

A Changing World,...An Unchanging Challenge: God's Plan for Rearing Children

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Introduction

The trend watchers and future predictors are busy as we move closer and closer to the turn of the century. They've published books, they've written articles, and they've granted interviews explaining the profound changes in attitudes, demographics, and lifestyles which are coming in the next century.

Some of the most hotly debated issues in our society over the past decade—including the abortion controversy, sex education in schools, and minors having access to birth control information and services—have focused on changes in American family life. The changes spill over to affect legislation, court decisions, the development of new products and services, and strategies that appeal to single parent and dual wage earner families. Changes in the American family have become so dramatic that there is speculation in the family literature about whether the institution of the family will survive.

Changes in our society have reshaped the family. Changes in the family have reshaped society. Changes have impacted the Church's dual ministry of outreach and nurture with an increased sense of uncertainty, insecurity, and frustration. The intent of this presentation, however, is not to add to the magnitude of existing research by taking a "what's wrong with" approach. The level of awareness concerning the welfare of the Christian families to whom we minister is acute enough to suggest that rather than continuing to place blame, it is time to begin looking for solutions.

The Christian Church has an abiding interest in families. It recognizes that important issues, trends and challenges are impacting the Christian family and consequently hindering the effectiveness of the teaching ministry of the Church. My thesis is straightforward:

"Though sin has adversely affected the family, God's plan for the family remains unchanged. The fundamental task of the Church remains unchanged in a changing world. The challenge is to mobilize all of God's people to meet the spiritual needs of children within the dimension of the family."

Christian Education—A Shared Ministry

The Church is a gathering of disciples and its fundamental task is discipling. The Church has a collective concern to disciple both parents and children. When the risen Lord commanded Peter, "Feed My Lambs," He was delivering the commission upon which Christian education, especially of the young, is founded. Scripture places a teaching responsibility upon the Church, a responsibility which includes children. (Deuteronomy 31:13; Joshua 8:34-35; 1 Samuel 1:23; 2 Kings 11:21; 12:2; Psalm 78:5-6; Proverbs 22:6; Matthew 28:19-20; John 21:15; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 13:28) The congregations of the WELS have always demonstrated a special sense of ministry to children through their agency approach to Christian education.

Historically, parents have been viewed as the primary providers of spiritual training for youth. Unquestionably, the primary responsibility for Christian nurture lies with parents. (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6-7; 11:19; 19; Isaiah 38:19; Proverbs 3: 1; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; 2 Timothy 3:14-15) Scripture is clear when it assigns to parents the first privilege and obligation for the spiritual training of their children. Parental responsibility cannot be relinquished; it can be shared. It is accurate to say, that at whatever age formal instruction begins, parents bear the primary responsibility for Christian nurture.

In our generation a reversal has taken place. Where the home formerly served as the primary agency for Christian nurture, and the Christian school was to reinforce that which was being taught in the home; today, for whatever reason, Christian education programs have become the training ground for Christian life, with parents

taking on the role of the reinforcing agent, supporting that which is taught in the classroom. Here, I feel is the most important issue facing Christian education today. The lead role of training children in God's way must be shifted back to parents. Christian education must find greater emphasis in the home.

God's Design for the Home

The last trace of the perfect family was removed when Adam and Eve were led from the Garden of Eden in disgrace; their disobedience shattered their family-like relationships with their heavenly Father and with one another. Sin made the perfect family an impossible dream this side of the grave. The degeneration promises to continue until our Savior's reappearing.

The diversity of family types and styles in secular contemporary America makes it difficult to offer a concise definition of family. The courts have defined family as "people living under one roof." For Christians, such a definition is hardly acceptable because it legitimizes arrangements which defy the Scriptural model. Recognizing that there are some valid exceptions, the WELS Task Force on Family Ministry has defined the family as "two or more people bonded together by marriage or parenthood."

Though the condition of the family may seem to be chronic, it is well for us to be reminded that the future of the family rests securely in the hands of its Creator. Ever mindful of His grace and power, we need to adjust our focus clearly on God's blueprint for the family. God's design for the home provides the context for planning effective Christian education programs for children.

The family is an integral part of God's order. The family is God's model for commitment, love, and intimacy.

1. Family is God's own institution. He established the home and the family when He ordained the holy estate of marriage (Gen. 1:27,28; Gen. 2: 18; Gen. 2:21-25).
2. Our Savior, Jesus, acknowledged that God created the sexes, man and woman, for marriage and for family. The manner in which Jesus quotes the words of Genesis 2:24 recognizes the permanent nature of this basic unit of society (Matthew 19:4-5).
3. A major responsibility for the welfare and happiness of the Christian family rests with husbands (and fathers). According to God's order of creation, the man is to be the head of the family. God created the man first and He created the woman out of the man for the man. As head of the woman, man can perform no greater duty, and render no higher service, than to love and care for his wife in the same way as Christ loved the Church by giving His own life for her happiness. God wants wives to submit to their husbands with the same, willing spirit as the Church submits to Christ. Woman is not inferior; neither is she identical. She is man's helper, a fitting compliment. The relationship of man and woman to God is identical because God's saving grace is not dependent upon an individual's sex. (Col. 3:19; Matt. 20:26-28; Col. 3:18; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; Eph. 5:22-25; 1 Peter 3: 1; Eph. 5:25-28; Gal. 3:26-29)
4. A wife's "place" is beside her husband, for she is his partner in marriage. There is a great deal of wisdom connected with her role which suggests that she would do well to be at home. There is nothing in Scripture which says a woman's "place" is necessarily restricted to the home. Economic necessity in our country very often requires that a family have two incomes. In this connection, many women have careers outside of the home. As the mother in the home and bearer of children, women enjoy a high and noble station. (Prov. 31:10-31; 1 Sam. 1; Heb. 11; 1 Tim. 1:5; Prov. 31:10-31; Prov. 31:28)
5. God's order for husbands and wives becomes even more important when God blesses the marriage with children. God created the first male and female so that children would become a blessed part of this relationship. Children remain God's greatest blessing upon marriage. (Gen. 1:28; Psalm 127:3-5; Gen. 17:16; Gen. 28:3; Gen. 33:5; Psalm 113:9; Prov. 17:6; Job 1:21)
6. Child-bearing brings great responsibility. Both parents are to assume responsibility for spiritual matters. However, husbands (fathers) have been given a headship role to fulfill in this matter. (Eph. 6:4; Deut. 6:6-7; Deut. 4:9; Deut. 6:1-3; Deut. 31:12-13; Prov. 22:6; Col. 3:21; Heb. 12:7; Is. 38:19; Joshua 8:35; Joel 1:3; Mark 10:14)

7. In the Scriptures, God gives guidance showing parents how children can live together in families according to His will. The Word of God states rather firmly, and positively, that honor and obedience to parents, are expected of children. (Eph. 6:1-3; Ex. 20:12; Matt. 15:4; Deut. 27:16; Prov. 30:17; Prov. 10: 1; Prov. 23:24-25; Col. 3:20; Lev. 19:3, 32; Luke 2:51-52)

God's established order for the individual family members, the relationship of spouses, of parents, and of children does not change. It is always the same because God's purpose, like God's order does not change.

1. Families need to realize they are sinners (first use of the Law) and that Christ has taken away their sins; that through faith they might inherit eternal life (the Gospel). A life-long study of the Word of God equips family members with the means to grow and mature in faith. The Word of God also provides family members with a guide how to live as His redeemed children (third use of the Law). (1 John 5:17; Psalm 51:5; 1 John 3:4; 1 John 1:8; Matt. 1:21; Luke 24:47; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 John 1:9; Matt. 4:4; James 1:22; Rom. 12: 1; 1 John 5: 18)

2. God's purpose for the family is to provide children role models who will communicate examples, images, and ideals which will in turn enable him or her to establish a strong marriage, and home and family life in the years to come. All Christian virtues need to be taught to children in the intimacy of the home and family. Children are to be taught both formally and informally. (Prov. 22:6; Deut. 6:6-9; 2 Tim. 3:15; Galatians 5:22; Col. 3:12-14; Eph. 4:32; 1 Peter 4:7-10; 2 Peter 1:5-7)

3. The home setting is to be a workshop of the Holy Spirit. Parents are priests in God's spiritual kingdom who are called to minister with His holy Word. The Christian home is to be a church where worshipping the Savior is the best part of each day. (1 Cor. 6:19; 1 Pet. 2:9; Matt. 28:19; Prov. 13:24; John 3:17; Eph. 2:10; John 21:15; Col. 3:16; Luke 11:28)

4. Scripture wants families to live in harmony and to be filled with Christ-like love for one another. God the Father is the supreme example and source of true love. (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9; 1 John 4:7; 1 Cor. 13:4-8; Eph. 5:1-2; 1 Peter 3:8)

5. Communication is fundamental to all human relationships. The Christian home provides a primary setting in which Christian communication skills are acquired and applied. Effective communication is the means by which a husband-wife relationship and a child-parent relationship is established, grows, and is maintained. Apart from open channels of truthful communication, there can be no truly Christ-centered home. (Eph. 4:25-27; Eph. 4:29; Zech. 8:16; James 1:19-20; Galatians 6: 1; 2 Cor. 6:11-13; Prov. 15:1; Prov. 15:28; Prov. 17:27; Ecclesiastes 3:7)

6. The home is the means whereby God provides for the physical well-being of God's people. It is an important function of the home which should not receive undue stress. Scripture does not equate happiness with material possessions. According to the Fourth Petition, parents are to trust the Lord to provide for daily bread. (2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:8; Prov. 30:8-9; 1 Tim. 6:6-8; Psalm 145:15-16; Psalm 37:25; Matt. 6:32)

Outcomes for the Healthy Christian Family

The agenda for the Christian home has been determined by God's Word. The Church's Law-Gospel ministry to families could be structured around the following outcomes for a healthy Christian family life.

A. Being Nurtured by the Word

Centered: Christ and His Word are at the center of family life.

Worshiping: The family is regularly engaged in meaningful worship of the one true God.

Growing: The family members encourage one another to grow spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, physically and socially.

B. Nurturing through Christian Family Relationships

Intimate: A close Christian family is built upon unity with God.
Mutually Committed: Family members support one another in love.
Communicating: Communication is direct, loving, constructive and forgiving.
Distinguishing Roles: Family members interact according to divinely ordained roles.
Bonding: Family members prioritize time spent with and for one another.

C. Developing Christian Lifestyles

Establishing Values: Family values are shaped by Scriptural truths.
Adaptable: The Christian family prepares members to deal with and affect change.
Coping: In times of stress the family applies God's promises for strength and guidance.

D. Growing Sense of Mission

Possessing Christ-worth: The family and its members know who they are in Christ.
Having Purpose: The family members identify and use their gifts to serve in His kingdom according to God's appointed roles.
Reaching Out: The family shares its blessings outside the home.

Teaming Up for Effective Ministry

On the wall of a service station in a small town hangs an old, dust covered, yellowed paper plaque which shows two large work horses harnessed and hitched to a large boulder. They are pulling mightily, heads down, legs straining, . . . going nowhere. They are pulling in opposite directions. The caption reads: "Pulling together makes a job easier."

Assuming that the mission of the two horses was to move the rock, it is unlikely that the task would be accomplished unless something happens to change their individual goals or unify their efforts.

Even the Lord's disciples had a problem with goals and teamwork. They were frequently pulled in a direction opposing the Savior. Peter, the impulsive one, needed a crisis of gigantic proportions to make him realize which was the proper direction. James and John fought over who would be the greatest. Jesus reminded them both that neither was to be greater, but all were to be servants, working together, meeting the needs of others.

Do modern-day Lutheran disciples pull in the same direction, toward a common goal, or do they pull their boulders of work in opposite directions? From my perspective, within the WELS, a lack of unity and purpose seems to be on the increase. Distrust and/or disdain for administration, a perceived lack of in-touch-with-reality on the part of the church institutions, competition for the charitable dollar, finger pointing, the church growth fears, and turf protecting are interfering with the ministry of the Church. It seems to me, that before effective Christian family-centered education can be accomplished, everyone within the church must be pulling in the same direction. Paul outlines a common ministry goal in Philippians 1:9-11 "This is my prayer: that your love may abound more in the knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."

The team approach to ministry in both the narrow and broad sense would facilitate the work of God in our midst. In the narrow sense, if all called public servants would see themselves as part of a team, each needing the other, each supporting the other, called together for the leadership of the congregation, much would be gained. In the broad sense, if all our people saw themselves as ministers of Christ, called and gathered around the cross by the Spirit for the sake of serving each other and the lost world, much of what disturbs us would be diminished. Territorialism within the Church has no place among God's chosen leaders. What's true for our called workers is true for our parents. Partnership in service is a key need. Our servanthood must reign supreme over our tasks. Developing operational team models and mindsets is a key change needed to address family

ministry.

Prior to initiating and planning ways to motivate and equip parents in their primary role as Christian teachers, congregations need to examine and clearly state the mission of the Church. Establishing the mission of the Church (Matthew 28:18-20), the means to accomplish the mission (Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:22-25), the purpose for the means (John 20:31; 2 Timothy 3:15; Romans 6:3-4), the nature and purpose of ministry (2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 2 Corinthians 4-5; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 1 Corinthians 9:22; Ephesians 4:11-12), and the result of using the means (Colossians 1:3-4; 2 Peter 3:18; 2 Peter) will establish balance in approach to ministry and ensure a coordinated, unified approach for spiritual growth for children and adults. To isolate the one without a commitment from the other will in the end prove ineffective, is poor planning, and will ultimately become a source of greater frustration.

Restoring the Family—A Coordinated Approach

The obvious desired outcome is the involvement of parents. In many congregations it is hard to get parents to take an active part in the spiritual nurture of their children. Luther faced the same problem in his day. After the Saxon visitation, when he got the real picture of how bad things really were, what did he do? He wrote a catechism to give parents a tool with which they might begin teaching their children, and he laid it upon their conscience to use it. We can't give up on parents in our day either.

There are a number of things which we can do to begin to turn the situation around. The turnaround may take from ten to twenty years and may never be complete, but we need to work at it a number of ways. The following ways suggest themselves:

1. Evaluate all that you do in the light of your mission statement.

Evaluating the church calendar is a critical task which needs to be accomplished. Do the activities of your congregation and its agencies reflect a commitment to the significance of families? Is your congregational schedule filled with meaningful activity? Or does it keep everyone busy with too many activities? Do the Christian education agencies practice what you believe concerning the important role which parents have in providing spiritual training? Or, are we by default allowing parents to have little or nothing to do with the Christian education of their children?

National surveys reveal that parents are willing to help their children learn and improve, but they want information. Make moms and dads a focus as spiritual leaders of all media. Parents seek greater status, and a sense that child-rearing is valued and important work. Use every opportunity and setting when parents are present to assure and instruct them that they play important roles and have strengths to help their children grow spiritually.

All activity involving parents and children could very well be evaluated on the basis of two overriding policies: what is our mission? and, do we affirm in all that we plan, the role of parents as primary providers of spiritual training? Applying these questions to the diverse activities of our educational agencies, organizations, and programs could set into motion a plan for ministry which could prove beneficial to called workers, parents, children, and stewardship.

2. Train leaders to work with families as partners.

Part of a new and enhanced role for teachers is working with adults as well as children. Unfortunately, many Lutheran elementary and Sunday school teachers feel inadequate and offer the excuse that they have not been trained to work with parents. Many, for a variety of reasons, are reluctant to become involved. Today, as in Luther's day, unless they overcome this reluctance, the teaching church is at great risk because it is in danger of losing its primary mission of teaching the Word of salvation to children day by day.

I am not suggesting that the goal for those who teach is to become clinical psychologists or professional family clinicians. Rather, theirs is a ministry in the Word as outlined in 2 Timothy 4:2, where the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to "*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*" In essence, Paul describes actions which correspond to the two great doctrines of the Bible: law and gospel. Teachers committed to the concept of ministry to families will be fully involved in applications of both law and gospel. Those who teach children must become

more involved in the evangelical process of admonishing parents when admonition is clearly called for.

Adult spiritual growth is a significant key to meaningful ministry to families. If teachers are to carry out their mission, their concept of ministry will need to increasingly become a helping ministry to homes and be committed to spiritual growth.

3. Adult education must precede the desired changes on the elementary level.

Provide parenting classes or use the new *Training Christians for Ministry* course for adults (1992) to get more and more parents involved in the study of the Word. Use a variety of strategies and avenues to reach parents (i.e. small groups, family clusters). This will help to make them more aware of the need for the same Word for their children. It will also help to give them some of the Scriptural background they will need to take part in the nurture of children.

4. Plan and establish a Christian education curriculum which meets the family-centered goals for Christian nurture.

Curriculum is the “stuff” of which education is made. It involves virtually everything that is used to maintain learning growth. The term “family-centered” implies that the curriculum is made up of family-oriented subject matter to meet family-oriented goals. The concept of a coordinated family-centered curriculum, to be true to its name, must involve more than just children in the learning process. Luther certainly understood that when he prefaced his Small Catechism with the words: “The head of the family should teach them in all simplicity to his household.” Family-centered means getting parents more involved in the spiritual training of their children.

Involve parents at every level of the curriculum, with heavy involvement at the early levels. The new WELS Coordinated Religion Curriculum will include material for the parents to use with their child (e.g., teaching an additional Bible lesson at home each week, take-home assignments and discussion designed for parents and children), as well as clear, specific instructions on how parents can use these materials. Parents can be shown how to be comfortable with the simple truths of Scripture and know the joy of teaching their children to know who God is and how sure His promises are.

A personalized curriculum will have unique specific requirements which the parents know and agree their children must meet before they go on to the next level. This will help to get the parents more concerned about how their child is doing. If outcome based education is mandated in our public schools (as it is in Minnesota), our parents will be used to having such requirements for their children.

5. That every lesson aims at cognitive and affective outcomes.

Teachers would do well to plan their Bible lessons around learning activities which require doing as well as knowing (a balance of cognitive and affective objectives), and involve parents. Structuring parental involvement will help parents receive information, feel success, and become encouraged in their parenting role.

6. Parents need a strong spiritual partner.

After school day care and early childhood programs can provide an effective link between parents and the church in providing parenting and Christian education programming. Birth through primary grades is a time of special interest for parents regarding their children’s education. The use of the Cradle Roll, parenting classes, and early childhood programming are powerful opportunities for service.

7. Evaluate the church’s practice of confirmation in the light of the nurturing role of parents. This may also be an opportune time to take a critical look at what is often called the “confirmation syndrome”—the prevailing attitude is that confirmation is the end for any further nurture other than congregational worship.

Would it help families to become more fully involved in the study of the Word if we were to change our practice of confirming youth at the end of eighth grade? It might be more effective to prepare children to receive communion and then offer communion at the end of sixth or seventh grade. The decision for “readiness” could be made in consultation with parent, child, and pastor. Most Lutheran writers (e.g., Walther and Fritz of the Missouri Synod, J. Schaller and A. Pieper of the WELS) acknowledge that twelve-year-olds are able to be instructed for the proper reception of the Lord’s Supper. Since this sacrament is a God-ordained means of strengthening Christians in their faith, and since seventh and eighth graders in our contemporary society are

faced with powerful temptations, why withhold communion from them for one or two years?

The other aspect of breaking away from the past practice of confirming would keep the teen and their parents involved in the Christian education process on into the high school years. The years from seventh to eleventh grade are pivotal years in the life of each person. The seventh grade in our society has come to mark the end of late childhood, and the eleventh or twelfth mark the end of early adolescence. These are the years when the youth begins to develop his independence from others. These are the years when he begins to question his parents' authority as well as to doubt the authority of God's Word. His sexuality and his ability to reason become powerful influences in his life. Certainly this is a time when he needs to be under the influence of the Word as much if not more than any other time in his life. Would it not be a step forward if the church would reflect the importance of these years in the way it constructs its curriculum for the nurture of youth and the strengthening of families?

In the eleventh or twelfth grade, when the young person is looking more than ever toward his adult life, he and his parents might be more ready for a ceremony which emphasizes both the Lord's faithfulness to him and the importance of a person who is coming of age to take more of a responsibility for his spiritual life than ever before. Hopefully also through Bible class attendance during the high school years, the young person will have acquired this good habit which will then carry over into adult life.

8. Network parents together.

Parent-to-parent approaches in children's Christian education can take the burden off the church as the sole provider of support and help for families. Such an approach can pair effective Christian parents with others who need encouragement and "know how."

Inservice families on how to be effective in the home setting. Trained families can ask another family to pair up with them. They in turn can pair up with others to discuss the Christian home agenda together. An alternative approach might be the production of "homemade" video resources.

9. Establish a pyramid structure to promote and train parents for family devotions.

What is lacking among us today is not, thank God, the pure Gospel about Jesus Christ. The Word is being preached and taught and the Sacraments are being administered rightly. What too many of our people lack is the spirit and faith of Mary who sat at Jesus' feet. What too many are missing is a longing for the message of Christ and the means which proclaim it. What too many are without is a devotional life in the Gospel.

A rather simple approach to dealing with this problem and others is through a personal visitation ministry. Personal family visitation is an "old idea" whose time has once again come around. A spiritual pyramid schema is a ten-week personal visitation program. Each of the five phases takes two weeks. It starts with the pastor who talks to his own family and begins daily devotions with them. After two weeks the pastor and his family personally visit one of their families and talk to them about beginning devotions according to phase A. The next day the pastor begins his own family on phase B. Two weeks later he and his family revisit the leader family and introduce them to phase B and so forth.

After two weeks of phase A devotions, the leader family visits TWO other families to introduce them to phase A devotions. And so forth unto every family and individual in the congregation is conducting daily Bible reading with discussion, prayer and song. Figure it out. In 22 weeks 1,000 family and individual membership units could be introduced to daily Bible reading. In less than a year (32 weeks) all units would have at least 5 visits; or 10 weeks of reinforcement in their new spirituality.

10. Create new formats which will affirm parental roles and increase parent responsibility.

I am aware of several WELS congregations who have successfully used confirmation instruction, mid-week classes, and family Vacation Bible School settings to more directly involve and equip parents. This model provides parents with the opportunity to teach/discuss lessons after they have been taught the material. Initial results indicate that parents have responded positively and appreciate the opportunity to experience first-hand the joy of teaching their children.

11. Since education within our congregations is a partnership of the church and the home, our policies should reflect this commitment.

Schools should ask parents to support a reasonable percentage of the cost for educating their children.

Parents should be asked and have expected of them participation of time and energy in the maintaining and conducting of the school's affairs and in meeting the school's needs. Teachers' assistance, library helpers, painters, cleaners, correctors of tests, assisting in organizing science fairs, art programs and any other curricular matter should be eagerly and automatically sought from the gifts which God has given to parents. Parents should be asked to be active participants in the teaching process in their homes. To allow parents to place their children into our educational programs and have minimal obligations of partnership monetarily, timewise, or talentwise, as an expectation is divisive of the partnership. Congregations are to assist parents, not replace them. Our teachings and our practice need to be brought together.

12. Develop and *promote* the use of a family library or a family resource center.

Carefully screen and review all materials you want your families to use. Beware of using the materials produced by the evangelicals. It is rather frightening how readily we are willing to promote and disseminate reformed theology. Likewise, recognize and avoid humanism for what it is. The spiritual dangers are significant. Parents are eager and begging for resources and may not be as discerning as we give them credit.

Conclusion

Can we expect the Christian home to improve and become stronger in Christ? Absolutely, if we put our trust in the all-powerful God, pray, and faithfully employ God's Word as we intentionally plan for ministry to parents and children. The challenges are great; much needs to be accomplished.

Church leaders need to remain committed to the primordial value of the Christian home. The church can give parents the sort of training they must have if they are to be Christian home builders, fulfilling God's timeless expectations for them as spiritual providers. The challenge for the Church and its leaders is to focus its energies, resources, and "the people of God" upon Christian education within the family. In short, what the Church is, the home can become.

In these last days "teamwork," "shared," "togetherness" need to be the touchstones which mark our ministries. To be complete, we do need each other. To complete Christ's tasks, we need all of God's people working together, enhancing each other's abilities and skills, supporting each other in the tasks, endeavors, struggles, and victories. He needs to be the head of His Church, and we His servants. This means we evaluate, plan, and organize ourselves intentionally to minimize the adverse effects of sin.

As we look to the future, there is much unknown. We realize that we are not a people who are "Future Shocked"—unhappy with the present because of a longed-for past. We are people who are "Advent Shocked"—impatient with the present because of a longed-for future. We know the One who holds the future. "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'*" (Jeremiah 29: 11) We have been born anew to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are celebrating people. In the resurrection of Jesus, we are given a hope. In spite of paradigm changes, organization transformations, predication and forecast, the kingdom ours remaineth. Thank God!