

SERVING

IN AND BY ENGLISH DISTRICT-LCMS CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, AND MINISTRIES



Choir at Grace Lutheran, Mitchell, ON

I.N.I.

A THEOLOGY OF SERVING - SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

A Theology of Serving has its biblical roots in service (Hebrew: עָבַד *“abad,”* meaning to work for another, to serve) and in the Greek New Testament words for “serve,” with varying nuances. *Abad* as “service” also carries the notion of suffering. It orders all our other service under our relationship to Almighty God as an important aspect of the life of worship and devotion. Out of this service to God flows our service to and care of others.

Exodus 23:23-25 – “When My angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I will blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces. You shall **serve** (“be led to serve”) the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you.”

Deuteronomy 10:12-13a – “And now Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to **serve** (“be serving and continue to serve”) the LORD, your God, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD...”

Joshua 24:14-15 – “Now therefore fear the LORD and **serve** Him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and **serve** the LORD. ... As for me and my house, we will **serve** the LORD.”

Isaiah 40-53 (notably the Servant Songs), finding its fruition in the sacrificial service of God for us (the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53)

Matthew 20:25-28 (also Mark 10:45) – “But Jesus called them (His disciples) to Him and said, ‘*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whomever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and (an exegetical kai [“and”], i.e. He serves by giving His life...) to give His life as a ransom for many.*’” (In TLSB study note, 20:26: “Greatness in God’s kingdom is characterized by willingness to serve others rather than insistence on being served.”

Luke 22:26 – Jesus said during the Passover Meal with His Apostles, “*But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.*” (In TLSB study note, 22:26: “Christ rebukes this error of the apostles and teaches that there shall not be lordship or superiority among them. Instead, the apostles would be sent forth as equals [the apostles being equal to one another] to the common ministry of the Gospel.’ [Tr. 8]” (Tr = “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” Book of Concord)

Acts 6:2 – “And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘*It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God and to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.*’” (7 Deacons are chosen [ordained with the laying on of hands] to perform this important work of “waiting on tables,” that is, serving for the relief of the Church’s poor, in this case the widows who were being overlooked in the daily food distribution. The human care ministry of the early Jerusalem Church was a striking feature and witness, and likely attractational to outsiders.)

Romans 12:1-2 – Paul writes, “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual **worship** [Greek λατρείαν *“latrian,”* is

usually translated and rightly understood as “service”]. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Galatians 5:13 – Paul writes, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **serve** one another.” (The freedom that we have in Jesus Christ is the basis for serving others, not for self-serving.)

I Peter 4:10 – Peter writes, “As each has received a gift, use it to **serve** one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” (This remarkable passage links serving with Christian stewardship. In TLSB study note, 4:10: “God’s gifts are not personal possessions but are meant to be used according to His will” in serving others.)

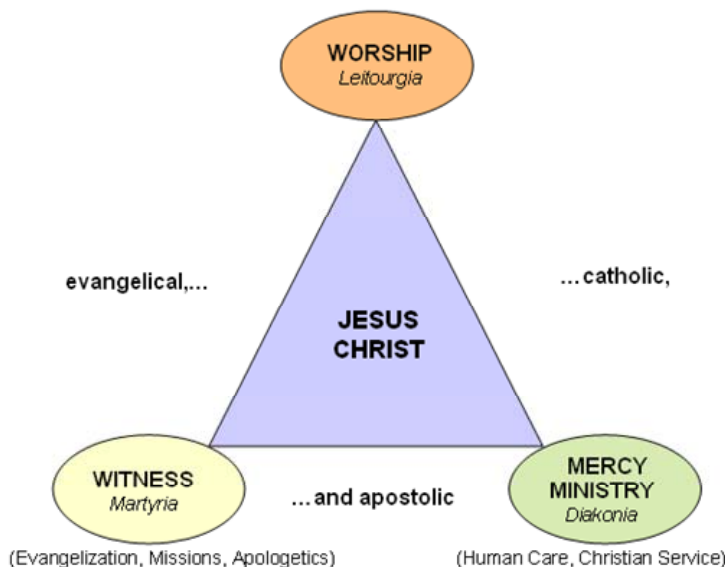
PROLOGUE

I am fascinated by our Lord’s words concerning “serving” and “service.” He did not come to be served by human beings. Rather, He came to serve by giving His life as a ransom for sin in order to save human-kind from the consequences of sin. This essay will focus especially on the biblical doctrine of “serving.”

Serving has a dual usage in the Church. The model I use in our English District for various conferences and in Congregational Bible Classes and other forums depicts the Church’s life, mission, and ministry, centered in and on our Lord Jesus Christ. Like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His teaching of the Word of God, so the Church is focused on Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Luke 10:38-42). In this model, the three foci are worship (*leitourgia*), witness (*martyria*), and human care/service (*diakonia*). Worship includes not only the public adoration and praise of the Triune God but also includes education (catechesis) in all forms in the Church (*lex orandi, lex credendi*) in the living out of the faith.

THE CHURCH’S LIFE, MISSION, AND MINISTRY

by the Rev. Dr. David P. Stechholz, @2008



Both *leitourgia* and *diakonia* represent the fullness of service to God and to the neighbor. This life of the Christian is beautifully expressed in the post-Communion Collects:

We give thanks to You, Almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith to You and in fervent love to one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

O God the Father, the Fountain and Source of all goodness, who in loving-kindness sent Your only-begotten Son into the flesh, we thank You that for His sake You have given us pardon and peace in this Sacrament, and we ask You not to forsake Your children but always to rule our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may be enabled constantly to serve You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

In worship of the Almighty, we both receive from God's gracious hand His love, mercy, and forgiveness of sins. In His holy Word and holy Sacraments, God feeds His people and they, in turn, serve the Lord in devoted worship, offering the sacrifices of praise and song and liturgy, prayer and offering. We render to God the praise and adoration due His holy name. We offer God the totality of our lives in public and personal worship of Him who is God Most High. In the human care of Christian service (sometimes called Christian social ministry), we serve others in their needs because we have ourselves been nurtured by God through Him who is the Ultimate Servant (the Suffering Servant and Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world), Jesus Christ. The Church is the Creation of Him who came not to be served but to serve to us in His Incarnation, Birth, Life and Ministry, Suffering and Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Reign as Prophet, Priest, and King. Even now Jesus intercedes for us before the Father's throne in heaven. He is still serving, not in the sense of "abad" (sacrifice), but in His state of glory (exaltation) without suffering. And He continues to serve us on earth through His priestly intercession, the work of His Holy Spirit, His means of grace (Word and Sacraments), the holy ministry of His Called servants, and through the mutual encouragement (consolation) of Christians (the brethren).

In short, the starting point is not with the Third Use of the Law but with the Gospel. The starting point is God's service to humanity and our humble service of worship to God and care for His Creation and creatures. The starting point is not "obligation," a point that is rarely grasped by many well-meaning Christian thinkers of the 21st century who, like me, want to emphasize the Church's ministry of mercy. Instead, we must begin with the serving work of our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who makes us His own in Holy Baptism, feeds us of His grace with forgiveness of sins in the Holy Supper, and, through the strengthening work of God's Word equips, empowers, and calls us for service to Him through others and their needs.

Our English District, by the Holy Spirit, is **igniting Christ's Church in mission** as a "reasonable service" to God. We state, as our mission, that Congregations and Schools of the English District-LCMS, in receiving God's gifts in His holy Word and Sacraments and worshiping the Lord God, are:

Serving in our communities

Connecting with the unchurched and dechurched

Growing in faith and numbers by the power of the Holy Spirit

Reproducing by planting new churches (missions, schools, ministries).

The first and most foundational of these four participles is "serving." I note that these four verbs are participles for a very clear reason. Jesus Christ gave to His Church a mission, His mission, and words that we know as the "Great Commission." There are three participles in verses 19 and 20 of Matthew, Chapter 28: "go" (which is actually "going"), "baptizing," and "teaching," all in support of the main verb: "make disciples." In truth, that is what we are about – **God makes disciples of Jesus through us**, His disciples who are part of His Church. Almighty God makes disciples of Jesus through us as conveyers of the Gospel truth of Christ's death and Resurrection. However, you cannot make disciples if you are not winsome witnesses who connect with people, in this case those whom Jesus calls the "lost" (Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost [Prodigal] Son, Luke, Chapter 15). Said another way, God does this providential work; He graciously provides us "bridges" to people in our everyday lives. We as Christians or disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ connect with our neighbors, families, work associates, co-workers, classmates, check-out clerks, gas station attendants, people we meet at airports or on airlines, just to name a few. And we best connect with them by serving them.

Serving another human being calls us to be in a winsome "relationship" with that other person. Consider our Lord. Consider His relationship not just with His apostles and other disciples, including the women who were the "support cast," but also such folks as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany, a Roman centurion, Jairus, Peter's mother-in-law, a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Sychar of Samaria, a

wealthy young man, Nicodemus, and many more. Notice how Jesus took time to know each of them, minister to (serve) them, talk with them, listen to them, love them, and finally die for them. It is true that our Lord is omniscient and knows people beyond our finite capacities to know others. Nevertheless, He took time to know them. Jesus served. He came to our world to serve us with highest gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and His entry with people, while proclaiming the Kingdom of God, was compassionately serving them in their various needs.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Our Congregations, Schools, and Ministries of the English District are re-learning to serve. Such a statement would lead one to think that perhaps we have stopped serving. I do not believe that this is the case. Over the decades, the English District through her congregations, schools, and ministries has often been distinguished by this critical element of service in the Christian life. Human care ministries in District and congregations have continued. However, with the secular, post-modern society around us, we Christians have also become increasingly focused on our “need” for material things, larger homes, more expensive cars, digital-age objects, travel, etc. I see that in myself; I often greedily think that I am entitled to whatever I desire. While such roots are in the Garden of Eden, the sinful flesh in our consumerist culture is craving still more and more.

The explosion of technological advance has also fostered a society of narcissism. Consider such phenomena as “I-pod,” “myspace.com,” “my music,” and “my this and my that” on our computers, “Facebook,” YouTube (“Broadcast Yourself”), and endless tweets about me and “my life.”

The narcissism and self-gratification impulses of our age have certainly permeated the Church. We are not immune from the “pull” of our sinful flesh and the world, with Satan also greasing the skids for personal desires. I see this notion of entitlement in everything from my family members to pastors and teachers in our District, to my Staff and, as stated before, also in me. None of us are immune. We would rather be served and pampered than serve. Why? Because we would rather be served than suffer, that is, to serve by taking up our crosses and following Jesus.

Sin leads us to have a fantasy that we wish to be served instead of serving; however, when faith is present and growing in us as believers in Christ, we soon find that being served is unfulfilling. It is true that we rightly enjoy the ministry of Christ’s Church to us; we always enjoy being served by Christ, but here I am saying that faith compels us to respond. **Service is Gospel, not Law.** Service is a beautiful gift of God the Holy Spirit that connects us to God’s very nature because we need something to do – words are not enough. We need action to fully grasp God’s Word.

Jesus’ words and those of the New Testament are refreshing. They are a call to humble service. The example of our Lord is genuine, authentic, unvarnished, clear, and not self-serving. Whether it was washing the feet of His disciples or ministering to a woman caught in adultery or welcoming the children whom the disciples found to be a nuisance, Jesus revealed His overwhelming love in asking nothing for Himself. We have in Him the perfect model. Our parishioners have the example to follow and we pastors show them Jesus Christ.



Quilt-makers at Peace Lutheran, New Berlin, WI

Christians who are truly fed and nourished on God’s holy Word and Sacraments have a willingness to “serve” freely and sometimes spontaneously. This point cannot be overstated. Disciples of the Lord Jesus crave the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word (1 Peter 2:2). They cannot get enough of God’s goodness and mercy, so freely lavished upon us by a gracious Lord. The service of Christians flows from what they have received, for they have the love of Jesus for other people. Serving in our community is not always easy. Let’s face it. Some Christians have the confidence to seek opportunities to serve and some do not. Yes, one can easily join the Lions, Kiwanis, Rotary, or Chamber of

Commerce, and that gives opportunity for both Christian service and witness, even in a secular, service organization. A good example is the late Ernie Harwell, famed sportscaster with the Detroit Tigers. He was a committed Christian. Even as a retired man battling cancer and living in a nursing home in his 90's, Ernie was the one, having been fed on God's Word, to gather up the hymnals used for a Devotional Service at the nursing home by Pastors Vic or Tim Halboth of Grace Lutheran Church, Redford, Twp., MI. Ernie would mix his Christian "faith words" in with his personal conversations with people. I did not know him. This is what I was told.

Let me use another local example, because service is most often "local." In Chicago there is a young woman (pictured) whom I do not know and who is part of River of Life, an inner city, Spanish background congregation. On Memorial Day weekend I heard her speaking about Jesus as she gave dance lessons to a few young girls. Her witness was small, humble, and in a room of the former Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church's School building, but her witness made a profound impression on me. **A willingness to serve others** rather than entitlement, that is, expecting service, ought to be a mark of 21st century North American post-modern Christians, no matter what their age. The proclamation of

God's holy Words is the powerful tool that leads the child of God to joyfully serve others. Only the Gospel motivates for such servanthood.



BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

There is no question that our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the greatest example and model for us of "service above self," to use the Rotary motto. All other examples pale in comparison. Jesus was that Good Shepherd who was always serving the sheep, the flock, the family of God and those whom He was seeking to find and bring into the family of God, His Church. His ultimate service was, of course, His sacrificial suffering, agony, and death on the Cross. He endured intense pain, humiliation, and crucifixion in order to save humanity from the wages of sin, death. Was there ever such love, such service? No doubt, Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross was the greatest act of selfless-servanthood that this world has ever known.

However, that act of service culminated His serving throughout His life, and particularly in the events recorded in the Gospels. One might mention His Maundy Thursday Passover Meal foot-washing of the disciples' feet as another example of humility and service, but I would like briefly to focus on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, Chapter 9, Verses 35-38. Typically, the words at the end of the passage, "*The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few,*" lead us to focus on the harvest of souls and the workers for that harvest. We often overlook the first two verses, which tell of Jesus' actions: "*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues and **proclaiming** the Gospel of the kingdom and **healing** every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He **had compassion** for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*" (Vs. 35-36). I have highlighted the verbs: the first three are participles of action and the last is an aorist passive. Jesus was that Good Shepherd who was always serving the sheep, the flock, the family of God and those whom He was seeking to find and bring into the family of God, His Church. These words identify the pattern of Jesus' serving: He compassionately teaches a harassed world of people, who stumble in the blindness of deceit. He teaches the truth that brings to light the goodness and beauty of God and the life He intends for us. Jesus compassionately proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom of a gracious God, freely forgiving an anxious and distressed humanity. Jesus compassionately diagnoses and heals the sickness of sin that leads to death. This is our Good and Chief Shepherd, who comes not to be served, but to serve.

Throughout Scripture, then, one sees what happens in the lives of those who come to know the gracious, compassionate God promised to Israel and revealed in Jesus Christ. Consider just a few of the godly

people in the Old Testament who are heroes of service, male and female, young and old. Just to name a few, though, our list would certainly include the following from the Old Testament: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and Caleb, Ruth, Samuel, David, Daniel, and numerous prophets. In the New Testament, we could certainly include Mary, the Mother of our Lord, Mary and Martha of Bethany, Peter's mother-in-law, a Roman centurion, Peter and John, Barnabas, Paul, Dorcas (Tabitha), and Lydia.

Our Lord's teaching also directly points us to the life of service. One example stands out. It is a parable that our Lord used in teaching service and addressing the question, "who is my neighbor?" It is the Parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. Since numerous pages of commentary can easily be found on this parable, I'll make only brief remarks.

The Good Samaritan



Jesus tells this parable for the benefit of a fellow Jewish countryman, a lawyer, that is, one who was a student of the Decalogue, the five books of Moses (the Torah) that comprised the foundation of the Old Testament revelation. The lawyer answers Jesus' query and acknowledges that the heart of the Law was and is a love of God and a love of one's neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5).

But then the lawyer seeks to justify himself as one who ought to "*inherit eternal life.*" He asks our Lord, "*And who is my neighbor?*" Jesus then tells this most profound parable about the Kingdom of God (Kingdom of Heaven). The Kingdom of God is like a man, who happened to be a hated foreigner, a Samaritan, who at great risk and expense showed mercy (kindness and compassion) to a fellow traveler, one who had been beaten up and left half-dead on the road to Jericho from Jerusalem. Jesus as true God and true Man expects us, His followers, His disciples, to love all people with such kind compassion. However, we are not capable. Thanks be to God that Jesus has done what we cannot do, show costly love and total mercy.

In all likelihood, the man who was beaten up was Jewish. The parable is not about berating two upstanding Jewish men, a Levite and a priest, though the Law did require them (and us) to keep that very point. Perhaps they were in the fix I was in a week ago, having witnessed an accident but behind schedule in getting to Chicago for a meeting. Since I saw others helping out in the accident and that it did not involve physical effects to those in the accident, just a badly damaged car from a foolish driving

stunt of an impatient motorist, I chose to not get involved. Did I feel guilt about this – yes, and rightly so! We've all been in the place of the Levite and priest. Moreover, we can justify our not getting involved in a lot of things that are messy, time-consuming, fraught with legal problems, and more. Yet in the parable, it is the good Samaritan who stops and displays extraordinary service. Look at all his actions:

1. He stopped to help the wounded, half-dead man who had been beaten up by robbers.
2. He bound up the beaten man's wounds, pouring on oil and wine as a first aid treatment.
3. He placed the wounded man on his own animal, probably a donkey, and then himself walked.
4. He brought the wounded man to an inn, a place of lodging.
5. He took care of him, no doubt ministering to the man with words and actions of comfort. This probably included changing his temporary first aid bandages, cleaning him up, and feeding him, as well as encouraging the man toward health and healing.
6. Perhaps late for an appointment, he then left the wounded man at the inn in the care of the innkeeper, but not before paying the cost for the man's lodging and care and then offering to pay an additional costs when he returned.

This is amazing. The word "savior" comes to mind in terms of the love, compassion, and actions of a good Samaritan, and yet our Lord says to the lawyer, "*Which of these proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?*" (Vs. 36). The lawyer could not but admit that it was "the" good Samaritan, and he does not call him the "Samaritan" but "*the one*

who showed him mercy” (Vs. 37). Jesus words are clear, “Go and do likewise” (Vs. 37). There is much to ponder in these words of our Lord. We are not capable of rendering the totally unselfish love and compassion that our Lord calls for, and yet that is the standard. The lawyer and each of us stand condemned. However, the Good Samaritan does represent Jesus Christ, and we represent Christ in our “giving of a cup of cold water” – so-to-speak – to our “neighbor” in need.

Legacy: I’m not advocating the exclusive use of the one-year lectionary as opposed to the three-year (A-B-C cycle) lectionary. However, the Parable of the Good Samaritan comes up every year at Trinity 13 in the one-year lectionary, while it only comes up once every three years with the three-year lectionary. Perhaps a minor point. Yet I would submit that our biblical illiterate society in North America is largely ignorant of this important story and the Christian ethos written into American culture and law. There exist in most states and provinces of the U.S. and Canada so-called “Good Samaritan Laws” to protect those who would try to help out someone in distress. There are also numerous

hospitals found through-out the world, as well as hospice, nursing home, and other human care ministries named “Good Samaritan.” Our Lord’s parable and the person of this “good Samaritan” live on, and this is part of the ethos in American society. To some degree, it has been lost and needs to be recovered. Sad will be the day when a society no longer has compassion for the poor, the downtrodden, the distressed, the homeless, the ill, the unborn, the terminally-ill elderly, or anyone else who is “not normal,” and that at times would be all of us. Better is the day that each of us is a “little Christ” to our neighbor, to anyone in need, whenever and wherever.

The legacy is the example for us who are filled with the Holy Spirit to follow.



NOT SERVING – WHAT KEEPS CHRISTIANS FROM SERVING

Since the Gospel alone can motivate us (Ephesians 2:8-10) because of the costly love of the crucified and risen God, Jesus Christ, I would frankly rather not have to deal with the question, What keeps Christians from serving? Why? Because it deals with the Devil, the world and our own sinful human flesh. Why do Christians and Christian congregations, schools, and ministries not serve in their lives and communities and regions? The unholy three noted above work separately or together in stymieing the work of Christ’s Kingdom of nurturing the family of God and equipping the family of God vocationally for service. The following are, I believe, the biggest factors in keeping believers in Jesus Christ from serving in their communities and sharing the faith in Christ that we have:

1. Idolatry and Individualism – something else in place of the Triune God
2. Fear – personal fear of failure, rejection, or inadequacy
3. Excuses

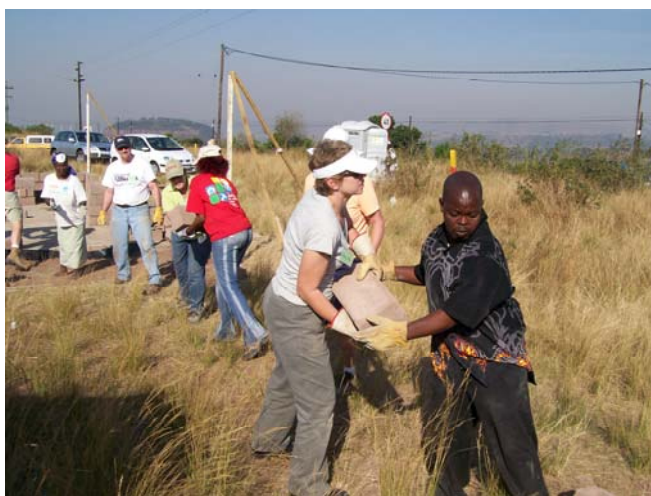
1. Idolatry and Individualism

Idolatry, simply put, is placing something in place of God. Instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things, it is allowing or placing anything into the honored spot of worship and adoration. In North America, rank hedonism (the love of pleasure) and materialism (the love of things, objects) has replaced for many the one true God. Some call this consumerism. (See the Up-In-Out Model used by St. Thomas Church in Sheffield, England, which addresses this idolatry in the Western world.) Coupled with this self-gratification is a rugged individualism in which it is all about “me.” (See Dr. Joel Biermann’s fine article, “*Individualism as the Insistence of My Rights*,” in the new Concordia Seminary-St. Louis book, ***The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ***.) Even Christian and pop radio talk shows talk about self-actualization and loving oneself in a way of pampering oneself, and this is antithetical to faith. This is not to say that Christians are not to love themselves. The biblical injunction is, after all, to love your neighbor as yourself. We want to take care of our bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit. We want to take care of our minds, our emotional needs, mental and other concerns, but not merely for “self.” What I’m talking about is a self-absorbing concern in which the “I” becomes the center of the universe. In valuing “self” too highly, one in effect rejects community. True self-worth, though, can only

be found in relationship to service above self as our Lord displayed and as He taught us. For many, their “me” has become their idol and object of worship. This self-absorption leads to far more than loneliness in isolating oneself from others; it becomes a cancer that renders all life as meaningless (Ecclesiastes).

2. Fear – personal fear of failure, rejection, or inadequacy

A preacher once had a great sermon entitled, “There is nothing to fear but the Fear Himself.” Genesis 31:42, Jacob, in words with his father-in-law Laban, refers to the Lord God Almighty as *“the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac...”* There is the rightful fear or being afraid of God in His wrath when we disobey Him and His Law and gracious will for our lives. What we are talking about here is a fear of people, fear of failure or rejection, or fear of inadequacy in serving other people, and this is a sin. The sin lies in not trusting in God, that is, breaking the First Commandment. The sin lies in our looking to ourselves for competency, adequacy, and our own abilities apart from God. Our sufficiency, our competency, adequacy, and yes, our abilities all come from God. He is the supplier of gifts and abilities. He is the Source of strength. If He shows us how to serve and tells us to serve our neighbor and thus proclaim the love of God in Christ to others, will He not supply us with the tools, the gifts, and strength to do His will? Of course He will.



Members of Redeemer, Sarnia, ON, and Christ Church-Lutheran, Phoenix, AZ, serving on a mission trip house build in South Africa

Yet like a supposedly-safe cocoon, our pride in being afraid of failure, rejection, or inadequacy becomes a rejection of the God of all grace and His good gifts. Did Jesus not tell His disciples, in reference to the Holy Spirit, *“He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”* (John 14:26)? This all-powerful God helps us remember what we need to recall. He also strengthens or empowers God’s people for works of service. By His forgiveness of our sins and by His all-sufficient strength, we are given power to overcome our weaknesses and fears.

A good example of this occurred at our English District Spring Professional Church Workers’ Conference. On Tuesday evening, May 4th, one of the speakers was the Rev. David Godkin from Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC District), Montréal, Québec. David is a remarkably effective pastor with a speech impediment. As a result of that impediment, he sometimes stumbles or stutters very slightly and must speak a bit more slowly. This actually works in his favor as he is witnessing and helping immigrants to Canadian for whom English and/or French are not their first languages. This patience with the pace of his speech is used by the Lord to build a greater credibility and care for those whose lives he is touching. As a result, many, by the power of God’s Word, are coming to faith, receiving Holy Baptism, and becoming a part of Ascension Church as a highly multi-ethnic congregation.

3. Excuses

Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh seduce us to make up excuses. It is a fact that the unholy trinity invite us to find excuses to justify our not serving our neighbor and thus connecting with people, most of whom have fallen away from worship in a Christian church or are not Christian and have rejected or never been shown the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ. Confronting our own sinfulness of not wanting to serve invites us to come clean before God of our excuse-making. The challenge, then, is to repent and change from our sinful ways and willingly serve our neighbor in response to God’s gracious service to us in the life, ministry, death, and Resurrection of His beloved Son. (I recommend God’s means of grace of Confession and Absolution.) And the Good News is that we have been delivered from guilt and shame by our Lord Jesus Christ. By God’s grace, you can repent of sin wherever and

whenever and you can receive the power to live freely every moment of every day, and freely living under the Cross of Jesus will include service to others.

CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDIES – WORTHY EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

While the Good Samaritan parable shows compassion and service by an individual, it has application in the English District and our wider Synod to congregations, schools, and ministries, as well as individuals. I believe that the strength of each congregation, perhaps the best “scorecard” of how a church is doing, is found in its compassionate ministries and the compassion of her individual members. Yes, this is the Third Use of the Law.

Listed below are a number of “best practices” and examples, gleaned from newsletters, correspondence, and visits, that demonstrate service and reflect the love of Christ.

Examples of Service:

- 1) **Sherman Oaks Church & Pre-school, Sherman Oaks, CA** – In May, the School (Children’s Center) held a *Trike-A-Thon* to raise money for Habitat for Humanity to help build a home “for someone less fortunate.”
- 2) **Trinity, Erie, PA** – Also with volunteers joining their Thrivent group in a local Habitat for Humanity effort, “The House that Hope Built,” with members also providing snacks, water, and food.
- 3) **Christ Church-Lutheran, Phoenix, and Holy Trinity, Tucson, AZ** – Both congregations are involved in prison ministries to the in-mates.
- 4) **King of Glory, Sylvania, OH** – In addition to collecting all kinds of save/collect items, the Church has an Angel Food Ministry to the community.
- 5) **First Lutheran, El Cajon, CA** – Weekly children’s activities at a methamphetamine-infested apartment complex near church on the front lawn of the 200-unit apartment complex, providing a safe environment for the children in a virtual weekly/weekday VBS.
- 6) **Youth delegates to E.D. Convention at Hales Corners** – delivery of 317 quilts and blankets made by members of E.D. congregations. Deliveries were to child-care centers, clothing banks, a sanctity of human life single mothers’ shelter, and other human care and social service agencies.
- 7) **Faith, Naples, FL** – In addition to their faith in action efforts to supply needs of military personnel and citizens in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Congregation has a local prayer shawl ministry to anyone in the community “who is sick or has been sick or has suffered a loss.”
- 8) **Martin Luther Chapel & Student Center, East Lansing, MI** – This campus ministry at Michigan State University continues to have an annual mission trip/servant event involving 40-50+ students going to 4 sites over Winter Break to serve in various settings including Nicaragua, Phoenix, El Paso, Texas/Juarez, Mexico, Haiti, etc.
- 9) **Redeemer Church & School, Oakmont, PA** – Served as the drop-off point for the Hearts for Haiti project with area churches & schools, and members & school families collecting thousands of dollars of supplies for families in Haiti in response to the earthquake disaster.
- 10) **Beautiful Savior, Lee’s Summit, MO** – Also involved with “Homeless for Haiti” effort in which area high school youth ministry programs united and the youth slept outside at night this past winter to fulfill their commitment to raise money for the Haiti earthquake victims.
- 11) **Risen Savior, Green Valley, AZ** – This church does a host of human care ministries, as you know. Here, though, are a few other new ministries: Breast Cancer Support Group, Men’s Prostate Wellness Group, helping children through play therapy via the Life Counseling Network of LSS (Lutheran Social Services) of the Southwest, the Community Food Bank (serving and/or giving),...
- 12) **Redeemer, Sarnia, ON** – Re-cycling to help others, including aluminum beverage can “tabs,” milk bags (which are crocheted into sleeping mats for people overseas), stamps (Canadian Bible Society), Campbell soup labels for the Lutheran School for the Deaf.
- 13) **West Portal and New Life Chinese, San Francisco, CA** – Making of quilts, blankets, and afghans, and packaging and sending them to U.S. troops and Afghani citizens in Afghanistan.

- 14) **Prince of Peace, Menomonee Falls, WI** – Many congregations have Eagle Scouts doing projects that benefit the Church or community and involving many volunteers. One caring Scout in the Congregation has an Eagle Scout project of building a reflection/memorial center for families that have lost a loved one due to a drunk or impaired driver, and that in memory of a friend and teammate, killed by an impaired drive, while riding his bike. The memorial center with an estimated cost of \$8500 in donations will go in the local Fireman's Park.
- 15) **Martin Luther Chapel & Christian School, Pennsauken, NJ** – Collecting “cell phones for soldiers” as one of 3,000 collection sites, especially helping our military personnel around the world, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 16) **New Beginnings, West Branch area, MI** – In addition to their semi-monthly food and clothing give-aways to the needy in Ogemaw County, the members plant and tend flowers at the next door neighbor area high school.
- 17) **Mount Calvary, Lititz, PA** – Bhutanese refugee outreach in helping new immigrants find work, learning to drive, registering, find housing, etc., modeled after...
- 18) **Christ, Lansing, MI** – The Refugee Resettlement Center and activities for numerous African immigrant refugees by the members of Christ Lutheran Church, a well-known example in the English District-LCMS of human care and compassion and immigrant outreach.
- 19) **Praise, Fort Wayne, IN** – In addition to their Little Praisers Pre-school, Blood Drives, and Martial Arts Camp & Breaking Barriers Ministry, the Congregation now has a Lighthouse Café for community youth every Tuesday evening.
- 20) **St. John's, Hannibal, MO** – Prayer Pals Ministry is praying for a friend in need, especially those outside the Church, and then giving them one of the foot-long teddy bears in each pew in Church as a gift. A Christian witness message is attached to each bear. Over 400 bears have been given away in prayer and gentle-witness ministry of the members of St. John's.
- 21) **Grace, Elyria, OH** – A May 4th School Teacher Appreciation Day involved the distribution of thank notes and 1,000 cookies to public school teachers and delivered to 8 different schools in two area school districts, resulting in members offering to serve voluntarily wherever needed in these schools
- 22) **Christian Day Schools, Pre-schools, and Open Arms** – Schools can be give service to and in a community, proving the area with quality Christian education as a school of choice.
- 23) **Vacation Bible Schools** – Throughout the District, congregations sponsor and run a community Vacation Bible School. Follow-through as to witness for Christ and added services marks the difference as to whether the VBS has its widest impact.
- 24) **Blood Drives** – A very large number of our Congregations have annual, semi-annual, or occasional blood bank drives, with members and local citizens giving blood.
- 25) **Parish Nurses** – A huge ministry of parish nursing is again in many of our churches, a ministry that also extends beyond the walls of our church and school buildings.
- 26) **Chaplains** – A significant number of our English District pastors in the U.S. and Canada serve as local Police and Fire chaplains, nursing and retirement homes' chaplains, volunteer hospital chaplains, and with the two latter avenues of service, often involving lay members in these visits. (My late father as a retired pastor, until December, 1999 when he stopped at age 86, had me make tape recordings of hymns that he would play on his boom-box, and he would have church members make miniature Church Year seasonal banners that he would take to the 33 nursing homes that he visited monthly, holding a Service, showing slide shows, and visiting anyone in need in their rooms/apartments.)



These are but a few examples of service. Many more examples could be cited. This is just meant to help demonstrate the great variety and ways of community and international service by congregations, schools, ministries, and individuals in the English District-LCMS. As our

congregational members and school families demonstrate the love of God in Jesus Christ in our communities and neighbors, the Lord opens up more opportunities for touching the hearts and lives (connecting) of people with the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Los Angeles Circuit Visitor Pr Nick Wirtz changes a flat tire on Bishop Stechholz' rental car off of a highway near Highland Park Lutheran Church, LA

The English District-LCMS, including her Praesidium, Staff, and Board of Directors, in **receiving** God's grace through His holy Word and Sacraments and in **worshipping** the Lord God, **is committed** to helping our congregations in service and our mission, under Christ, in **Serving** in our communities and regions **Connecting** with unchurched and dechurched people **Growing**, by the Holy Spirit's work, in faith and numbers, and **Reproducing** by planting new churches.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

With the changes that have occurred in North America in the last few decades and what has intensified since 9-11 (September 11th, 2001, the date of the Terrorist Attack on America), the Church of our blessed Lord faces formidable challenges. While biblical doctrine and confessional subscription cannot change without changing what we as Evangelical Lutherans believe, teach, and confess, there are some things that can change to help the Church of today be more effective in her mission and ministry. Among these are the following:

- **Follow the example of Mary**, noted previously. Congregations, schools, and members of our congregations **drink in the living water** of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. While one could write volumes on this, children of the living Lord God eagerly, humbly, and gratefully continue in Christ's word (John 8:31-32). They receive God's holy Word and Sacraments for forgiveness of sins, healing for their souls, and joy, life, and peace with God so they can then respond to the Gospel in lives of stewardship and service in Christ's Church and in the world.
- **Congregations and individual members need to understand that a mere attractional approach will no longer work** (i.e., the Church building is there, they will come; or, have the right programs that will draw people in; come up with the right type of Pastor, music and worship ministries, etc.). Another variation of this is that if we are merely faithful to God's Word and have a strong but limited Word and Sacrament ministry, "they will come." The notion that we can attract people without the centrality of God's pure Word is false. While it is true the Holy Spirit works when and where He wills, the notion is also false that merely preaching the Word faithfully will draw people apart from building relationships of trust and genuine Christian care and concern. (Again, this is God's action through us as winsome Christian people proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus.) We see that our Lord Jesus took the time to first listen to, care for, and help people.
- **Pastors may need to "re-tool,"** that is, develop new skills (continued professional growth in faith and useful training, learning Spanish or another language, or re-learning something of their Seminary years) so as not to limit the proclamation of the saving Gospel and the training of the holy people of God in service to the Lord and others. They

may need help in training a Congregation “to serve” in the community and city in which the Church and/or school building/s are found.

- **Congregational members must learn that they are** not merely members of a local congregation but **disciples of the Lord Jesus** who happen to be members of a given congregation. They must learn to be disciples who devote themselves to Christ, His Word, His Church, and the parish (community) and not be a self-serving group, however nice the Christian camaraderie may be within that Church. They cannot behave as a clannish and exclusive society that has little heart for the city and community. Discipleship means first being a student of Christ and, for most churches, a huge change in attitude, and I say this in a very caring and non-judgmental way. The richness of being brothers in sisters in Christ gathered around God’s holy Word and Sacraments is deepened with godly service that flows from the relationship of faith in the Blessed Trinity and then looks externally toward those in need in the neighborhood, village, and city and with a heart to reach people for Christ.
- **The children and youth of our congregations and of a very diverse North American culture need to be heard.** We need to listen to one another, and especially those who will take up the mantle of leadership and service in the Kingdom of Grace.

No doubt there are other things that may need to happen. This is worthy of our discussion. In a changing world we still proclaim a changeless Christ. In a world where Christianity is now stronger in the southern and eastern hemispheres, perhaps our serving of God and others will take on a shape more similar to people who were once called the “have nots” and we will serve with less material resources but rich in Divine grace and people of willing hearts to serve. Through all ages of the Church, may all glory be to God alone.

The Rev. Dr. David P. Stechholz,
Bishop and President,
English District-LCMS