

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

Rev. Paul R. Harris – 512-453-3835 Church; 512-251-4204 Home
Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM – Divine Service 10:30 AM

Austin, Texas Jan 31, 2016 Volume 18 Issue 1

February 2016 – March 2016

A Catechetical Life

It's not bragging, just fact, to say that I have read the Bible much more than any of you. And that's how it should be. I expect that my dentist reads more dental journals than I do, and my lawyer reads more law than I do. But in day to day life knowing lots of Bible stories or passages isn't really that helpful. You have to be able to apply them to your life, to put them in the context of your life. This is where the catechetical life comes in.

You've heard me, following Luther before me, rail against coal miner's faith. That's the faith that says I believe what the church teaches without having any idea what that is. Is this you? Do you see how your confessing of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed influences your view of evolution? Do you know how to use the Sixth Commandment to address the issue of gay marriage? How about the Fifth to address abortion? Lutherans, since 1529, have not been producing the same catechism for nostalgic reasons but for practical, real life reasons.

Below you will find a two dozen true or false statements that are answered by your catechism. While what saves a per

son is faith in Christ's innocent life and holy death for them, that faith is endangered by false teaching of any kind. The catechism was meant to be a simple way to teach the content of the one true faith.

1) God-breathed means the same as inspired.

2) All religions – Jewish, Buddhists, Islam, Mormon believe in the true God.

3) Sunday is the same thing as the Old Testament Sabbath Day.

4) The most serious misuse of God's name is teaching or believing false teaching.

5) It's always murder when a person takes the life of another person.

6) A person may get a divorce without sinning if their spouse commits adultery.

7) The 7th Commandment shows that God is against Socialism.

8) We should explain even apparently evil things in a kind way.

9) If a man will not work he shall not eat.

10) Evil things around us cause evil desires.

11) Original Sin causes us to be weak in spiritual things.

12) We can know from nature that God loves people.

13) God created the universe but now the laws of nature take care of it.

14) Jesus is present on earth right now only with His divine nature.

15) By rising from the dead Jesus paid for our sins.

16) The Holy Spirit is the power or the energy of God.

17) All people are not saved because some are more sinful than others.

18) The Holy Christian Church is all those who use Word and Sacraments.

19) The reason I know I am going to heaven is because I believe in Jesus.

20) To have saving faith means you understand all the teachings of the Bible.

21) Baptism saves us.

22) In Baptism the Blood of Jesus was applied to me.

23) We must confess our serious sins privately to our pastor.

24) It is a sin for a woman to be a pastor.

These are simple, basic catechetical questions. I know they are simple because I have taught them to 6th graders, and even some 5th graders, for over 25 years. If you don't know the answers, or aren't sure, you could use more catechetical instruction. And I have great news for you: I will be giving more catechetical instruction at Lenten Vespers and I am always giving it in Sunday morning Bible class.

Lenten factoids

Lenten Factoids: The original period of Lent was 3 days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. By the 3rd century, it was extended to 6 days and called Holy Week which is the week before Easter. Around 800 AD during the reign of the great Christian emperor, Charlemagne it was increased to 40 days. The Sundays in Lent are **not** included. The 40 days correspond to the 40 days in which Jesus fasted in the wilderness in preparation for His battle with Satan...a battle He won by the way.

The earliest Lent can begin is February 5. That last happened in 1818. The latest that it can begin is March 10. That will not happen again until 2038.

The day before Ash Wednesday is called Shrove Tuesday. The word "shrive" means to cut off, and it means to forgive sins. It was the custom on Shrove Tuesday to go to confession and have one's sins forgiven in preparation for Lent. The day was also one of "saying farewell to meat," which is the meaning of the Latin word 'carnival.' So the custom was to use up all the fat in the house by making jelly rolls or pancakes, and to feast on a roast of fat meat. "Mardi Gras" is the French name for the day, and it means "Fat Tuesday."

Originally, no meat was eaten during Lent, but this was gradually reduced to only Fridays and Wednesdays when fish was eaten instead.

"Giving up something for Lent" is not done to do something for Jesus, the One who did it all for us, but to purposely focus on spiritual things more than on physical things.

The most important thing about Lent is that it is the time we

consider more closely the last week of Christ's life, actually the last two days, where He suffered the most intensely for our sins. This time in Christ's life is called the Passion. Every year for Lent we read the account of Jesus's Passion. Over the six Wednesdays of Lent we read it from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. On Good Friday, we hear it from St. John. By following Christ on His way to the cross, we identify closely with His suffering. When Easter comes we celebrate with great joy His Resurrection.

Communion Every Sunday, Why?

by Pr Klemet Preus
Epiphany, 2001
Pt. I

In the early 80s I was the Campus Pastor at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks. Each year we would get together with college students from the various Universities in the Upper mid-west and have a joint retreat. In 1983 we traveled from Grand Forks down to Minneapolis to the University of Minnesota and were hosted by Pastor John Pless and University Lutheran Church. During the Sunday service we celebrated Holy Communion as was typical at these retreats. But this time I noticed something different. ULC had written into its constitution that Communion would be given at each Sunday service. The Augsburg Confession was cited as support for this practice. "Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available

to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved." [1] Pastor Pless explained that the church had committed itself to the practice every Sunday communion.

Two things initially struck me. First, I thought that Pastor Pless was being a little extreme. This was a very radical notion I thought. And all the reasons why I would oppose such an idea immediately rushed into my mind. Wouldn't this require much more work for the altar guild, the secretary, the pastor and the communion assistants? When would the church do Matins or Morning Prayer? Wouldn't people begin to take Holy Communion for granted? People like to invite non-Lutheran family and friends to church when there is no communion. With communion every Sunday how could you do this? Isn't this kind of Catholic? John is high church and very liturgical. So I initially figured this was a high church fad. But I wondered.

Second, I was surprised and a little miffed at myself that I had not really read this in the Lutheran Confessions before. Of course I had read the Confessions. I had read them at least four times, and many times since. And I had pledged to teach according to these documents as every Lutheran Pastor has. But I had not noticed this particular phrase before. Since I have always prided myself in being a true and faithful Lutheran pastor and theologian I was put off that I had to be educated by someone else. I had taken

one course on the liturgy in the seminary. In it we learned how to do the various liturgies. We never really thought about how often to have the sacrament. We were taught to give it “often” whatever that meant. In the doctrine courses we learned that the true body and blood were given for the forgiveness of sins. But we had simply accepted the practices of our churches as proper. That practice was communion once a month or twice a month. Now I was being challenged to think again about the frequency of communion. So, I spent the next year studying the issue. And I asked the right questions. What does the Bible say? What does our doctrine say? What do the Lutheran Confessions say? What was the practice of the earliest Christians? What is the custom of the church throughout the centuries? What are the positive and negative influences in history which shaped the church’s practice throughout the centuries and particularly our practice? Is the whole issue worth all the trouble? It took me about a year of thought, study and discussion with other pastors and Christians. I was not about to change my mind and worship patterns easily. This is what I found.

COMMUNION FREQUENCY AND THE GOSPEL

The Bible never tells us exactly how often to have communion. Of course the Bible never tells us how often to have church services either. And the Bible never tells us how often to receive absolution. The Bible never says at exactly what age to baptize children. There is a reason for this.

You can’t place laws and rules upon the gifts of the gospel. God tells us that we are saved in our baptism, in the Gospel and the Lord’s Supper. He never tells us how often to hear his word. He just figures that we will hear it as often as we can. He does not place rules on how often we should be absolved of our sins. He figures that we will take the forgiveness as often as we can. He simply forgives us through the gospel all the time. He never tells us how soon to baptize our babies. He just tells us how much they need it and what a blessing we have in Baptism. He figures we will baptize as early as possible. So also with Holy Communion. He never tells us to receive it daily, weekly, monthly, yearly or once in your life. He simply tells us how much we need it and how great it is and He figures we will act accordingly. Then He tells us to do it often. He figures we will receive the Lord’s Supper as often as we can.

The Lord’s Supper is like kissing your wife or husband. The minute you have to place rules on how often, then the kiss loses its affectionate force. No one who is in love would ever say, “I think we have kissed enough,” or “That kiss will have to do for the rest of the day.” No one says, “How often do we have to kiss?” Instead we ask, “How often do we get to kiss?” We kiss and get kissed as often as we can.

The Lord’s Supper is more than a kiss from God. Through Holy Communion God gives us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through the body and

blood of Jesus. We need and want these blessings all the time. So the question should not be, “How often do we have to take communion?” Rather we should ask, “How often do we get to take communion?” Logistically, the Lord’s Supper is more difficult to give than a kiss. First you have to gather the church together. You have to provide a place as well as the elements of unleavened bread and wine. You need to instruct as to the proper meaning of the Sacrament. And you have to do all this with a sense of respect and decorum. So, how often should the Lord’s Supper be given? In the Scriptures, in the practice of the early church, at the time of the Reformation, in the Lutheran Confessions, and until quite recently the answer has always been, “We give the Lord’s Supper at every Sunday Service.”

COMMUNION FREQUENCY IN THE BIBLE

In the New Testament there is no mention of Sunday services without a mention of the Lord’s Supper. In [Acts 2:42](#) Paul describes the earliest Services, “And they continued steadfastly in the Apostle’s teaching, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayer.” So the “breaking of bread” or Communion was a common part of the normal Christian services. These services were held in the evening since most of the people worked on Sundays. (It wasn’t until the year 321 AD that Sunday became a day of rest for Christians.) Another reference to Sunday services is found in [Acts 20:7](#) where Luke says, “On the first day of the

week we came together to break bread.” Then it describes a service with preaching followed by the “breaking of bread.” You get the impression from these verses that Sunday evening were reserved for two things: instruction in doctrine and Holy Communion.

I Corinthians shows the same thing. In chapter 11 the people “come together as a church.” Part of the coming together was to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Here the people would precede their services with a meal called “the love feast.” These feasts are also mention in [Jude 12](#). In Corinth the people would exclude some of the poorer people from the love feast by starting the dinner before the common laborers got off work. “Wait for them,” Paul says. The people had gathered for the Lord’s Supper but were abusing it. Paul criticizes them for their abuse and corrects it by explaining how their services should be done. Listen to his words, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper you eat...I received from the Lord what I also give to you: that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, etc. [2]

So Paul corrected the bad and kept the good. To Paul, the exclusion of people who were part of the church was bad. To Paul, Communion at every service was good.

COMMUNION FREQUENCY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The Earliest Christians gathered together on Sunday evenings. The services had two parts: the instruction and the Communion. Today these two parts of the service are reflected in some of our hymnals and our bulletins. There is the service of the Word and the service of the Sacrament. The recently published *Lutheran Service Book*, a hymnal of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, divides the Sunday services into three parts, “Confession and Absolution,” “Service of the Word” and “Service of the Sacrament.”[3] These divisions reflect what the church of Paul and the earliest Christians did in their services. The early Christians may not in all cases have had services every Sunday. Persecution, hardship, travel difficulty, and large distances may have made this impossible. But every time these Christians gathered together they received from their Lord His Word and His Sacrament. The literature of the first two centuries shows that Word and Sacrament were the universally common Sunday practice among Christians. One of the earliest Christian writings besides the Bible is called the *Didache*. It was written about the year 100 AD and possibly earlier, even before the last apostles had died. In this writing the people are directed to, “Assemble in common on the Lord’s own day to break bread and offer thanks; but first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.”[4] The earliest account of a Sunday service was written by a man named

Justin Martyr in about the year 150 AD. This is his account: On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president [the pastor or minister who presided] in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.[5] Notice how the Lord’s Supper was just as much part of the services as was the instruction in the Word. The earliest surviving Christian liturgy, called the *Apostolic Traditions*, was written about the year 215 by Hippolytus. This work is something like our Lutheran Agenda, the book which the pastor uses in leading the services. In *Apostolic Traditions* the Bishop and the people exchange greetings, “The Lord be with you, And with your spirit, Lift up your hearts, We lift them to the Lord, Let us give thanks to the Lord our God, It is right and proper to do so.” Then immediately follows the Words of institution. This was the every Sunday expectation of the early churches.[6]

I could provide quotations from the liturgies or theology books from almost every century until recently. All would show that the Sacrament of the Altar was celebrated every time the people of God gathered.

COMMUNION FREQUENCY BEFORE THE REFORMATION

Over the years the church corrupted the sacrament. Sermons were eliminated from the Divine Service. The Sacrament gradually was viewed as a sacrificial act of worship by the priest rather than the gift of God's salvation. The language used in the liturgy was Latin and not the language of the common people. It was thought that those in the pew didn't really need to understand the words since they were spoken to God and not to the people. The people communed less and less often while the priests communed more and more. At the time of Thomas Aquinas (1277) communion was considered frequent if a person went two to four times a year. Alarmed at this paucity of participation edicts were periodically pronounced mandating the reception of the Sacrament. Everyone was to go to communion at least four times a year and especially on Easter. The press of the masses at Easter would require so much time that the custom of withholding the cup from the laity became widespread. This custom became church law in the church in 1415 AD so that by the time of Luther no lay-Christian had sipped upon the blood of Christ for more than a century. Superstition lead people to pilfer pieces of the bread and bring them home to wor-

ship. The people no longer sang the hymns or liturgical parts. The monks did this. Christianity had truly become a spectator religion. The grace of God was simply not received and consequently not treasured by the common Christian.[7]

Yet, through all the centuries and despite the crass and Christless corruptions of the Eucharist, the services in God's house always featured the Sacrament of the Altar.

COMMUNION FREQUENCY AND THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

Martin Luther became embroiled with the Papists over the church's understanding of grace. (Early Lutherans never viewed themselves as fighting with the Catholic Church but with the Pope, so they referred to their opponent as Papists.) Luther believed that grace was the forgiveness of sins earned for all by Christ and freely given in the Absolution, the Word, Baptism and the Lord's supper. The Lord's Supper, to Luther, is not something that the priest did for God but something that Christ has given to us. You can imagine the changes that were made.

Luther refused to change anything that was not wrong. He retained as much of the liturgy as the gospel would allow. So the collects, the prayers, the creeds, the readings, the order of service and the basic structure of Word and Sacrament were retained. And these are faithfully employed today in all Confessional Lutheran churches.

But changes were required. The Lutherans' greatest concern was that the people get to know God better. Preaching was reestablished in the churches, since it had fallen into disuse. Luther wrote the liturgy in German. Now the people were treated to the Divine Service in their own language. They could understand what was being said and done. The Bible was translated into German so that the readings could be understood. Luther and many of his contemporaries wrote hymns so that the people could be taught the truths of Christ simply and could participate in the proclamation in the service. Catechisms were written and produced so that the people could be trained easily. The words of institution were no longer mumbled in Latin by the Priests. They were spoken or chanted loudly to the people in their own language. The main emphasis of the Reformation was that the people could understand the grace of God. These changes had salutary effects on the hearts and habits of God's people. Communion attendance increased dramatically. In fact the Lutherans were attending the Sacrament so often that their Roman Catholic neighbors got a little jealous. Ironically, "the practice of frequent communions in the Church of Rome today owes much to Reformation inspiration." [8]

But old habits die hard. Many Lutherans were reluctant to take communion every week. Some were afraid to receive the blood in the Sacrament. So the early Lutherans slowly and painstakingly

ingly taught and explained the need and blessings of the Lord's Supper. They did not force. They simply taught. And they realized that people need time to adjust to change, even necessary change.

One change that Luther and the early Lutherans never considered was to drop the celebration of the Sacrament from the Sunday morning service. Luther Reed summarized the practice of the Early Lutherans.

"The appreciation and unbroken use of the Service by the Lutheran Church in all lands is noteworthy.... The church has everywhere retained the Service for its normal Sunday service. Other Protestant churches promptly abandoned the historic liturgy and established a type of preaching service separate from the Holy Communion.... The Lutheran Church restored the "primitive synthesis" of the early church by including in balanced proportion the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacrament in the principal service of the day.[9]

COMMUNION FREQUENCY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

What happened? At the time of Luther the church celebrated communion every Sunday. By the middle of the twentieth century, when I was born, most Lutheran churches offered communion only once a month.

What happened? It was my discovery of the answer to this question that convinced me to teach that we must return to the historic practice of communion every Sunday.

Old habits die hard. And praiseworthy liturgical habits must be guarded with great

vigilance. Three factors lead to the loss of the practice of weekly communion among the Lutherans. The first is called Pietism. The Pietists stressed the importance of personal preparation for communion. This, in itself, is good. Luther said that fasting is good outward preparation. And the Lutheran Church has always insisted that communicant be prepared by learning the basic teachings of the catechism and by making a confession of sins. These practices are reflected in the Book of Concord, "Among us...the sacrament is available for all who wish to partake of it after they have been examined and absolved." [10] But the preparation expected by the Pietists was different. It was not learning the true faith at all.

The Sacrament was surrounded with an atmosphere of awe and fear; excessive emphasis was placed upon personal and intensely introspective preparation; and there grew up in the people's minds a dread of possibly being unworthy and of "being guilty" of the body and blood of Christ. These morbid and exaggerated emphases upon preparation for the Sacrament, rather than upon the Sacrament itself, are still occasionally in evidence.[11]

I see this fear of the Sacrament occasionally today. I've heard people say that the reason they are uncomfortable with weekly communion is that they require time and spiritual effort to prepare themselves for the Sacrament. "If I take it too often I will not be able to be prepared." These sentiments, while sincere, are not what Jesus wants. He

does not want us to focus on our sins and our repentance so much that we neglect the forgiveness in the Sacrament. How does one prepare for the Sacrament? You learn the catechism. Remember your baptism. Go to confession. Receive the absolution. Believe. That is preparation.

The second factor that caused the Lutherans to give up weekly Communion is far worse. It is Rationalism. Pietists were Christians with a misplaced faith. Rationalists were not Christian at all. Leading rationalists were men whose names you vaguely remember from Western Civilization class in high school: Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Locke. Rationalists believed that their reason and understanding was the measure of all things. Their creed was that creeds were bad. The Rationalists spawned the Unitarian Church, the Freemasons, Secular Humanism and the general age of unbelief in which we live. Rationalists rejected the belief that people are sinful. They denied the great events of God in Christ.

Churches were turned into lecture halls. Preaching Christ was discarded in favor of flowery addresses intended to inspire. Sunday services became a time in which we could be impressed with each other and the Lord's Supper is not conducive for that. In Germany the frequency of Sacramental celebration plummeted dramatically in the 1800s until the Liberal Lutheran practice approximated that the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Reformation.

The Lutheran Church that began migrating to America in the 1840s was not healthy. Its worship was impoverished and its practices lax. It had lost much of its doctrinal heritage and true doctrinally sound confessional pastors were rare. The pastors who did come to America, while dedicated, were often young and inexperienced. The New World was not flowing with milk and honey. Rather, it was teeming with forces that were foreign to Lutherans and to the gospel itself. Fred Precht has said, "The cumulative effects of the Thirty Years War, Pietism and Rationalism spanning almost two centuries, left the worship and the life of the churches at a low ebb at the opening of the 19th century.... It is to be noted that it was in this period of the church's history that the large migrations of Confessional Lutherans to America took place." [12]

The third factor, which led to a decrease in the frequency of the Sacrament especially in America, is the influence of Reformed and baptistic theology and preachers. Followers of John Calvin, early American revivalistic preachers, usually Baptistic in theology, denied that the Lord's Supper is the true body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. To them it was fellowship meal of bread and grape juice, which was not needed more than a handful of times annually. Many early Lutherans came to America to escape the unbelief in the churches in Europe. These pioneers often found themselves with neither church nor pastor. They lived among the Mennonites,

Moravians, and Methodists of America. The faithful Lutheran pastors who did serve the Lutherans often had to attend the needs of literally dozens of parishes. These "Circuit Riders" could visit their parishes only periodically and the people never could find a rhythm of regular Divine Services. Further, the abundant Baptistic and Methodistic itinerant preachers often enticed faithful New World Lutherans from their doctrinal roots. These revivalists did not believe in the saving benefits of the Lord's Supper. Revivalism continues to influence Lutherans to this very day. So Pietism, Rationalism and the Reformed Churches all worked their influence on Lutherans until we lost something very precious. Reed Summarizes, Luther and his associates never would have approved of the "half-mass" commonly found among us today as the normal Sunday worship of our congregations. For two hundred years, or nearly half the time from the Reformation to the present, the normal Sunday service in Lutheran lands was the purified Mass, or Hauptgottesdienst, (High Divine Service) with its twin peaks of Sermon and Sacrament. There were weekly celebrations and the people in general received the Sacrament much more frequently than before. The ravages of war, the example of Calvinism, the later subjective practices of Pietistic groups in a domestic type of worship, and the unbelief of rationalism, however, finally broke the genuine Lutheran Tradition. [13]

- [1] Augsburg Confession, Apology, Article XXIV paragraph 1
- [2] [1 Corinthians 11:17-23](#)
- [3] Lutheran Service Book Concordia Publishing House, 2006
- [4] Ancient Christian Writers, Newman Press, 1948, p. 23
- [5] In the Stead of Christ, Kent Heimbigner, Repristination Press, 1997, p. 69-70
- [6] A Study of Liturgy, Ed. Cheslyn Jones, SPCK, 1978 p. 213
- [7] This is My Body, Herman Sasse, Augsburg Publishing house 1959, p. 52
- [8] The Lutheran Liturgy, Luther Reed, Muhlenberg Press, 1948, p. 244
- [9] Reed, p. 243-244
- [10] Augsburg Confession, Apology, Article XXIV paragraph 1
- [11] Reed, p. 244
- [12] Lutheran Worship: History and Practice, Fred Precht, Concordia Publishing House, 1993, p. 83
- [13] Reed, p. 244

What Will We Try Next...

Posted on November 17, 2014 by Rev. Paul R. Harris

to win souls for Jesus? I don't know, but I'm willing to bet that whatever the Baptist, Presbyterians, on Non-denominationalists do, we will soon follow.

In an article for the *Christian Research Journal* managing editor for *Christianity Today*, Drew Dyck, outlines how the postmodernist is to be evangelized. It's four simple steps: 1. Tell Your Story. 2. Build Trust. 3. Invite Them to Serve. 4. Follow the Leader.

1. You can't talk doctrine but you can tell your story and be sure to leave in the hinky parts.

2. You can't preach the Law. "Only once they trust you and believe you love them unconditionally will they warm to your message."

3. They don't want anything to do with Christian doctrine, but they want Christian service.

4. Jesus is the leader that you follow. You do what He did (except for the suffering the pangs of hell and dying on the cross part – prh) and it turns out He invented steps 1 through 3 ("Reaching Postmodern 'Leavers'", Vol. 36, 1, 8-9, 57).

Go to any going, growing emerging, community, or otherwise unwilling to be denominational "church" and a variation of the above program will be what you find. It won't matter if that church is funded by Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, or is really non-denominational in the 21st Century this is what is hot.

In 1965 this was hot. Under "Helpful Hints for Lay Visitors" we find "GIVE THE INVITATION. If they seem to be in agreement and the time is ripe, give the invitation in clear words: 'Since it's apparent that you think so clearly in this matter, and are in agreement with us, we would like you to get your letter of transfer (or enroll in pastor's class, or reaffirm your faith). Here's a tract, 'Christ Invites You.' Please

glance through it and indicate how you will accept His invitation.' Then go over each item with him and urge him to take a spiritual step forward. Ordinarily people appreciate this approach."

In case there is any doubt in your mind that this is really salesmanship 101, closing the sale, and before that it was Baptist decision theology, go from page 47 to 48 and read: "PRESSING FOR A COMMITMENT. If there is hesitation in reaching a decision, keep speaking of the benefits of faith in Christ and of the uncertainty of daily life. Say, 'This is something that ought to be taken care of now, don't you agree?' Tell them this is a decision people never regret. Some people refuse to sign anything, so request permission to sign their names for them."

You know what 1965 program manual the above is from? *The Preaching Teaching Reaching Mission* manual of the Evangelism department of the LCMS. Isn't it amazing that we came up with the same program the Baptist had been using at revivals for a century or more before?

No, it's not amazing; it's sad, but it's also not surprising. A decade later we traipsed after the Kennedy Evangelism Explosion method. In 1979, the Fort Wayne seminary had us going to local churches to experience the Explosion. It wasn't much of a bang.

What drove Kennedy to "explode" our churches, Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner to "grow" our churches, and Rick Warren to repurpose them is the same thing that drove the *Preaching Teaching Reaching Mission* program of 1965: We don't see the results we expect, want, or need to feed the budget.

Let me be clear. I'm not saying these people have no love for lost souls or don't seriously desire the salvation of them. That's not their error. Their error is thinking that each new wrinkle in society requires a new wrinkle in the church to accommodate it. There are serious assumptions underlying every evangelism program, movement, tactic, and plan. Are those assumptions Biblical and Confessional? If not, the results won't be either.

Go looking for the truth

posted Oct. 15, 2015 5:16 p.m. | updated Oct. 17, 2015 12:00 a.m. (CDT) by / The Rev. Clint Stark

Editor's note: *The Rev. Virginia Wolf's Matter of Faith column ran on Sept. 19.*

I would like to point out some logical fallacies and hypocritical irony from Ms. Virginia Wolf's article "Go looking for a church."

Her article can be summed up in her sentence, "But the biggest reason (people don't attend church) is the failure to find relevance or meaning in church — a lack of belief in what a church espouses."

This is the popular post-modern absolute truth statement that “there is no such thing as absolute truth, but truth is whatever you believe it to be or find to be relevant.” I hope you caught the irony.

Ms. Wolf then goes on to say, “First and foremost, we support freedom of belief.” She then lists other religions like Christianity and Islam and says, “... all are welcome who search for truth.” Here again, what is truth? She defines truth as, whatever you think is relevant is true.

She, for example, didn’t tolerate, welcome or celebrate her American Baptist upbringing, but judged it to be untrue because she found it irrelevant. With this logic, should a serial killer who believes that murder is the true way to go, look for a church community that welcomes and tolerates that truth?

No, believing that serial killing is good, and even finding others who agree with you and find it relevant, doesn’t make it true. Even the religions she

mentions are not so open-minded that their brains fall out.

However, Ms. Wolf’s church’s doctrine [She is the “pastor” of a Unitarian Universalist “church.” – prh]and the doctrines of all the other religions she mentions, save Christianity, do have one thing in common. They all only teach what a person must do. She says, “... we are sure that we are called to help others ...” Many churches simply tell you what you need to do. A Christian congregation is unique in that it tells you what the one true God has done for you.

Jesus, God’s son, says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one gets to the Father, but by Me.” Yes, I know this isn’t the popular dogma of “all roads lead to heaven.” Yet, the absolute truth is that we are all sinners, from serial killers to pastors, and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Jesus truly loved his neighbor as Himself, and He then died on the cross for all our sins.

A truly Christian church is always relevant because it speaks the truth of what we

need to hear not what we want to hear or find relevant this week. The absolute truth is that we are sinners, but for the sake of Jesus alone, God declares us righteous. Do Christians love their neighbor and do good works? Yes, but out of thanksgiving to God for His love and grace.

Finally, Jesus also says, “Beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing who try to lead you to hell with lies in the name of truth.” I doubt Ms. Wolf sees the irony. Instead of looking for a church that will tell you anything you want to hear, why not go looking for the truth and attend a church that teaches it.

I invite Ms. Wolf to attend my congregation. God wants all to believe the truth.

Stark is the pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Chippewa Falls.

<http://www.leadertelegram.com/Features/Religion/2015/10/17/Go-looking-for-the-truth.html>

Trinity Lutheran Church
1207 West 45th Street Austin, TX 78756
512.453.3835 www.trinityaustin.com

Trinity Te Deum is published bi-monthly. Deadline for all articles is the 15th of the odd months. All articles must be approved by Rev. Paul R. Harris. Articles with no author are written by him.

February 2016

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	5pm Confirmation		7:15 Romans			
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	5pm Confirmation		Ash Wed, Communion 7:30 pm			
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	5pm Confirmation		Lent Vespers 7:30			
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	5pm Confirmation		Lent Vespers 7:30			
28	29					
	5pm Confirmation					

March 2016

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
		Voters Meeting 7pm	Lent Vespers 7:30			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	5pm Confirmation	6:30 Elders Meeting	Lent Vespers 7:30			
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
←-----	Camp Out	-----→	Lent Vespers 7:30			
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	5pm Confirmation			Maundy Thursday 7:30	Good Friday 7:30	
27	28	29	30	31		
	5pm Confirmation	←Pastor	----on----	Vacation→		