we need in facing the task of following Jesus and making disciples of all people, as He has commissioned us (Matt 28:15–20), He has given us by His grace and through faith in Him. The Gospel is the power of God, already and always (Rom 1:16–17; 8:28–29; 3:21–26; John 3:16–20).

### What brings you joy in your tasks as pastor?

Sharing the Gospel with children and with adults who have a child-like faith in Jesus, through youth ministry, Sunday School teachers, and our Christian school. This joy includes the Scriptures put to music and shared with God’s Spirit of joy and praise, and deep spiritual consolation for those grieving, yet being held in God’s baptismal promise in Christ. It is a “coming home” to what has sustained us in our new life, and now gathers us to Christ forever (Rom 6:4–5).

### What has been the most surprising/unexpected aspect of becoming a pastor?

That in hearing and believing God’s Word, now we get to live this way. That the Lord would call me to follow Him in being a pastor and live out what I was born to do by His grace (1 Tim 2:1–8). It is as though He poured out His love so abundantly upon me that I have the joy and support in sharing Christ with others, as my calling from Him and the Church. He “has also put His seal upon me and each baptized believer and given us his Holy Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 1:22).

I am regularly surprised and blessed by living out my/our baptismal faith when it comes to commending others to the Lord at the end of their life’s journey on this earth. It is the rich and somber privilege of preaching Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:1–5) and sharing our new life and hope through Baptism into Christ and eternal life with Him (Rom 6:4–5).

### What is one of the biggest challenges you see Christians facing?

To believe and live according to God’s Word when other worldly church supports are pulled away. This is the reality for those suffering persecution and having the blessings of our Lord by God’s Spirit, which will become the “greater than these things that they/you will you do in my Name” (John 14:12–20).

That we may be stuck going through all the motions and forget our first love (1 John 3:16–24; Rev 2:1–6). This is not emotional but could be doctrinal, scriptural, or practical, and it means we may not be ready for when Jesus will call us to follow Him through all of that which He has prepared for us.

### Where have you seen God working lately?

God is working in our Christian Day Care chapel services and in eager visitors coming to hear about hope in Jesus. He is working in Bremerton and my life, as with those who wait upon the Lord and see that which is growing and being overwhelmed by God’s grace! It has been wrapped in the promise of our Lord—and abundant life and peace for those who believe in Him. It is contentment in the One who is true and calls us to himself now and in the final day to be with Him (Rom 8:28–31).

To Christ our Lord be all glory and praise! †

# Installation: Rev. Antonio Romano



**Left:** The Rev. Antonio Romano was installed as Associate Pastor on Sunday, October 13, 2024, at Ascension Lutheran Church in Ames. Present at the installation were: Rev. Wayne Wilken, Rev. Steve Klawonn (who also gave the sermon), Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson, Rev. Antonio Romano, Rev. Roger Twito, Rev. John Linch, and Rev. Scott Bieker. Submitted photo. **Right:** The Romano family: (left to right) Isabella, Carmine, wife Kristie, Rev. Romano, Gianna, and Sofia. Submitted photo.

## Introduction by Rev. Antonio Romano

I am 49 and have been married to my precious wife, Kristie, for 22 years. We have four beautiful children: Isabella Grace (20), Sofia Hope (19), Gianna Faith (18), and Carmine Paul (13). My wife and children are five of the clearest evidences of God's grace in my life. Each one is precious to me.

I was born and raised (as a Nazarene) in Columbus, OH. My dad was a Nazarene pastor until I was 21, at which time he moved us to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). I am particularly thankful for this as it was at the local SBC church that I met my wife. But it was also the first step on a journey I had no idea at the time I was taking.

I obtained my Master of Divinity from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in 2013. I was a Baptist pastor from 2002–2024, most recently in Moundsville, WV.

Over the last 5–6 years, I was increasingly convicted regarding the inaccurate and, frankly, dangerous implications of many of my Baptist beliefs (in particular, the lack of a clear distinction between Law and Gospel, the absence of the means of grace, and other issues). God graciously brought me into Lutheranism by “accident,” if I can say such a thing (knowing much better). I began to listen to preachers/teachers (podcasts, etc.) and read books by authors that were challenging my presuppositions, as well as my hermeneutics.

I found myself deeply convicted and empty. After a few years, I began to realize everyone I was reading, loved listening to, etc., was Lutheran! These beliefs and changing convictions I had were Lutheran beliefs and convictions! It occurred to me: “Am I a Lutheran then? Is that what all this means?”

Eventually, an LCMS pastor in Charleston, WV, encouraged me to come away from the personalities and podcasts, etc., and read *The Book of Concord* (and the Catechisms). Another LCMS pastor encouraged me to seek out the Colloquy in *The AALC*. This brought clarity and certainty about the direction I needed to go. I thought I was too old to make the transition from Baptist to Lutheran but it seems God has been pleased to make a way for me.

After enrolling at ALTS and auditing courses from 2022 to 2023, I met with the Clergy Commission in June of 2024 at the Biennial Convention and was accepted into the ministerium of *The AALC*. Shortly thereafter, God and His congregation were pleased to call me to be the Associate Pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church in Ames, IA. My family and I moved there in September and I began on October 1, 2024.

I am so thankful to our gracious God that He brought me into *The AALC* and to the congregation at Ascension – Ames. I am indescribably thankful for the opportunity to finally be a biblical minister of Word and Sacrament. Amen. †





January 2025

PRAYER BOOKMARK

# Installation: Rev. Mark Raitz



The Rev. Mark Raitz was installed as Pastor at Christ Lutheran Church, Duluth, MN, on Sunday, October 6, 2024. He is pictured here with AALC Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson. Rev. Raitz was accepted onto The AALC Clergy Roster in November 2022. Submitted photo

## Introduction by Rev. Mark Raitz

I was born and raised in the city of Detroit, MI; my father was a lithographer, and my mother was a seamstress. My parents enrolled me in the Lutheran schools in Detroit, and I was raised within the Christian education system. My college years were at Concordia College, Ann Arbor, where I majored in vocal music performance and conducting, minored in religious studies.

After college, I was hired as a High School teacher at Detroit Lutheran High Schools where I taught Old and New Testament, as well as directed choirs. A few years later I studied at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, IN, and was ordained in 1995.

I have served two congregations in Michigan, and spent 22 years as a Chaplain for several hospice organizations and last year at a senior living campus.

The Lord blessed me with my wonderful bride, Marianne, who teaches in the Minnesota public school system. I am a big sports fan: hockey (Red Wings, now a Wild fan), baseball (Tigers) and football (Lions). I love studying Civil War history and everyday history of how people lived in the past. I lift weights to stay in shape and have lifted for many years.

I am thankful and blessed to be a part of The AALC family, and am extremely honored and humbled to be serving at Christ Lutheran Church in Duluth, MN! I love preaching and teaching God's Holy Word and am very excited to bring this precious Word of God to the brothers and sisters in Duluth for many years. †

1. Eastern Region TAALC
2. First English Lutheran Church, Gibsonburg, OH
3. For God's peace in the new year
4. To have no others gods before Him
5. Rev. Steve Klawonn, Assistant Presiding Pastor
6. Our Savior Lutheran Church, Piqua, OH
7. Rev. Dan Dapelo
8. Rev. Fred Balke, Emeritus Pastor
9. Dr. Dan Kruger, Treasurer of The AALC
10. Peace Lutheran Church, Defiance, OH
11. Rev. Gary Benson, Emeritus Pastor
12. Rev. Ray Lorthioir
13. To not misuse the name of our Lord
14. Regional Pastors
15. Pr. Charles Sandison
16. Rev. Paul Hansen, Emeritus Pastor
17. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Napoleon, OH
18. Rev. Dean Stoner
19. Christ Lutheran Church, Germantown, MD
20. Rev. Irvin Stapf, Emeritus Pastor
21. Bethel Lutheran Church, Rowland, PA
22. American Lutheran Theological Seminary
23. Rev. Thomas Jahr
24. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy
25. Rev. Jamie Strickler
26. Hope Lutheran Church, Hampton, VA
27. To honor your father and mother
28. Rev. Anthony Voltattorni
29. Pastors' Wives
30. St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Charleston, WV
31. To not harm our neighbors





# February 2025

## PRAYER BOOKMARK

1. Faith Lutheran Church, Watseka, IL
2. Rev. John Hallock
3. Rev. Nigel Brown
4. To lead a pure life
5. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Augusta, KY
6. Rev. Michael Hartley
7. Agency for Professional Chaplains
8. Rev. Richard Sunderlage
9. Rev. Neil Cadle
10. Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, NC
11. Rev. Robert Wallace
12. To help our neighbors and not cause harm
13. Christ The King Lutheran Church, Chesterfield, MI
14. Association Council
15. To not give false testimony about our neighbors
16. Trinity Lutheran Church, West Hempstead, NY
17. Churches without pastors
18. Rev. Dr. Chris Caughey
19. Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Franklin, NC
20. Rev. Joseph Christina, National Home Mission Developer
21. To not covet your neighbor's house
22. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Marshall, MI
23. Rev. William Moberly
24. Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod
25. To not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor
26. Men who are applying for rostering in The AALC
27. Lutherans For Life
28. That God would raise up Church Workers

## In Memoriam

### Rev. Dr. Daniel K Schroeder

**December 14, 1954 ~ October 10, 2024**

Rev. Dr. Daniel Konrad Schroeder, lovingly known as "Pastor Dan," was born on December 14, 1954, in Wakefield, NE, the eldest son of the Rev. Daniel Clifford and Barbara Ann (Hankey) Schroeder. He entered God's family through the sacrament of Holy Baptism on February 13, 1955, at St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in Emerson, NE, administered by his grandfather, the Rev. Dr. Martin A. Schroeder.



Dan spent his early years growing up in Emerson and later Lincoln, graduating high school in 1972. During high school he participated in the Learning Exchange Program with the Nebraska National Guard.

He then went to work installing and inspecting fire and security alarm systems, and as an insurance agent. In 1982 at the age of 27, he began studying for the ministry at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN, graduating with an Associate of Arts Degree. Concurrently, he attended Mankato State University, receiving his B.A. Degree in 1987, with a Psychology major and a Sociology minor. He entered Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and graduated with a Masters of Divinity Degree in 1988. On August 28, 1988, he was ordained into the Office of the Public Ministry at Bethany Lutheran Church in Princeton, MN, and commissioned as a missionary to Australia.

Dan became a pastor in Australia from 1989-1994, serving Our Redeemer Lutheran in Kallangur, Queensland, St. Paul's Lutheran in Maryborough, Queensland, and distantly served Prince of Peace Lutheran in South Australia. From 1994-1998 he served Resurrection Lutheran in Kennesaw, GA, and a vacancy position at Lamb of God Lutheran in Cartersville, GA.

He returned to Lincoln, NE, and in May of 1999, he became a commissioned chaplain for the Lincoln Police Department and Lincoln Fire & Rescue. In 2004, he accepted the call to serve Mighty Fortress Evangelical Lutheran Church in Seward, NE. During this time, he worked on his doctorate and earned a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Biblical Studies in 2010 from St. Luke Ev. School of Biblical Studies in Dearing, GA.

Dan was a Pastor Emeritus on the Clergy Roster of The American Association of Lutheran Churches and served Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church, Seward, NE, for nearly 16 years before retiring in February 2020. He also served on the Association Council of The American Association of Lutheran Churches and was a past chairman of The AALC's Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations and a member of the Board of Trustees. He had served as a president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia. He was also a member of the Lancaster County Mental Health Board.

Dan had a lot of varied interests. He took a locksmith course, and did lock work as an avocation. He traveled to various places and enjoyed his camper as his health permitted. He also enjoyed playing organ and piano and had a special love for pipe organs. His final project was spearheading the pipe organ installation project at Mighty Fortress Lutheran Church in Seward, which is a memorial dedicated in loving memory of his parents.

Dan entered the Church Triumphant on October 10, 2024, at the age of 69. He is survived by a number of maternal and paternal cousins, spouses and families. He was preceded in death by his parents and his younger brother, Jeffrey. †

# 2024 PASTORS' CONFERENCE HELD

By Rev. Joe Marsh

On an unusually warm fall day at the end of October, pastors, seminarians, and guests gathered at Calvary Lutheran Church in St. Paul, MN.

The people gathered there represented a mixture of vastly different backgrounds! The group included military veterans, an active-duty chaplain, seminary students, second career men from all walks of life, pastors from Baptist, Reformed, ELCA, LCMS, and NALC churches, others included a former atheist, a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses group, a hospice minister, old, young and everywhere in between—what a remarkably diverse group! The one theme that drew them together was a desire to serve the Lord in a TAALC setting.

Several presentations centered on practical ministry ideas. The main presenter is Rev. Dr. Samuel Zumwalt, a pastor who was in the process of leading his congregation toward The AALC. He touched on topics such as “What is Lutheran Preaching,” “Preaching the Word of God as Conversation,” and “Preaching and Teaching Lutheran Identity.” Preaching the Word of God is central to Lutheran worship so his presentations hit right at the sweet spot of needs for pastors and congregations.

We came away from the conference with many ideas on how to involve congregation members in the sermon process and how to use the *Small Catechism* as a guide in structuring yearly preaching and teaching.

- Rev. Dr. Jordan Cooper spoke concerning the rise of “Christian Nationalism” and its impact on the Christian church as a whole and Lutheran churches in particular.
- Rev. Tylan Dalrymple presented personal insights into how to minister and evangelize to Muslims. He has extensive experience in his congregations with immigrants coming from various backgrounds. He encouraged pastors to “get out there”

and meet people face to face in order to hear their stories, opinions, and needs.

- Rev. Michael Badenhop led a lively study on texts for All Saints Day to help pastors with their sermon preparation for the following Sunday.
- Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins updated us on the American Lutheran Theological Seminary accreditation process and other programs. Currently there are 38 men enrolled in the Master of Divinity program and over 80 students in various programs.

At the end of each day, conference attendees worshiped and communed together to thank God for all His blessings, His saving forgiveness and the communion of saints.

On Thursday morning the conference ended with a Matins worship service followed by a report from our Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson concerning the state of our small but mighty denomination. Dr. Larson challenged our regions to think about planting two new congregations per region in the next few years in areas that do not already have a Confessional Lutheran presence in them.

In true Minnesota tradition, the weather went from unusually warm weather on Monday and Tuesday to wintry weather on Thursday. Having endured a period of drought for over a month, the grass and the trees lifted up their branches and leaves in thanksgiving.

The AALC has been blessed by talented and loving pastors and leaders. Rev. Dean Stoner and Bonnie Ohlrich deserve more than a mention for their organizational efforts to produce a successful event!

Soli Deo Gloria. †

*The Rev. Joe Marsh serves Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN, and as Secretary to The AALC.*



**Left to Rights:** Rev. Dr. Tom Stover and Rev. Greg Stenzel visit at the Pastors Conference. Rev. Dr. Samuel Zumwalt was the keynote speaker, presenting on “Preaching the Word of God” to the clergy in attendance. Submitted photos.

## The American Association of Lutheran Churches

921 East Dupont Road, #920

Fort Wayne, IN 46825-1551

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(260) 755-9401  
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## UPCOMING EDITIONS...

**Overarching theme: Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism**

**Please be in prayer for these upcoming editions:**

**Mar/Apr: The Creed** (deadline Jan. 1)

**May/June: The Lord's Prayer** (deadline Mar. 1)

**Jul/Aug: Baptism** (deadline May 1)

**Sept/Oct: Confession & Lord's Supper** (deadline July 1)

**Nov/Dec: Table of Duties** (deadline Sept. 1)

**Church News:**

*The Evangel* welcomes submissions of what's happening in your congregation. To submit content, **email the editor** Gretchen Baker: theevangel@taalc.org

**Or mail:** St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church, Attn: Gretchen Baker  
207 Taylor St., Traer, IA 50675