

# CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PUBLIC MINISTERS

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## Introduction

I wrote this paper as the completion of my study for the STM Degree from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The journey has taken a number of years. It has been spread out by commitments to the Mission Boards of the Texas Mission District of the Arizona/California District and the Mission Board of the South Central District as well as the Presidency of the South Central District. It has been complicated and compromised by my own lack of organization to regularly “seize the day” to keep continuing education as a priority in my schedule. There has been an ongoing struggle with the attitude that I have garnered the fruit of the classes and to leave it at that with the excuse that the degree is insignificant to the work.

I would be remiss if I did not give credit to a few close friends—who shall remain nameless—who encouraged me to join them in the pursuit of expanding knowledge and honing skills. The encouragement that they gave along the way kept me buoyed up to keep seeking ways to look beyond the status quo. To this expression of gratitude should be added the encouragement which the faculty members gave, who led the instruction both at summer quarters and at the pastoral institutes we have had over the years in the district.

One purpose in writing this treatise was, of course, to fulfill a requirement. However, I have always been in support of our called workers continuing their education through formal instruction. I am particularly encouraged that our seminary and also our college of ministry offer courses for this purpose. I applaud Martin Luther College for adding the program for the Master’s Degree. Some would argue that to “stay in the same pasture” for feeding the mind and the heart does not challenge the intellect and therefore does not broaden a person’s thinking as continued education should. They would say that a person needs to engage in drinking from the well of the Arminians, to stand at the trough of the Church Growth advocates, or to take a hiking tour on some of the trails of the Eastern Orthodox or the mega

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Vilas Glaeske serves as District President of the South Central District of WELS. This essay presents his personal reflections on the importance and some of the challenges of continuing education for all pastors.

churches of the Evangelicals. One may have to suck the information through a screen to avoid contamination, but it provides a broader vision of what is considered contemporary. Thus a person supposedly can remain in harmony with his surroundings.

My answer to those suggestions is that I have not come anywhere near exhausting the resources of learning from the men in our own fellowship to the point that I need to look elsewhere to keep growing. Perhaps those more intellectually gifted than I have reached those plateaus, but I suspect that for the majority of us there is sufficient fodder in the pastures of the WELS to keep us eating for the rest of our lives. I do not mean to imply that it is a sin to take a class at a secular or parochial university. It isn't. However, there are serious dangers in doing so.

The sainted Rev. E. Arnold Sitz's advice to all of us rookies coming into the Arizona/California District of which he was the president and therefore the one responsible for doctrine and practice in the district was that we should not read the free issues of *Christianity Today* which were given to us for a year after graduation from the seminary. Instead, his encouragement was to read Luther and the Confessions as a regular diet. His point was that a person shouldn't walk in a pond barefoot when he can't see the bottom. He never knows what he is going to step on!

It is encouraging that the Ad Hoc Commission Report which was published in the BORAM for the 2009 synod convention has a section on continuing education. The members of the commission felt very strongly that encouragement should be given to the workers in the field to pursue continuing education. An issue raised during the discussion was that of keeping pace with the people with whom we are associating every day. We have highly trained professionals in our congregations—people with post-graduate degrees and with seminar and workshop attendance tacked on. An example would be a pilot for any major airline. The pilot knows how to fly the plane and does so. But periodically he or she must take time in the simulator to hone skills and keep sharp on reacting to unexpected circumstances. The lives of their passengers and crew may depend upon their ability to react to unexpected circumstances to keep the plane from crashing. Our called workers need to do the same. Continuing education is a way for our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers to keep the skill-sets honed and polished for their calling.

### Part One

A rookie was sent to the Gulf Coast of Texas to serve a gathering of saints which had withdrawn membership from their Lutheran

Church—Missouri Synod congregation. They had met with President E. Arnold Sitz and Pastor Walter Diehl. The people asked to be served by the WELS. In addition, the AZ-CA Mission Board was interested in exploring both San Antonio and Houston for the purpose of establishing congregations in those two large metropolitan areas. This was the mid sixties. Neo-orthodoxy had established a beachhead in the LC-MS. Individuals were looking for an orthodox gathering of believers who held to the Lutheran Confessions.

Another element in the mix was that this rookie was working the old "Bible Belt" of the South. Southern Baptists, Church of Christ folks, Nazarenes, Assemblies of God, and independents of various shades were all around. Previous to my coming to Texas, these denominations were approached academically in our classes but now there were live adherents to these various persuasions walking the sidewalks of the city and living in the homes up and down the streets. And they were not at all afraid to speak up about what they believed. Nor were they timid to point out that they believed confessional Lutherans carried some "heavy baggage of erroneous teachings."

In the midst of the opportunities to have conversations with these people, it became crystal clear that the Lord had provided this assignee with a rock solid theological education. He could challenge the heresies on the basis of "the Lord says." Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary presents candidates for the holy ministry who are well grounded in the teaching of the Scriptures. They are equipped to rightly divide between the Law and the Gospel. They understand the need for specific Law and specific Gospel in their preaching. They graduate with the tools needed to study the Scriptures in the original languages and therefore do not have to take anyone's word for what the Word says. The foundation for ministry has been laid.

Yet at this point ask yourself if you would be inclined to continue going to a doctor who has not taken any further training since he left medical school. Applied medicine keeps changing with new technology and new discoveries in medications and in the diagnoses of illnesses. At one time good medicine called for letting blood to help rid a person of fever. Would you stand still for that today? When you visit your doctor's office, you will find all kinds of certificates and diplomas hanging on the walls. Is the fellow being braggart? Not at all! He is letting his patients know that he has been keeping pace with his profession. He has been building on the foundation laid during his years in medical school.

A doctor friend of this writer made the following observation about continuing education. He said that "continuing" means change, moving forward in professionalism to remain on the cutting edge of good

medicine. “Education” means personal reading and study of what is published in the medical journals. It means attending seminars which are held at various places in the country at which specialists share their knowledge and observations or researchers share the progress in treating certain illnesses. Continuing education is a must in the medical profession. For example, here are the continuing education requirements for nurses in the State of Texas.

Twenty (20) contact hours (two Continuing Education Units) of continuing education are required every two years coinciding with the nurse’s license renewal. A contact hour is defined as 60 minutes of a clock hour. A Continuing Education Unit (CEU) equals 10 contact hours. The CE hours must be earned within the two-year period immediately preceding the license renewal, beginning with the first day after the renewal month until the last day of the subsequent renewal. For example, if you are to renew your license in December 2010 (your birth month), the CE hours must be earned between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2010. Additional hours earned *may not* be carried over to the next renewal period.

To count toward licensure renewal, a program must have been approved by one of the credentialing agencies recognized by the Board. The credentialing agencies have met nationally-predetermined criteria to approve programs and providers of CE. The Board recognizes the following credentialing agencies:

[Numerous examples follow]

These organizations, in turn, approve other continuing education providers. For example, most of the state nursing associations such as the Texas Nurses Association and many of the nursing specialty organizations are accredited through the American Nurses Credentialing Center. Thus, these programs would be accepted.<sup>1</sup>

This short note is on the website for AIA Architects.

#### *AIA Continuing Education System*

Continuous learning is required to stay competitive in the profession and to serve your clients most effectively. The AIA Continuing Education System helps you stay up to date.<sup>2</sup>

Many more such references could be inserted to illustrate that the professionals around us are required to continue their education in their field of work. I don’t think that anyone is gunning to set down requirements for our church workers to meet in order to remain in the active ministry. Besides, attempting to motivate people by the law doesn’t work. The law will only cause a person to resist. The person persuaded against his will is of the same opinion still. When the pro-

<sup>1</sup>Texas Board of Nursing’s web site located at [www.bon.state.tx.us](http://www.bon.state.tx.us).

<sup>2</sup>AIA General Website—[aia.org/education/index](http://aia.org/education/index)

professional is motivated by the desire to improve himself, he will gladly seek further instruction. We who understand that we are called by our Lord Christ and serve him in our ministry will be serious about serving God's people in the best way we know how. We will want to keep growing in our ability to dispense the Word of God in ways that reach their hearts and then their lives. We don't need requirements to move us in this direction. Christ's love for us and those we serve is the powerful means to quicken in us such a desire. After all, it is not credentials we are interested in maintaining, but immortal souls that we desire to touch with the Word of Life.

In answer to a question I proposed to attendees at Summer Quarter a pastor who had only attended one year had this to say:

There is hardly a better way to keep the mind sharp and the skills dusted off. WLS summer quarter gave me the opportunity to A) study what I wanted to or had an interest in studying and to B) really immerse myself in the course material without the daily distractions. I felt it made me a better pastor in the short term for sure and probably in the long term.<sup>3</sup>

We always tell our confirmation classes that their confirmation is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Confirmation means being equipped to move beyond boot camp. Those soldiers of the cross are ready at the point of confirmation to pursue advanced training for living their confession in the vocation to which God will call them. The study of God's Word is to continue for the rest of their lives.

This is also true for the person leaving Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary or Martin Luther College to engage in the public ministry as a called worker in the church. Would any one of us have said when he graduated that he knew everything there was to know about the ministry to which we were called? If there is such a person, he is, more than likely, simply repeating his first year of ministry over and over again. Perhaps, this is the "confirmation equals graduation syndrome" moved up a notch or two. A question we in the public ministry have to ask ourselves is this: "What example are we setting for the leadership in our congregations by such an attitude?" Could it be that our people are following our example and drawing the conclusion that they have exhausted the study of scriptural truth? They don't need to gather together for the study of God's Word. Mediocrity should never be acceptable when we are working in the name of Christ.

This does happen! I have had people tell me that after a few years of being a member in a certain congregation, they can anticipate the content and even the expressions used as they listen to the same ser-

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<sup>3</sup>Response from Pastor Aaron Glaeske.

mon a second or third time. Because that pastor was not digging into the Word of God in preparation for his sermon, he was not growing in his knowledge and application of the Word, and his members were not growing through his preaching either. The person's Bible classes were probably similar in quality. The question is, "Would you continue to come after you had drawn all the juice from the message in the first or second hearing, or would you be tempted to look elsewhere for further nourishment?" We had a family join our congregation driving fifty miles one way to attend. They had been members of a different Lutheran synod. The father said that he knew he had to do something when his teenage daughter no longer wanted to attend worship or Bible study. Her reason was that she could learn more by studying her Bible at home than by going to the church. The whole family was regular in both our Bible class and our worship services in spite of the distance.

One of the rewarding aspects of being a "bishop" supervising a vicar in his year of practical training in the congregation is watching that person grow in his sermon preparation, listening to him change from reciting a sermon to preaching it, observing him becoming more relaxed in presenting a lesson in Bible class, seeing him move from a written text for a shut-in visit to a free heart-to-heart message from God's Word to the person before him. The members of the congregation notice these changes as well and appreciate them. As the young man grows in his facility to handle the Word of God, a strong bond begins to build in the congregation's love and respect for him. When the year comes to an end, it is not uncommon for members to say they want to keep him rather than get a new vicar!

This kind of growth needs to continue after the student leaves the classroom and enters into his field of ministry. I suppose the gainsayer would ask, "What new doctrines would a person expect to develop by pursuing further education?" "The Bible does not have new books added from time to time." "The foundation for faith is sure and the standard for morality is fixed." It is true that the Bible defines the foundation and structure of Christian ministry. The body of divine revelation has not changed since St. John wrote his "amen" at the end of the Book of Revelation. However, such remarks from the gainsayer reveal that he does not understand the depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge found in the Word. Who of us has not said that the more he learns in his study of the Scriptures, the more he realizes what he still does not know.

Another point needs to be made here. The Bible does not change but we do. The world around us changes. There is always room for growth in understanding how the law and the gospel can be applied to the practical issues we face in our day, which our fathers did not face or rarely faced in their ministries.

Consider this. When we went through catechetical study, a certain amount of what we heard sailed right over our heads as far as being practical for us at the time. We did not have the experiences of life to see their value in 3D. Our pastor and our parents wanted us to know these truths before we needed them so that we would not be caught without ammunition when the battle with the devil confronted us. We were told on the day of our confirmation not to stop growing in the knowledge of the Word. Now we had the tools for our spiritual growth for the rest of our lives. We needed to keep these tools sharp.

The comparison can be made with our graduation from Martin Luther College or Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In our college and seminary years we were being given tools with which to carry out our ministries. We perhaps didn't understand how all these truths intermeshed, but when the time came we were not helpless to move forward and meet the challenge. Who of us has not been preparing for a Sunday school teachers' meeting, going over a story that we have taught several times before, only to find new insight and new interrelated texts of the Scriptures? The alternative is to think that we are holding a pat hand relative to the knowledge of the Scriptures. That would be like a 21-year-old going off to a secular college campus with a 14-year-old student's knowledge of the Bible. Without a doubt this is why 66% of members between the age of 18 and 22 drop out of Protestant churches. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is contributing to this percentage.

## Part Two

In light of the importance of continuing education a person might wonder why the summer quarter at our seminary or the summer classes at MLC are not attended by more people serving in the field. I suppose there are as many reasons for this as there are people you might ask. However, there are a few responses which keep reoccurring. The first is cost. The young pastor or teacher in the field is usually struggling financially. He or she finds it difficult to add travel, tuition, and board and room to the budget. The desire to enroll is present, but the financial means to act on the desire is missing from the equation.

It would be an incorrect assumption that every congregation wants its workers to pursue continuing education and puts a line item in the budget for this purpose. Individual members may be required by their employers to attend seminars and institutes to sharpen their skills for more efficient efforts at their position in the corporate structure. But those same people don't always transfer the concept to their called workers.

Perhaps a way to build toward an ongoing program of support for continuing education would be to begin by starting a fund for this purpose in the congregation. A line item in the budget could move money into the fund and individuals could also give directly to it. Perhaps it would take a year or two for the fund to grow in order to enable the pastor or teacher to attend a summer quarter, or even to attend a seminar more locally. But it would be a start.

A second reason given for lack of attendance at summer sessions or institutes or workshops is time. Dr. Kiessling at Northwestern College used to say that if you wanted something done, go to the busy person to do it. His point was, of course, that the busy person would be able to readjust his schedule to find time to get done whatever you were asking him to do. The person who complains about a lack of time to get everything done in a day or a week could be suffering from a lack of planning and scheduling. You know the old axiom—to fail to plan is to plan to fail. I will quickly add that a schedule for a given day can be crashed with one phone call at 7:30 A.M., but this is no excuse for not scheduling at all. It also happens that a person does not have the time in a given summer to attend classes. Family obligations may dictate a priority over summer study. Not to be overlooked, however, is Insight #4 in a paper written by Professor Forrest Bivens for the Central Conference of the Western Wisconsin District on “Fulfilling your Role as a Spouse and Parent.”<sup>4</sup> In this Insight #4 Professor Bivens has a footnote on page 171 in which he cites a study that compared Jonathan Edwards’ descendants to those of “Max Juke” (not his real name), a criminal. The study is a comparison between the descendants of the two men. After quoting from this study Professor Bivens concludes with these words, “Regardless of the precision of the statistics the contrast is striking.”<sup>5</sup> The importance of living our faith in our homes can never be minimized.

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<sup>4</sup>*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 105, Number 3, Summer 2008.

<sup>5</sup>The footnote reads: As I understand it, the study began when the NY Prison Commission employed a Mr. Richard Dugdale in 1874 to visit state prisons. Dugdale was surprised to find criminals in several prisons who were not only related to other prisoners, but (as shown by further investigation) were all descended from the same family unit, that of “Max Juke” (not his real name), born about 1720. The study was subsequently expanded to include about 1,200 of Juke’s descendants, as well as the sharply contrasting family of Jonathan Edwards, who was born in 1703. Nearly 1,400 descendants of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards were charted. The findings confirm what sociologists have called the “five-generation rule:” how parents raise their child influences not only the child but the four generations that follow. (The Juke family purportedly revealed 300 convicts, 27 murderers, 190 prostitutes, 509 alcoholics and drug addicts, etc., while the Edwards progeny had 430 ministers, 130 lawyers and judges, 99 colleges professors, 13 university presidents, 60 physicians, 11 congressmen and governors, etc. Regardless of the precision of the statistics the contrast is striking.)



A third reason offered quite often is family. The worker with a young family may feel the summer session would mean using the resources set aside for a family vacation. We all know that the balance and tension between family and ministry is an ongoing struggle. Good honest give and take discussions will have to be held along with the willingness to compromise from time to time in order to resolve this issue in a given year. It should be noted that continuing education is not a vacation. It should not be considered such by the individual or by the congregation. A great deal of work is packed into those weeks of study.

In response to questions regarding obstacles to attending the study opportunities offered at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the respondent wrote:

For me the obstacles have been many. Distance [TN, CA] has been a challenge. Even though mileage is covered, for those of us who have to leave Saturday to arrive by Sunday to be ready by Monday a.m., it means an extra week gone. Flying is a must and then 'wheels' once we arrive is another challenge. Cost and the Congregation: Once I finally had led the TN congregation to include it in the budget on non-district convention years, I took a call and their financial situation worsened. In CA I've been asking since I've been here but have not succeeded in adding it to the budget. I think WLS could do a better job of advertising the cost, say in October when some of us are putting budgets together. Big numbers with bold print, so I can't miss it and don't have to guess that I read the info correctly. Family has been the most recent challenge.<sup>6</sup>

A suggestion for overcoming some of these obstacles was given in these words.

For me the rest of the world has figured out how to offer online courses and while this isn't ideal for some people and for some courses, it could work for many of them. We HAVE TO get this done, if we hope to improve continuing education. [Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has to close the gap from where it is today to being prepared to offer courses online for those who can't get back to the campus.] Even my Spanish Institute offers online courses for \$100 for four two-hour lessons to help their former students. This is done on Saturdays in real time with real Spanish teachers from the Institute in Mexico! The other alternative is to allow our profs (call one extra to make it possible if necessary) to teach a 1.5+ credit course in 3-5 days in major locations (Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Phoenix, San Diego/Los Angeles, Baltimore/Washington, Denver, Seattle—you get the picture).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Aaron Glaeske's Response to the questionnaire sent to him—Bracketed remarks are mine. VRG

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Now take a look at what it means to attend summer classes. It means that the student will be freed up to spend quality time in study. Classes are held in the morning and there is a class offered after lunch. The rest of the day a person can be immersed in personal study and preparation for the next day's classes. The study is focused and designed to help the student get his mind around the subject matter. The classes are conducted by those who have spent time in the area of study in order to be in a position to lead the students through what the outline of the course has promised would be covered. In addition to this, a person is surrounded by likeminded friends and coworkers who can be a great encouragement to him. The free time taken to fellowship with other students not only gives relief from the tension of ministry, it also provides the opportunity for discussions on subjects of common interest.

An important aspect of these casual discussions during time of fellowship flows from sharing problems of ministry. It is reassuring to know that other men in ministry, who are our seniors by ten to fifteen years or more, have wrestled with the same problems and perhaps still are. Various approaches are shared with dealing with the problems under discussion and a person is enriched and reloaded to go back and face the lions.

Finally, look at the study resources available at our schools. None of us has at our disposal the volumes in the library or the essay files that are at the seminary. Periodicals and journals of all sorts are at a person's finger tips to use and help interpret questions and answers on a given topic. Add to this the willingness of the faculty on campus to answer questions and guide investigation into a point of interest. Where else can a person get this kind of quality instruction? By the way, a person does not have to commit to a three-week course. There are opportunities for a more intense one-week course each year, and two-week courses are being added. It is presented as an alternative for those who just cannot be away for three weeks.

Why is continuing education important? It is important because the vitality of a congregation revolves around the pastor. "Those pastors who excel at communicating God's Word spend much time in God's Word themselves. Unfortunately the demands of many church members pull pastors in so many directions that only the leftover time is given to Bible study and sermon preparation."<sup>8</sup> This emphasis is nothing new. It was happening already in the Apostolic Church. As the demands on the time of the apostles increased, the point was reached when the apostles were spending too much time in seeing to it that the widows were being properly cared for. The decision was made to enlist men from the con-

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<sup>8</sup>Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church?* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing House, p. 197.

gregation to do this work. The reason given in Acts 6 was to return more time to the apostles for prayer and the ministry of God's Word. The result was that efficiency returned to the care of the widows, and the whole church was happy with the solution (Acts 6:5).

It is obvious, then, that if a congregation has high expectations of its pastor in delivering good sermons each week and in being led into a deeper study of the Word of Truth, the congregation needs to develop an environment in which essential time is given to the pastor to pray and to study the Word himself. Of course, this means time each week, but included should be some form of continuing education. Encouragement can be given, along with the means to do so, to attend workshops, institutes, and summer quarter classes. These studies complement the week to week searching of the Scriptures for refreshing Bible classes and sermons. Might we be so bold as to assert that the greatest strides in growth occur when we devote large amounts of time regularly to the new work for a sermon or Bible study!

In the districts there is opportunity to attend Pastors Institutes. These are usually two to three days in length making them much easier to fit into a schedule. The choice of the subject matter is usually determined by those attending. This is done by being given a choice of subjects to be studied or when an agenda committee, eager to receive suggestions from the brothers, chooses a course of study. Professors from our schools of ministry are available for a wide assortment of such studies.

I might add the importance of attending circuit meetings, conferences, and district conferences and conventions. Three reasons should make attendance a high priority. One is that information that is shared is important to the pastoral leadership of a congregation. Reports are given on the progress of the ministry of the synod. Why is it that I can travel around and find that many people don't know what I am talking about when I refer to the Jubilee Celebration? Their pastor, perhaps, has not shared the opportunity of a joyous participation with brothers and sisters in praising God for the blessings we have received as a church body. It takes more than the insert in the service folder. It should involve an enthusiastic endorsement of the celebration in a heart to heart encouragement for the membership.

A second reason to attend the meetings of the brothers is that most of the conferences have study papers presented—papers that have been suggested by their own pastoral brothers. I just returned from a conference that studied various aspects of the scriptural teachings relative to the Lord's Supper. I took a course at Summer Quarter at the seminary on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper led by Dr. Becker. It was excellent. However, I added to my treasure chest of knowledge

on this subject from the papers presented at our conference. Here I would like to put in a pitch for having brothers from the district do the papers. Doing this enriches the person preparing the paper as a result of his personal study and it adds local flavor to the presentation and addresses local situations more precisely.

A third reason is the mutual support and encouragement given and received from the brotherhood. This is not an insignificant element. Our district provides travel assistance to those living at greater distances as well as for the retired men. Every individual's contributions to the discussions are beneficial to the whole assembly as well as the person's presence for mutual encouragement. We had a semi-retired professor work in a congregation in our district for several years. Several times he told me how exhilarating his attendance at our conferences had been for him. He had been fed by the Spirit of God through the Means of Grace. He had enjoyed the fellowship of his brothers in ministry and had had the opportunity to dialog with individuals on various subjects. He had been enriched. The experience refueled his enthusiasm for ministry and gave him a joyful heart.

I believe that we all want to be good soldiers of the cross. In pursuing this desire we will seek to grow deeper in our knowledge of God's Word. We will want to continue in what we have learned and have become convinced of, because we know those from whom we have learned it (2 Ti 3:14). This is not optional. This is a necessity. The Book of Wisdom instructs us to lay hold of God's words. We are to hold on to the doctrine unswervingly. This means that we need to study and be refreshed regularly in the Truth. This is the work of the Holy Spirit as He uses the tool of the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments. We should pray each time we approach the Spirit through the Word: "Come, Holy Spirit and kindle in our hearts the fire of your love."

It is humbling to review one's performance in the area of continuing education. Many resolves have fallen by the wayside. Personal meditation has taken some serious head shots from time to time. Family devotions have foundered at times. Repentance returns a person to the cross in a plea for mercy for the sin of neglect of the one thing needful. The answer from our dear Savior is to show us the wounds by which we are healed. Our sins have been paid for and the encouragement to live in the promises of God rather than being chased by our fears is welcome relief for a troubled conscience.

Professor Forrest Bivens' paper quoted previously presents "Seven Practical Insights for Personal Spiritual Growth."<sup>9</sup> He points out the necessity for such growth in combating our own sinful nature, in keep-

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<sup>9</sup>*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*: Volume 105, Number 3, Summer 2008.

ing sharp to see the subtle intrusions of secularism into the teaching and administration of the church and for developing fresh ways to present the timeless Truth to the changing society in which we live. I recommend the paper to all.

Continuing education is a matter of good stewardship. We need to put our talents to work for our Master. He has provided us with a sound mind, a solid education, and he has called us to work for him until he comes. It is irritating to have a student in class who is gifted but who does not use the gifts God has given. That student may well lose those gifts through lack of use. A sort of atrophy can set in. It is not beyond God to take away what he has given if a person does not appreciate his grace in giving the abilities in the first place. The guiding principle should always be “my best for my King.” We can find the power to carry out this resolve by repenting of our misspent hours and our out of focus attitudes, and then rushing to the shadow of the cross, where the Holy Spirit will energize us to pick up the pace again with a renewed spirit and with a good measure of Christ’s forgiving love poured out on us.

The sad element in this is that God’s people also suffer. All of us need to step back and evaluate what we are doing in ministry. We need to ask why so many of our young people are leaving the church. The statistic I have read recently is that 80% of Protestant young people between the ages of 18 and 22 drop out of the churches in which they grew up. The reasons for this are multiple. However, the Rainer book *“High Expectations”*<sup>10</sup> reports that those people who are in a regular Bible study and attend worship regularly were five times more likely to be active in church than those who attended worship services alone. It is likely, according to this research, that our young people are not moving from confirmation class into a regular Bible study group. Jobs, school activities, social activities and other distractions move our young people away from their church.

A myth that seems to prevail is that young people are dropping out of the church because of worship style. “Students don’t drop out of church because an organ toots instead of a guitar screeching. They drop out because their church is not essential to them.”<sup>11</sup>

What we have to ask ourselves is whether we are serving up a nourishing diet of biblical study that keeps them coming back for more or whether we are missing their hearts and their spiritual taste buds week after week. Some people have come to the conclusion that

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<sup>10</sup>Rainer, *High Expectations*, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999, p. 29ff.

<sup>11</sup>Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III. *Essential Church?* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing House, 2008, p. 64.

style of worship is a major factor in the dropout rate. The research does not support this conclusion at all. It doesn't even show up on the radar screen for the top ten reasons for dropping out. The individual member needs to know that he or she is a vital member of the body of Christ and does not want to miss the regular opportunity to serve. This is accomplished by leading the members into a deeper growth in the Word.

Now we are back to the importance of continuing education. The closing remark of the respondent is a fitting conclusion. "I loved the one summer quarter experience I had. I'd love to go nearly every year or realistically every 2-3 years. I think that should be realistic, however, due to the nature of the challenges many of us face, online or satellite courses would go a long, long way to making that happen."<sup>12</sup> The last issue of "PREACH the Word"<sup>13</sup> has an excellent Q&A interview with Professor Gurgel of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The article is focused on continuing education. Gurgel's answers and insights are based on research he is doing "to provide a comprehensive program of continuing education for WELS pastors. This project aims to be a 'preacher's toolbox,' offering something for every pastor in our synod, from courses for credit to online resources." In a short time, then, we will be able to meet at the toolbox in our pursuit to expand our minds and to keep on the cutting edge of our calling.

To God be the glory!

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<sup>12</sup>Aaron Glaeske, General comment on continuing Education at Seminary's Summer Quarter.

<sup>13</sup>PREACH the Word: Volume 12, Number 5, May/June 2009.