

into their sermons. They sound as though they are trying by their efforts to make the Word authoritative rather than trusting in its power to touch the soul. Preachers most trusting in the power of God's Word simply and boldly allow their manner to conform to the content of what they say so that the meaning of Scripture is unambiguous and the work of the Spirit unhindered. The example of Christ and the instruction of the apostles should remind us that the truth of the Bible comes with various attitudes toward hearers depending on their situation and that this truth is undercut by a manner of proclamation milder or bolder than the text indicates is appropriate (1 Thess. 5:14). (Chapell 2005, 94-95)

John Stott speaks even more forthrightly.

There is something inherently horrid about human beings who claim and attempt to wield personal authority they do not possess. It is particularly inappropriate in the pulpit. When a preacher pontificates like a tinpot demagogue, or boasts of his power and glory as Nebuchadnezzar did on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon (Dan. 4:28, 29), he deserves the judgment which fell on that dictator....

... the authority with which we preach inheres neither in us as individuals, nor primarily in our office as clergy or preachers, nor even in the church whose members and accredited pastors we may be, but supremely in the Word of God which we expound. (Stott 1982, 58)

No matter how well a pastor learns to tell biblical narrative to a storied postmodern culture, and no matter with what humility he wields the powerful sword of the Spirit, this next challenge of preaching in a postmodern world will still loom large. The growing biblical illiteracy in the culture at large has not been without effect among those sitting in our pews—both church and unchurched. I was given a wake-up call to the seriousness of this issue in an interview conducted with a seminary's academic dean.³⁹ This well-respected, biblically conservative seminary had seen over the years a growing super-majority of its incoming students failing an entrance exam on basic biblical literacy. Finally, they determined to change that test from an entrance requirement to an exit exam! If

³⁹ This interview was conducted as part of my research for curriculum review at WLS.

biblical illiteracy is so impacting incoming students at a seminary, WELS pastors would be naïve to maintain that there is no impact on those who sit in our pews. Thankfully, WELS preachers in interviews and survey showed that they do not have their eyes closed to this challenge. In an interview, a parish pastor make this comment.

We have been particularly blessed in drawing people to our congregation who haven't had a spiritual basis whatsoever before this, but that leaves a huge gap. These are not graduates from our Lutheran elementary school system or our area Lutheran high schools or prep school system. It's nothing like that. The result of that is that personally I'm finding myself spending a lot more time explaining Bible stories and using Bible stories in my sermons. I can't just refer to Daniel in the lions' den; I have to tell the whole story. There is a dearth of biblical knowledge, and you can't assume anything. And that is too bad. Maybe with the people regularly coming to church you could assume more than if you were preaching on the street corner, but still there is a dearth of biblical knowledge. "Oh yeah, Abraham, he was in the ark."

Such biblical illiteracy raises at least two thorny issues for preaching. The diversity of those gathered has always been a challenge for preachers as they seek to reach young and old, male and female, rich and poor, proud and despairing. It has often been a challenge to know how to apply a particular text in ways that allow many different people to see how that sermon applies to their hearts and lives. But the growing gap between the more biblically literate and those who are effectively biblically illiterate raises that challenge to a whole new level. Now the concern doesn't rise up merely in how to apply the text but in how to expound, explain, and illustrate it. For instance, often the best way to explain and illustrate more abstract scriptural sections is with concrete Old and New Testament narratives. But, as the quotations indicated above, the brief and multiple biblical allusions that the author of Hebrews could use with his Jewish audience are often utterly lost on a significant percentage of our hearers. Similarly, how do you get to the depth of a doctrinal truth a text reveals when

many are still struggling to sound out doctrinal ABCs? As one pastor wondered, “How do you balance in your sermons to have milk and also to have the meat, and not to just have surface sermons on a regular basis—not to lose someone but then to bring an individual up to the next spiritual level in your preaching? I think that is going to be a struggle especially as you get more and more new individuals into our pews.”

What would seem to be an obvious answer to this dilemma bumps directly into another reality of the culture around us. To set the context of a text for those unfamiliar with it, to develop more in depth any use of biblical allusions, and to begin with doctrinal milk while also progressing to some solid meat, all require the same thing: more sermon time. But doesn't that run headlong into the commonly decried shortening of attention spans in a media-saturated sound-byte world? Isn't that one reason sermons in many churches have grown shorter? A seminary professor from another Lutheran synod indicated that he was convinced that the average sermon length in his church body had shrunk to about twelve to fifteen minutes. While in the WELS the survey indicates that sermons are, on average, longer than that (63 percent of pastors responding state that their average sermon is twenty minutes or longer), there were still 40 percent of pastors whose sermons already are regularly less than twenty minutes in length. While only 13 percent indicated that they were considering shortening their sermons, not a single pastor in the survey indicated he was planning to add time to his typical sermon. Several noted that they are convinced their hearers have indeed been affected by their immersion in a sound-byte, media-saturated, post-literate culture in which people are losing the ability to follow a lengthier and logically deep presentation.

So where do we go? It is certainly unwise to ignore the impact of shortened attention spans and what a post-literate culture has done to hearers' abilities to follow closely reasoned logic. Yet I am convinced that as those who love the exposition of the Word, and who know people are being deceived and are dying because of a lack of spiritual depth, we cannot give in to the pressure to chop large chunks from our sermons. If we move to the length of sermons mentioned by the seminary professor from another Lutheran church body, we run the great risk of facilitating the very biblical illiteracy we lament. As someone committed to the liturgical heritage of the Lutheran church, I am not arguing for dramatically increasing sermon length so that the average sermon goes beyond twenty-five minutes. But as this project is implemented, I do intend to encourage our pastors to recognize that biblical illiteracy demands that they think more deeply about how to meet the challenge of short attention spans. Instead of chopping chunks out of our sermons, I believe we are wiser to find ways to capture better the beauty and variety of Scripture. The goal is to hold our hearers as long as necessary to communicate the heart of the text. This calls for hard work and artistry in the design of our sermons. Most of all, this calls for praying to God for the feet of a deer that can walk nimbly on these challenging heights (Ps 18:33).

Allow me to add one more thought that can perhaps reduce the pressure pastors may feel to undo biblical illiteracy with a single sermon. All the burden of the educational ministry of the church was never intended to rest on the pulpit. In fact, to place all the burden on the pulpit would crush it under a weight it was never designed to bear. Biblical illiteracy is a challenge that requires a multifaceted attack for which the pulpit is only one thrust. Reinvigorating the sharing of the Word in the home among spouses and between parents and

children and developing a rich and varied educational ministry at church for sheep and lambs of every age are the chief educational thrusts of the church. What is more, the pastor must also remember that while the impact on biblical illiteracy of a single sermon may be imperceptible, the cumulative impact of many years of well-prepared expositional sermons will be huge. Remembering that can keep the pastor from overburdening his conscience—and his hearers' ears—with each sermon. To exhaust a text in a single sermon is the often-futile quest of the homiletically naïve that may leave only him and his hearers truly exhausted. A pastor has grown in pulpit maturity when he understands that what matters most is not what he can accomplish in twenty minutes, but in twenty years.

And that truism cannot be undone by the use of technology in the delivery of a sermon, as helpful a tool as that may be for any given sermon. The dawn of the digital age, and its impact on the delivery of sermons, is the fourth and last challenge on which this issue will focus. The survey showed that 40 percent of WELS pastors have used or are using computer technology to some extent in the delivery of sermons. While most of those who reported using technology in sermon delivery do so once a month or less, 13 percent of pastors reported using some form of technology for almost every sermon. Clearly this deserves some careful analysis of the wisdom of this practice. To merely use technology because it is available, or because it gives us the appearance of being “cutting edge,” is dubious at best. The real question to be asked is this: does the use of technology in the delivery of the sermon aid or hinder the proclamation of the gospel in the unique forum of pulpit proclamation?

Without a doubt, there will be times when a well-placed movie clip or a carefully chosen projected image could accomplish what a thousand words could never do

quite so well.⁴⁰ We are the followers of a God who asked a prophet to construct a miniature of Jerusalem under siege (Ezek 4) and who, when as the great Prophet he preached in the flesh, found truths to be proclaimed in flowers blanketing a nearby Galilean hill (Matt 6).

But there are at least two powerful cautions to raise before assuming that it must be wise for a sermon to begin with “Grace and peace to you” as well as with the Microsoft logo. The preacher is getting himself and his hearers into serious trouble if technology becomes a careless shortcut to enable hearers to navigate the logical path of a sermon as words upon words are projected to share the sermon’s outline. If this becomes a crutch that substitutes for actually taking pains to make a sermon’s line of thought clear and persuasive, then no amount of words projected on a screen can prevent the homiletical train wreck as one by one loosely and carelessly joined cars of thought become uncoupled from one another. Is seeing a disjointed and unfocused message necessarily more helpful than hearing one?

The second caution speaks to an even larger question. Even if the sermon has been carefully crafted and organized, are we by projecting logical sermon details (or even multiple pictures as illustration) raising the cognitive element of preaching far beyond a proper balance? Is the heavy logos of my message in danger of smothering both ethos and pathos? Especially when projecting more and more words is accompanied by urging detailed

⁴⁰ One professor shared a story of a sermon he “viewed” in which a gripping movie clip was used that had very little to do with the rest of the sermon—and nothing to do with the heart of the text. The preacher seemed to have used the clip merely for its attention gathering impact, after which he quickly moved on. Of course, the preacher may have been alone in that move. For many people in the pew, that movie clip easily enjoyed a longer afterlife. For all the edification he may have prevented from taking place that morning, he might as well have served popcorn and shown that whole movie, rather than using it as a distracting leader for a double-feature! To use a musical analogy, the cover band upstaged what should have been the featured act.

note-taking by the hearer, we can easily be blurring almost beyond recognition the difference between the classroom and the sanctuary.⁴¹ What I do in a classroom when teaching biblical theology and what I do from a pulpit when heralding biblical truth are certainly related to each other, but they are not identical in form or purpose. How easy it is to forget that the last point of law we just projected from our outline was not primarily intended to move people to push their pencil across the page for later filing with other notes. It was first and foremost meant to cut hearers to the heart in that moment of preaching! That wonderful gospel point projected on the slide (and illustrated with three others) was not meant primarily to give my hearers more cognitive data for storage, it was meant to breathe into them the comforting power of the Spirit in that moment. We simply must ponder the impact of what we are doing if we end up making it harder and harder for there to be eyeball-to-eyeball contact between preacher and pew in the midst of the sermon. Bryan Chapell makes this same point by comparing today's computer visuals to yesterday's overhead projectors.

In the 1970s, the overhead projector movement made its entry into the North American preaching world. Thousands of preachers gave projectors honored positions beside their pulpits with the expectation that this new technology would revolutionize the clarity and power of sermons. Within ten years the movement died because of studies regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the technology. Research indicated that such technologies are wonderful means of communicating information but are not effective in promoting persuasion.

The most powerful means of addressing the mind *and* the heart remains the *ethos* of the speaker. To the extent that technology takes focus away from the voice, character, and person of the preacher, the persuasiveness of the message is reduced. Thus, researchers advised preachers to use projectors to present information but, when it was time for exhortation, to turn them off so

⁴¹This statement in no way implies that I would urge those who best process information by note-taking to cease and desist when I preach. I am speaking against making this a general practice that I urge for the majority of hearers.

that nothing distracted from the person of the preacher. Preachers soon discovered, however, that trying to determine what part of a sermon was not hortatory was usually fruitless, and overheads and transparencies disappeared from stages. This does not mean that overhead projectors, PowerPoint, and visual aids have no purpose for instruction. It does mean that their use must be evaluated according to their strengths and weaknesses. (Chapell 2005, 171)

Earlier, Chapell made a related point.

More profitable [than hammering away at the details of outlines] is the recognition that we are not preaching so that people can pass a test given later on the material in a sermon but so that they can understand and respond to the Word of God *during* the sermon. ... A preacher finds ways to harmonize the wording and thoughts of a sermon so that listeners can navigate the progression, development, and flow of the sermon rather than get stuck at its various road signs. Preachers want to provide enough structure to avoid confusion and enough craft to avoid bringing attention to the structure. The goal is to sweep listeners up into the glory and the power of the Spirit's revelation rather than have them worry about whether they have gotten all the points. (Chapell 2005, 139)

One pastor echoed all these concerns mentioned, and offered what he believes is a better response than relying too heavily on projected visuals.

I'm personally not a big fan of props and PowerPoint ... to me that's Bible class and you are losing the art.... You lose the art of what preaching really can be, persuasive speech.... You create imagery and word pictures and take people along on the journey, and get them into this portion of Scripture so they are just there with the Israelites, or just walking along with Jesus, and it is really alive with them ... they are sweating away with [Paul] in his study and they are getting dusty feet with the [disciples]. That people sense these images and pictures that are so vivid for them; it's very real. I think that is something that in today's world we need to be able to do better.

As we bring this seventh issue to a close, there are two related sub-issues of preaching in a postmodern world that I failed to focus on in my research. The research indicates that not a few WELS pastors are wrestling with the question of sermonic formality and informality as it relates to whether or not they preach from behind a pulpit and whether or not they wear

(liturgical) vestments.⁴² They would consider this an important question of authenticity and transparency.

There certainly should be much careful help given here to make wise decisions, and I would very much condemn any harsh or snide judgment about anyone who makes a decision based on a careful consideration of the cultural setting in which he serves. However, a brief caution would seem appropriate lest we end up majoring in minors. I can be just as pompous and inauthentic prancing around the front of a chancel in a sweater vest as I can be in alb and stole behind a pulpit. The danger here is that we forget that what happens in my heart in my study is even more important than what I put on my body in the sacristy. While some in our midst have been heard to question what appearing in a “dress” (alb) communicates to postmoderns (a legitimate question to ask!), they should pause before snickering to consider that more formal garb for important events is not uncommon even in our more dressed-down and relaxed culture. Few would accuse a bride and groom who are normally found in jeans of being inauthentic if for their wedding day they don tux and wedding dress. Is it really that odd that the one serving as the personal attendant for the bride of Christ dresses in a way that signals he is also serving the Bridegroom?

⁴² For almost a century, almost all WELS pastors wore a black Geneva gown when preaching and/or presiding at worship. In the past twenty years, that has shifted dramatically. Although I have no data on this, a clear majority of WELS pastors appear to have moved to more historic Lutheran liturgical vestments, most typically a white alb and a stole to match the color of the season of the church year. Among the younger pastors, this trend is even more noticeable. This trend has coincided with a considerably greater emphasis at WLS on the beauty and richness (and flexibility!) of the liturgical heritage of the Lutheran church.

The careful reader will notice that few resources have been mentioned here to help WELS pastors meet these challenges. Much more work needs to be done to discover and develop resources that can help WELS pastors address the communication challenges of speaking to a postmodern world.

Key Issue 8: Preaching Relevant Sanctification that Flows
from the Gospel and Is Empowered by the Gospel

I am not aware of any Lutheran homiletician who has ever proclaimed that the strength of the Lutheran pulpit is its insightful sanctification preaching. As this project repeatedly stresses without apology, Lutheran preaching's main focus is on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the status of "not guilty" that he alone has freely procured for us. We can spend a lifetime and never get to the bottom of how "wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph 3:18).

Historically, Lutherans have feared nothing more than confusing the beauty of justification by allowing preaching or teaching about sanctification to sound like an ominous "if" hanging over our status before God as his children and heirs. The specter of Roman Catholic theology with its Christ-plus approach that mingles justification and sanctification (and destroys them both!) haunts Lutherans. One pastor in the survey articulated that greatest concern of thousands of Lutheran preachers. When asked what would be his greatest prayer for his own preaching or preaching in general in the WELS he wrote, "Preaching sanctification without compromising justification." The history of the Christian church makes it abundantly clear that such a concern is well founded!

Unfortunately, such legitimate concerns can easily become fears that paralyze us. Fearing compromising justification, we can easily downplay or omit in our preaching

legitimate ways that Scripture urges us to “live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received” (Eph 4:1). A synodical leader of another Lutheran denomination put his concerns this way: “I think we’ve historically done and continue to do a good job on the justification side, we’ve got that pretty well nailed, but I think people are searching more and more, ‘Tell me what this means for me as a child of God as I live?’ “A WLS professor echoed him.

We preach law and gospel, we get people all gassed up, but we give them no directions in where to go. And what that does sometimes is [that] it leaves you perhaps a little bit flat, you don’t really see how this gospel can help you to be more than conquerors in this particular aspect of your life that you are struggling with or that has been mentioned in the text as being an issue, the malady of the text.

Of course the sad irony of failing to give direction for sanctified living in our preaching—or giving it timidly as an embarrassing add-on—is that we undermine the very justification preaching we have so wonderfully highlighted! If I give little or no specific direction for life, my hearers may falsely conclude that there is nowhere they need to go. By default we enter into an unwitting alliance with the sinful nature in us all that seeks to convince us that freedom from sin and guilt means freedom to live as we please. We thereby turn our glorious and life-giving gospel freedom into a hideous and death-dealing license to “indulge the sinful nature” (Gal 5:13). Even a spiritual nature abhors a vacuum, and if the Spirit’s agenda for our lives isn’t presented clearly and regularly, the sinful nature, the sinful world, and our prowling archenemy will be more than happy to supply a full agenda of that which will eventually kill our faith (Rom 8:13).

How important for Lutheran preachers to pay careful attention to the Apostle Paul in all his letters, but especially in Galatians. There is no letter more focused on dealing a knockout blow to work-righteous arrogance than Galatians. But having spent four and a

half chapters cutting off in every direction any confidence in works for our salvation, from Galatians 5:13 on he becomes focused on what it means to “live by the Spirit” with no shortage of descriptions and specific details for what that will look like in our lives. Paul certainly had not forgotten nor had he compromised the main thrust of his book when he shifted his focus to the glory of what a sanctified life looks like. Neither need we compromise the glory of justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide* when we help God’s people glimpse the glory of what it looks like when gospel-empowered redeemed children of God show themselves “eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14). No, we don’t force or drive people to sanctified living like driving cattle to market. But we do lead and point the direction that willing hearts will run!

And once Lutherans refuse to retreat from the sanctification preaching field, we find that we have much to share even with the larger visible church in how to preach the beauty of sanctification. Far from having to take a back seat as sanctification amateurs, our theology gives us more to share than we knew! Two aspects of biblical doctrine, near and dear to Lutheran theology but often not heard with similar emphasis anywhere else, offer to our hearers and to the church at large a distinctive approach to sanctification.

The first, not surprisingly, takes us back to the supporting field of justification. It has long been a hallmark of Lutheran theology (but one too often absent from our own pulpits!) to proclaim not only the passive obedience of Christ but also his active obedience. We believe Scripture clearly proclaims that the life of Jesus is substitutionary as well as his death. He is our Savior from his first infant breath until he breathed his last in death—as well as when he triumphantly breathes again in the tomb! Jesus’ thirty-three years of life leading up to Calvary were not just a grand overture to mark time until the real symphony sounded

on Good Friday. To stand before God, we needed not only a cleansing from the sin that would render us nothing but fuel before a God who is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29), we needed a record of human holiness in thought, word, and action that would enable us to stand unashamed as those who had actually kept the law of God. It is certainly true that without such holiness no one will see God (Heb 12:14)! The law not only curses sin; it demands perfection. But such righteousness (not only forgiveness, but that perfect record) is precisely God's gift to us in Jesus (Phil 3:9-10). Already in the water of baptism, we are not only washed from sin (Acts 2:38) but we are also clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27). The whole work of Christ can be called obedience (Rom 5:19), and that includes so much more even than the pinnacle of that obedience when he remained the perfectly obedient Son from the depths of hell on the cross. That includes obedience to every commandment of both tables of the law, from his delighting in God's Word in the temple as a twelve-year-old to his being obedient to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:41-52). When we see him in the wilderness destroying Satan's temptations as our brother with the weapon of the Word, we are not being presented *primarily* with a good example to follow. We are being shown a champion fighting as our true brother on a battlefield stained by our blood as he renders in our place to the Father the kind of obedience he had not seen since he fashioned Adam and Eve. For a world of sinners like us who have shouted "No!" countless times to our heavenly Father's face, here is the one whose answer was always a perfectly willing "Yes!" "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps 40:7-8). Is it any wonder that the bookends of his public ministry (baptism and transfiguration) are marked by the resounding thunderous approval of his Father, "This is my Son, whom I love"? In all of this, he not only

took our sin, but he has given us his righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). There is not a single demand that the law makes of me that has not already been fulfilled for me by him who came to willingly place himself “under the law” (Gal 4:4).

Where that full picture of justification is proclaimed, the impact on sanctification is immense! Sanctification ceases to be a fulfillment of the law that I must render to God under penalty of being found to have failed to measure up. That would be a slave’s fearful obedience. But we are able to offer a loved child’s obedience (Rom 8:15)! There is absolutely nothing that my Creator and Father rightly demands of me that hasn’t already been done perfectly by my Lord Jesus. I have nothing I must prove to my Father. I am simply living out what he has already declared me to be in his Son. In Jesus I am already a son or daughter whom he sees as spotless and radiant, with whom he is already well pleased (Eph 5:27)!

In all of this, the motivation for sanctification shifts from law to gospel! Sanctification is freed to be what it would have been in the garden: the freely offered fruit of hearts that delight back in the God they know *already* loves them beyond comprehension (1 John 4:19). Those who don’t see how this gospel joy of true freedom can be enough to empower sanctification sell the empowering grace of God far too short! While our sinful nature is a ball and chain that we still drag around with us that needs to be killed and drowned by the law every day, it is alone the power of the gospel that can produce genuine fruits of faith as the child of God learns that he is not carrying out some divine bargain with God. He or she is living in response to love untold that has already cancelled all debts and fulfilled all obligations! What we already have been given in the lavish love of God empowers us to purified living (1 John 3:1-3).

It is one of the most memorable events of my six years of doctoral studies when Bryan Chapell answered a question asked privately while attending a class based on his book, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Chapell 2005). When I noticed in his teaching that he was professing belief in the substitutionary nature of Christ's life, I asked him why I found that so rarely in other Evangelical authors. His blunt appraisal in answer to my question still amazes me. He answered that he believed that many are afraid to tell people the law has been fulfilled since it would remove the motivation for living a sanctified life. The echo of Rome's reason for rejecting the teaching of the reformers is unmistakable. The burden this lays on sanctification is palpable. The free obedience of an already fully loved child is in danger of being compromised. The club of the law to motivate behavior is in danger of overshadowing the empowering gospel that alone produces real fruit!

It is a contribution Lutheran theology can make to trumpet from our pulpits and from our writings the beauty of the active obedience of Christ. Along with the beauty of Christ's removal of all our sins, there is the power to woo and win and strengthen us to run in the path of his commands, now that his gospel has set our hearts free (Ps 119:32)! Little do many Lutherans realize what a wondrous and freeing truth they hold if they but remember to proclaim the glory of the life of Christ along with the beauty of the death of Christ! Such announcing that every demand of the law has been fulfilled does not reduce genuine fruit—it produces it! Such is the power of grace that can accomplish what a hundred thousand laws can never produce—a son or daughter's delightful obedience that is a mirror of Jesus' own!

But there is one more arrow in the Lutheran theologian's quiver practically jumping out and volunteering for duty when he is preaching sanctification. It is the teaching

that many who study Luther believe he emphasized almost as much as justification. It is the glory of the teaching of Christian vocation. It is the glory of knowing that although God does not need my sanctified living, he so honors us that he calls us to be his representatives in carrying out his divine service to our neighbors. As we delight to honor and serve God, he points us to focus our efforts toward being his own masks to our brothers and sisters. What he has restored to us is one of the chief purposes for why God created human beings in his image.⁴³ Not only do we in Jesus once again enjoy companionship with God as Adam and Eve once possessed in the garden (the ultimate purpose for the image), we also once again get to live out being his visible representatives on earth (Gen 1:27-28). For those who have been made “a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (Rev 1:6), every calling of life opens up as high and holy. All of life becomes godly work as we are privileged to shine his compassion and love into every corner of our daily activity. This teaching safeguards justification because it reminds us that our sanctified life is not offered vertically to God (as if somehow to pay for his grace), but that God urges us to love him by directing our love to those who truly need it—to our neighbors on the horizontal plane. This fills every moment with divine meaning as everything from changing a diaper to visiting the sick and the prisoners becomes wonderful service rendered to Jesus himself (Matt 25:40)! Suddenly the beauty of

⁴³ Luther’s frequent teaching and preaching about the holiness of the everyday callings of life was in response to the deception of the monastic movement that purported to offer men and women callings more holy than marriage, family, work, etc. As the church encourages more and more lay involvement in church work (a good thing!), we must be careful that we don’t inaugurate a new monasticism that subtly suggests that only service opportunities listed in the church bulletin and newsletter are truly high and holy works pleasing to God. That would be a tragic truncating of the beautiful venue in which God’s people carry out their royal priestly service.

every sphere of life, from work to family to every other calling, comes into clear view! Suddenly all of life is seen for what it truly is: one vast altar on which we lay our offering of thanks to our Abba Father! Such is the glory of sanctification!

Of course, developing a sound biblical approach to preaching sanctification, and knowing how to do it in ways that connect with the very real daily challenges of those in the pew, can still mean there is a large gap. In both survey and interviews many pastors reported struggling to make such clear applications of biblical truth to real-life situations. A professor at another seminary commented on that two-sided challenge.

[It is important that as a pastor] you know how to speak to your people, and that you know how the text really relates to them ... to discover proclamation in that moment at the intersection of this text with these lives and these people at this place on this day. Discovering how proclamation occurs at that intersection, if you could discover that, I think that would be the answer to a lot of problems. Yeah. I think there are guys who get some of that, they get how the gospel is in this text, but they can't figure out how that applies to people today. Or you've got guys that are really out of the pastoral counselor tradition, they are aware of how the gospel can be spoken to people today, but it ends up having no relationship to the text. I think seeing that intersection, I think that would be it.

This challenge deserves plenty of attention; however, both these challenges have been addressed earlier in the key issues. The first four key issues were really all at their heart about being immersed in the world of Scripture so as not to jump to unbiblical and untextual conclusions for the sake of relevance. And the other side of the issue—knowing the details of people's lives so as to make relevant applications to real life—was addressed in both the third and (especially) the sixth. A pastor who immerses himself in the lives of the people he loves will learn day by day how to address real-life issues. Another seminary professor shared his view of how important that is.

Spending time with people in the congregation, knowing how they are hurting and helping them, I find that that probably keeps the focus on preaching better than anything else, because unless you know how people are hurting, unless you know how they are thinking, and how they are likely to misunderstand things if you put it one way [your sermon won't address real life] One of my friends, one of my peers I met with regularly, he said, "You know, your preaching in large groups will be a direct reflection of your one-on-one ministry with individuals." If your one-on-one ministry is hypothetical, because you are just not meeting with people and spending time with them, then your preaching will kind of have this hypothetical ring to it.

In real-life connections with the sheep, the shepherd learns how to provide just the right food.

Five other brief sub-issues congregate around growth in preaching sanctification in the WELS. The first additional sub-issue tends to present itself when pastors are preaching pericope selections from exhortation sections of New Testament epistles. Closely related to the moralizing mentioned in the previous key issue, pastors must be careful not to preach what Graeme Goldsworthy calls "naked law" (Goldsworthy 2000, xiii-xiv). By that Goldsworthy means preaching the sanctification imperatives from epistles without the gospel indicatives that are always found nearby either within the text itself or always at least within the wider context of the whole letter. Severing sanctification encouragements from their gospel base easily allows work-righteous assumptions to flourish as well as removing gospel power from being near at hand to live out the direction of heart or life to which the imperative points. While the shame of "naked law" may still be somewhat rare in WELS pulpits, it bears emphasizing since some in our midst covet the style of preaching popular in some mega-churches where detailed law imperatives may dominate as preaching easily degenerates into practical "how-to" lists divorced from Christ.

However, we cannot leave the issue of "naked law" behind until we address the fact that for WELS preachers the danger is more often the exact opposite! We so clothe

the law imperatives with previous law/gospel context that encouraging sanctified living almost disappears! The pattern too often found in my own preaching, and heard too many times from others, is to take a third use of the law imperative (“Be imitators of God!” Eph 5:1), point out that we haven’t done very well at doing such imitating (subtly shifting from law as guide to law as mirror), assure us that Christ has covered our failings, and then quickly say “Amen!” Perhaps we might throw in a few gratuitous “sanctification sentences,” but no matter, we have ignored the clear intent of the text as given by the Holy Spirit. That law as mirror and gospel as comfort will be found in that sermon is certainly not the problem; the problem is that the urging toward sanctification that was the clear intent of the inspired author is fading into the background (or into oblivion!). One pastor identified this problem by noting, “We are quicker to preach law and gospel rather than preach the text!” It usually takes a Lutheran preacher to pull off that particular textual sleight of hand!

The second sub-issue deserving attention is the challenge of finding another homiletical middle ground. On the one side is being so brief and generic in our sanctification encouragements (“Let’s all love our neighbor!”) that no one knows what that will look like in the specifics of life. On the other side is being so pedantic that we multiply applications in Puritan fashion, leaving almost no room for the hearers to draw for themselves any specific conclusions. Bryan Chapell, in class at Trinity, gave this helpful encouragement, “Never overestimate your hearer’s vocabulary or underestimate their intelligence.” When we endlessly multiply our examples, we are underestimating the God-given ability of hearers to identify with a single good concrete example drawn from the specifics of someone else’s life. Craddock rightfully reminds us that the path to the universal is often through the specific (Craddock 1990,

120). If these twin problems were weighted by their frequency of appearance in WELS preaching, it would be my observation that the former problem would outweigh the latter. Vague generalities rather than multiplication of specifics tend to be the style *du jour* in our pulpits. That's why I will close this sub-issue's treatment with an impassioned plea by one mission counselor. He spoke as one whose work now places him at the feet of many different WELS pastors.

I speak and listen as a beggar at the throne of God's grace in our congregations, where I and many wish to be trained in faith, in knowledge, in discipleship, and in the practice of Christian love. I have gone to many Bible classes without guidance in how the gospel we just learned can help us to be faithful and better witnesses in our daily lives, and among our relationships at work or school and in our vocations. I want to be lighted with the flame of Jesus to better reflect his light. I have heard many doctrinally correct law and gospel sermons that, in response to the uplifting gospel, did not specifically ask anything big of me. As a disciple of Jesus I hunger to be fed with his forgiveness and certainty, as well as at least occasionally [with his direction] for my life and my daily discipleship. I want to know how to act and live and think and believe and witness to God's great love for me and others. I want to hear the whole counsel of God, everything that Jesus has done for us and expects of us. I need sermons that as the fruit of faith encourage me specifically to love my neighbor as myself. If I don't, I might come to the conclusion that loving the neighbor is unnecessary or even unimportant, when in fact it is in the loving service of the neighbor in the world that God opens doors for me to do evangelism, and speak Jesus in natural ways.

Let all WELS preachers say, "Amen!"

That brings us to the third sub-issue that flows from the previous. This sub-issue is encouraging Lutheran pastors not to over-react to a lack of specific sanctification preaching in previous sermons by feeling compelled to include some gratuitous (and usually quite generic) sanctification application even if a text's entire burden is helping us bask in the beauty of our justification. Perhaps the most frequent form of this abuse in the WELS is the well-meaning attempt to turn every text into an encouragement to evangelism (usually done in a rather predictable fashion!). If we twist and turn every text into an evangelism emphasis,

we teach our people questionable biblical interpretation while almost insuring that they will no longer be listening when we are not just crying “Wolf!” Pastors’ hearts for the lost may be in the right place, but their fingers are in the wrong text. Especially on high festivals (Christmas, Good Friday, Easter) many an appointed text simply wants to enable our hearers to bask in the warm glow of the “sun of righteousness [who has arisen] with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2). It is wonderful to know that the result of this will be the spontaneous, joyful, calf-like sanctification going out and leaping that only the gospel can empower. Rather than offering some stilted and predictable application throw-ins, we can guard our tongues and trust that the spontaneous fruit of the gospel will show itself in ways far beyond what our forced and canned applications would have thought to encourage—even though we will not know until heaven exactly what all those applications were! Without going to the Lutheran-esque extreme of saying this means we never give sanctification direction, this is only maintaining that there are indeed many biblical texts where the inspired authorial intent is to give us truths to believe, not tasks to carry out.

The fourth sub-issue is a plea from the lay people of my Delphi group. Several of them urged WELS pastors not to be afraid to tackle tough doctrines and issues from the pulpit. This is a brief sampling of their encouragements as they listed weaknesses in preaching in the WELS: “[A weakness of preaching in the WELS is a] failure or fear that keeps us from teaching financial stewardship with the long-term goal of helping more of God’s people see it as the joyful privilege it is.” Another noted, “[A weakness of preaching in the WELS is] failing to address challenging issues such as the roles of men and women.” Still another lay person added, “We could be reminded more frequently to worship God with the first fruits of our

time, talents, and treasure.” Here’s one last statement: “We should hear frequent warnings about attitudes that accommodate living together without marriage.”

While pastoral wisdom may determine that some issues are better handled in the give-and-take discussion of a large or small group Bible study, yet it is good for pastors to know that many in the pew want them to be bold in addressing challenging and sensitive issues. They are simply urging us to remember Jesus’ own words that we don’t take anything about our Christian witness and hide it under a bowl (Matt 5:15).

The final sub-issue under preaching sanctification—closely related to the previous—is the encouragement given by both pastors (survey and interviews) and lay people (Delphi group) not to be afraid to address a whole series of sermons to a particularly challenging issue of sanctified living. While the church year and its series of appointed lessons is a rich gift of the centuries that assists us wonderfully in staying focused on Christ while we proclaim the whole counsel of God in a balanced and orderly fashion, yet that gift is our servant, not our master. Especially when preaching in the non-festival half of the church year, there are plenty of occasions when a scheduled detour from the normal flow of the church year can be a welcome break from the regular routine.⁴⁴ For those who like to compare such a practice with the practice in Wittenberg during the early years of the Reformation, the preaching

⁴⁴ Lutherans typically speak of the festival and non-festival half of the church year (also called the “half year of our Lord” and the “half year of the church”). The festival half extends from the first Sunday in Advent (four Sundays before Christmas) to the festival of Pentecost. During that time the flow of thought from Sunday to Sunday is following the life and ministry of Christ. That means the Sundays are quite closely connected in logic and sequence. However, during the non-festival half (the Sundays after Pentecost—typically May through November), there are more places that breaks can be taken without disturbing the progression of thought.

on Sunday morning was almost always on the gospel appointed for the day, but sermons during the week were often topical (catechetical).⁴⁵

This project was not very successful in discovering previously unknown resources for helping Lutheran pastors grow in preaching sanctification. Two online essays available on the WLS web site by Paul Wendland and Mark Paustian offer excellent specific encouragement in teaching and preaching sanctification. Much more still needs to be done in discovering and developing resources in this area.

Key Issue 9: Sermon Delivery that Honors the Gospel

As we enter this ninth key issue on sermon delivery, a side trip to a small mythical Minnesota town appears to be necessary. What some call the Lake Wobegon Effect may be at work. A professor from another seminary noted that the vast majority of pastors in his denomination routinely rate themselves as “above average” in delivery skills, but that his observation was quite the opposite. “Pastors rate themselves as above average or excellent in their preaching, across the board, so that nobody is below average, and yet I think what happens, is that you’ve got pastors who basically take their manuscript into the pulpit, who think they are preaching it, but they are actually reading it.” But it’s not just pastors in that denomination who may be overestimating delivery skills. Lake Wobegon must be a larger town than Keillor lets on, since in the survey WELS pastors give evidence of having spent at least a little time residing within its borders. In a survey question that asked pastors to rate themselves on seven homiletical tasks, sermon delivery was rated the highest of all seven. Fully 83 percent of the

⁴⁵ Those desiring a brief tour of Luther’s preaching ministry would enjoy *Luther the*

respondents rated themselves either as a “4” or “5” on a five-point scale (five being the highest). In fact, of the seven areas of homiletical work included in the question, this was the only one of the seven in which not a single pastor rated himself as a “1” or “2”!

Do those who listen to them agree with this glowing assessment of delivery skills? More than one WLS seminary professor noted that he sees significant evidence that our on-campus emphasis on exegetical study may produce some unintended fruit of delivery weaknesses. One spoke candidly on the issue.

I think we should do a real reality check on the balance that we maintain between study skills in Greek and Hebrew and communication skills. I’m not at all against the way we teach guys Greek and Hebrew. I’m happy that we do that ... but I think that we have really missed the boat as far as what we do already on the high school level and the college level in the whole issue of communication skills.... Greek and Hebrew have almost ... become our gods. We are willing to put up with just about anything as long as you have Greek and Hebrew. Just the ability to know how to get up in front of people and to talk whimsically and compelling ... even [name of his pastor] just gets up and shouts ... and you come home and say, “Why did he have to shout at us like that when shouting isn’t in line [with the text]?” To me that is the loss of some sort of communication skills someplace.... I think it has a lot to do with reading.... I think that it’s a terrible mistake that [MLC] turned Shakespeare into an elective and cut out Milton. I think guys are reading ... [but] they are not reading Time, they are not reading literature that shows them what good writing is like. And I don’t know how you force them to do that.

Several pastors in interviews and survey echoed several elements of his concern about weaknesses in delivery skills. They also wondered about an imbalance in our training when it comes to learning how to deliver the solid content we have put into our sermons.

I think with so many things going on within the week, I want to make sure I have something to say. That’s first and foremost. And that is good. But with my time management, and maybe I’m just betraying myself here, that does end up leaving little time for really focusing on how do I want to deliver this,

Preacher by Fred Meuser.

and what's the best way to deliver this. And most, I focus, I want to get this in my head and memorized, and any time I have left after that, I want to really focus on my pausing, or just turning a phrase in a different way. And I think my perception, at least of myself, and just a few others, there is such an exhaustive [effort] in regard to our preparation, and then not as much time taken in how do I want to deliver this so that it is exciting to listen to.

The layman who was interviewed made similar statements. He spoke of urging his own pastor strongly to take speech courses at a nearby university in order to strengthen some weaker delivery skills. And, although not technically a part of my research, as this report was being written, a lay leader who sits on our seminary's governing board spoke to me about what he observed when he first joined the WELS after leaving another Lutheran church body for doctrinal reasons. He noted how thankful he was for the sound doctrine he heard consistently in pulpit after pulpit, but he also indicated that he observed too many pastors delivering their solid content in a way that could only be described as dull.

While none of those who expressed this concern wanted to sacrifice content for style, they were all reminding WELS pastors that delivery skills are also critical so that we don't become an audiovisual impediment to the message we worked hard to assemble and that we know the Holy Spirit desires to use. As important as preaching is, faith comes from hearing (Rom 10:17), that is, from a message reaching eardrums and being taken to heart. Preaching is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Haddon Robinson shares why it is incredibly foolish to spend so much time giving birth to a sermon, but then to ignore delivery skills. "While ministers spend hours every week on sermon construction, they seldom give even a few hours a year to thinking about their delivery. Yet sermons do not come into the world as outlines or manuscripts. They live only when they are preached. A sermon ineptly delivered arrives stillborn" (Robinson 2001, 201). As we come to listing sub-issues of sermon

delivery, one advantage of waiting to discuss delivery until the ninth key issue is that many critical factors in what makes for good sermon delivery have already been treated. They were treated elsewhere because, although they are often seen as delivery issues, they are not at heart delivery issues. The most common reason for hearers labeling delivery of a sermon as poor seems to be a lifeless delivery presented with little emotion. The pastor gives the impression that he is merely discharging his duty. This often comes up when people speak about authenticity or transparency or conviction. These sub-issues were discussed at length within the first four issues since preaching with conviction is primarily a factor of what happens in the heart of the preacher as he studies the text.

Here I would only add that for some Lutheran pastors a phobia about pietism's excessive emphasis on emotions has yielded a delivery issue. If a pastor considers it a defect of delivery to display much emotion in the pulpit—even emotions genuinely worked by the text—then he will tend to veil his own emotions while preaching. In WELS pulpits this may especially show itself in a failure to celebrate the gospel in the presence of God's people. Without intending to, the pastor ends up working against Christocentricity! The wonder and awe of the gospel aren't on display before the people other than in words that appear at odds with the demeanor and tone of the preacher. While no two pastors will display emotion in the same way, observe any pastor talking about that which has captured his heart and you will see what that looks and sounds like for him. If that same kind of conviction is not evident when he is preaching the beauty of the gospel, something has either gone wrong in his study or when he enters the pulpit.

Another critical delivery issue, sermon length, was discussed under preaching to a postmodern world. Two other factors closely related to delivery that will also be taken

up during the seventh key issue are whether or not to preach from behind a pulpit and whether or not to wear liturgical vestments.

The primary delivery issue to be discussed here, and the one that resonated most in the comments of pastors and professors, are the various concerns that revolve around preaching without the repeated use of notes. Preaching that is well prepared and fluent, yet with little or no evident use of a manuscript or notes, has long been considered a strength of WELS preaching. The survey noted some encouraging signs in this area. In the survey, 77 percent of pastors indicated that they always write out a complete manuscript of their sermon. When those who reported writing out their manuscript 75 to 99 percent of the time are factored, the percentage rises to 87 percent. While merely writing out a manuscript doesn't guarantee free and fluent delivery of the sermon, yet it certainly contributes to being sure that one has something well-ordered to say. Pastors also reported devoting a considerable amount of time to committing their manuscript to memory so that they can speak it fluently without constant recourse to notes. Of those interviewed, 50 percent report spending at least three hours, and only 23 percent report giving such work an hour or less of their time.

The goal expressed in homiletics classes at WLS has always been to develop and polish a manuscript in a style written for the ear in order to make sure the sermon has a clear and logical flow of thought. Students are then encouraged to commit that sermon to memory so as to avoid two extremes. On the one side is the extreme of a mechanical delivery that sounds like a recitation of a canned speech even though no notes are visible. The preacher seems to be reading from an invisible teleprompter. Of course, even worse is being so unsure of the flow of thought that eye contact with the people is broken again and again. In either

case, those in the pew are given the distinct impression that someone is reading an essay to them rather than preaching to them.

On the other side is the danger of being so free from one's manuscript that the preacher is often left searching for words. The preacher will also wander aimlessly from time to time as he tries to recapture his train of thought. What is lost is anything resembling clarity and crispness in making the sermon's points. His careful crafting of his manuscript (assuming he did so!) ends up being wasted time. Listen to how two interviewees (the first a professor from another seminary and the second a WELS pastor) articulate the dangers on either side.

You have a manuscript written for literate reading, and it's being proclaimed orally, and the guy thinks he is looking up and doing it, but he's not, he's just reading it. At the other end of the spectrum are the guys who are very comfortable going without a manuscript, but they are just rambling. And so it ends up being kind of circular, hard to follow, repetitive. So I think in our delivery you've got guys who have great eye contact, great engagement, but the material is just not [clear], and at the other end you have guys who put the material together, but their engagement is lacking.

So more so than the memorization of the sermon, is just the emphasis on making sure you are connecting with the people, and talking with the people, and not having some written document going over their heads, or having nothing written so that you are talking around their heads.

How are WELS preachers doing in hitting that middle ground? Several interviewees feared that the reading of sermons is bothering a growing number of our pastors. One WLS professor is convinced he is seeing far too much reliance on manuscripts. "I am detecting more and more, as I go around the countryside, guys who spend too much time with their nose down rather than their eyes out." One pastor who participated in the survey, when asked about the one thing he would pray for to improve preaching in the WELS, wrote this: "Within the WELS that pastors would commit more time to their delivery rather than read the sermon." The survey hinted at this challenge when 63 percent of pastors reported

that they take a full manuscript into the pulpit. Even if at first those pastors merely have the manuscript there as a security blanket just in case they get lost, a manuscript can have a Siren-like power to lure the preacher's eyes away from his people and down to his words. While there may be artful ways to make use of a manuscript that keep it from being quite so disruptive, any break in eye contact between preacher and people provides a place for hearers to check out. Especially in a postmodern world, an evident reliance on notes may register dangerously close to "fake" on hearers' often subconscious authenticity meters. "Pastor," our hearers can be wondering, "is this merely something from your paper, or is this something from your heart?" While as preachers we can insist that this is an unfair dichotomy since what we put on our paper is what was in our heart, yet there is little denying that some hearers may be picking up a mixed message. When our friends share their joys with us, we are not accustomed to seeing them reading to us from prepared notes. What does it tell us when the common term for speaking without notes is *ex corde*?

But the scourge of manuscript abuse in the WELS is not merely on the side of being too attached to it either visibly or mechanically; there are those who expressed frustration with WELS sermons in the opposite direction. As they waited for the pastor to find the right word, or traveled in repeated circles as the pastor attempted to find his way, it seemed the pastor would have done better to have followed his carefully prepared manuscript (assuming, again, that he had one!). In his interview, one pastor in Paul-like fashion even created a new English word to describe the phenomenon. "Some guys can write real well, but they don't deliver it. They think they have to be free from their manuscript. They are so proud of that, but then it comes off like they are fludoobering their words, or they are just not precise."

How can this CE project help pastors learn to deliver their sermons so well that hearers encounter no paper barrier (seen or sensed) and yet at the same time they are hearing a sermon delivered with fluency and clarity? As in so many places in this project, pastors' own ideas from interviews and survey will prove helpful. In the survey, pastors were asked to provide some detail for the method they use to get ready to preach once their manuscript is written. Eight of the thirty survey responses listed oral rehearsal of the entire sermon as a key element of their routine. On Saturday night and/or early on Sunday morning, they regularly preach their sermon to an empty church. Most who do this walk through their entire sermon out loud several times as they grow comfortable with how the sermon sounds (though they pray the echo will go away because of full pews!).

One pastor indicated that he has entered the digital age when it comes to committing his sermon to memory. He makes a digital recording as he reads his sermon. He then downloads this file onto his iPod. As he exercises or takes care of routine tasks, he listens to his sermon again and again.

The most common pattern pastors reported for committing the sermon to memory was simply reading (and, of course, editing it) over and over again (often out loud) until they were comfortable that they knew their sermon well. A simple way of making use of this pastoral input will be to share all slight variations of these ideas with pastors. Pastors can compare their pattern with the patterns used by their brothers. Many may find helpful tweaks to their routine that may improve or even streamline their methods.

The fact that other issues of delivery (pace, pausing, volume, facial expressions, gestures) were mentioned so infrequently is probably a testament to the fact noted earlier:

these are not issues that get much consideration among our homiletical concerns.⁴⁶ Only one pastor mentioned these issues directly, while a few touched on them obliquely. Giving these delivery issues such little attention means that distracting habits formed in the early nervous days of preaching may be permitted to hang around. That is why pastors need to be encouraged to ask specifically about these issues as they get feedback from their hearers. That is also why the often-painful experience of watching a video of one's own sermons should be high on the recommendation list. While this can be an unpleasant experience for us as we notice nervous and distracting idiosyncrasies, imagine what it must be like for those who must view our idiosyncrasies week after week during sermon after sermon!⁴⁷ Those (including my DVD player) who point out where my delivery quirks are getting in the way are my friends! While, as Bryan Chapell points out, natural delivery has replaced a belief that there is one correct way to go about delivering a message (Chapell 2005, 329), nervous quirks aren't normally a part of anyone's definition of natural delivery.

For those for whom nervousness is still a big delivery issue, Jay Adams offers a very humbling reminder. He suggests that what may be wrong is our focus. He points out that such stage fright is almost always self-focused (Adams 1971, 154-57). Even as we gain experience in preaching and overcome some initial fears, our minds can still be all too preoccupied

⁴⁶ Another missing element in my research and study is training and care of the pastor's voice. How easily we neglect careful stewardship of this aspect of preaching. Any preacher silenced on a Sunday by laryngitis (as I have been) knows this is no small thing. Books are already purchased and on my shelf for further study.

⁴⁷ I will never forget a comment made by a classmate during seminary days about the all-too-frequent raising of my eyebrows. This Groucho Marx-like nervous habit was indeed comically evident as I went back and watched the tape. It hurt a bit to hear his comment, but he has helped me save untold distraction.

with questions such as “What will people think of me?” “Do they like me as a preacher?” “How will they respond toward me because of what I’m going to say?” When these thoughts want to dominate our thinking, there is only one solution. I need to repent. With Paul I must remember that “we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord” (2 Cor 4:5). Equally helpful to Adams’ call to repentance is the positive encouragement given by Caemmerer. Once we have turned from ourselves to Christ, then the next key is to turn our attention on the hearers to whom we are seeking to give Jesus again in that sermon.

Look, the preacher is in the pulpit! Is anyone in doubt about what he is thinking? His mind is crowded with words, details of a message. Does he step softly so that he will not dislodge them before he begins? No, for he has been waiting to talk to his people. He feels the pressure of a message which he is anxious to give them. He knows most of them from daily acquaintance in the neighborhood, in pastoral care, and in church work. He rejoices, for he loves them, and he knows that the Word of God in Christ is just exactly what they need. He is their servant and speaks that Word not just as their teacher but as their spokesman. He is the servant of God, and God will help him to preach the Word with boldness. (Caemmerer 1959, 129)

Ever since first reading those words of Caemmerer, I have often prayed right before preaching that God help me forget myself. No, that doesn’t mean I am advocating for preaching from some hidden location in the chancel so that only my voice can be heard. Having the eyes of the people on the preacher is an important part of communication as a whole person communicates to whole people. But the key is what is happening in my mind’s eye! I dare not be glancing back at myself again and again. I pray that God enables me each time to forget myself and be caught up in the message the text has given me to proclaim.⁴⁸ All of this reminds us why

⁴⁸ One pastor noted a “self-focus” possible in the opposite direction. For those skilled in delivery, Satan can easily lead them to preach so that people say, “Wow, what a preacher he is!” rather than “Wow, what a Savior I have!” What an apt reminder that Satan and our proud hearts can distort any good thing for their own purposes!

delivery matters. “When our manner conforms to our sermon’s content, it becomes obvious that our message has had an impact on us. Thus, delivery acts as a window to our sincerity, which ultimately carries the power of our words” (Chapell 2005, 332). While we must not forget, as Chapell also knows, that the real power of our words is the Holy Spirit who inhabits them, the point is still clear.⁴⁹ Once again, we are back to the all-important issue: this is proclamation of the life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

When it comes to helpful resources, I am well aware that many more resources still need to be discovered or developed for this issue. I too am a creature of my preaching culture. This issue has too often received from me only a passing glance!

Key Issue 10: Matching the Variety of the Scriptures with Variety in Our Preaching Styles

Greame Goldsworthy quotes this sarcastic quip about preaching, “Ten thousand, thousand, are their texts, but all their sermons one” (Goldsworthy 2000, 126). While I might like to retort how gross an overstatement that wisecrack is, yet part of what makes it sting so much is how true it has been for all too much of my preaching! I was trained in a basic theme and parts (usually two parts or mains, rarely three) deductive form of preaching. All my seminary sermons and the vast majority of my sermons for almost twenty years of parish ministry and pulpit assistant experience followed that pattern. The survey shows that that pattern would

⁴⁹ The assumption is that the words of our sermon are a faithful exposition and application of the inspired text on which we are preaching. If that is not true, all we have is the power and persuasion of merely human words. While that may be enough for a great political speech, that is a tragedy in a pulpit which claims to speak for God!

also characterize the vast majority of sermons preached by experienced WELS pastors in the field.⁵⁰

During those twenty years of preaching, very seldom did I pause very long (if at all) to ponder whether the text itself might have something important to say about how it wanted to be organized and preached. Instead, after having laid the selected text on my exegetical examining table and removed the desired points to be proclaimed, I assumed that the text had now served its purpose. I could reach into my bag of theme and parts deductive patterns and pour the points into that pattern. From time to time a text would spring back to life and resist being poured into those molds—all the while shouting at me that it had more to offer than I had seen! But I was usually quite successful in anesthetizing it long enough to get past Sunday morning without such concerns causing me further trouble. At times, there may have been some lingering questions afterward about some other ways that text could have been handled (and a few sermons, some interesting, some ugly in which I tried my hand at some slightly different patterns). Yet for the most part all texts were forced to submit to my predetermined mold for how to organize a sermon.

But all of that began to change as the parish years gave way to my years at WLS teaching students how to preach. The tedium of my own repetitive preaching pattern

⁵⁰ While thematic expositional preaching has always been found in WELS pulpits, theme and parts (mains) preaching does not appear to have all that hoary of a history in our midst. In looking back, I recall a different pattern in the preaching of my father (WLS class of 1940) and his contemporaries. They often preached with a theme and simply worked through the text in a way that some might label as a homily (a guided exegetical/practical tour of the text under a general theme). Theme and parts preaching seems to have entered into WELS preaching sometime between my father's generation and the time my oldest brother attended the seminary (WLS class of 1968). This deserves much more digging on my part.

was now coming back to haunt me in one submitted assignment after another. Slowly, my pattern of teaching preaching began to change to something that, as I look back, had begun to be present more and more in my preaching as a parish pastor. I was beginning to urge beginning preachers to spend more time enjoying the narrative and letting that predominate more in the structure of their sermon.

The next great spur was taking David Larsen's doctoral class on the history of preaching. Suddenly swimming through my mind were the multiple styles of sermon organization that have existed in the church and that were being rediscovered and refined in the church today. Curiosity turned to further reading and study of what is called the new homiletic. That led to a Winterim elective course (entitled Alternate Styles of Preaching) taught on our campus to middlers and seniors. After the first year of teaching that course, the opportunity came to attend a six-hour course on alternate styles at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, taught by Glenn Nielsen. This course provided much more needed depth of reading and thought on the issue of alternate forms of preaching. The final assignment of that course was designing a four-part presentation for the faculty of WLS on alternate styles of preaching and their place in the curriculum at WLS. Invited to those four faculty meetings were the two retired preaching professors who had authored our current textbook. The response from the faculty was almost unanimously positive, and encouragement was given to continue to pursue my study.

In the years that followed, much has happened. The elective course is no longer offered. I was confusing middlers who had written only two sermons in our basic deductive method. But instead of dropping study of alternate styles of preaching from the curriculum, we added it to the final required homiletics course taught to seniors. Including their vicar year, seniors have written about twenty to thirty sermons. Most have learned well a solid

deductive method, but they are also not yet set in stone in that method. They are willing to ponder some other ways of organizing sermons. Therefore, during the last half of this semester course, twelve class hours are devoted to discussing what Lutheran preachers can learn from both the old and new homiletic. As those twelve class hours come to an end, all students are offered the option to write the second required sermon for that class either in a more deductive style or a more inductive style. No matter which style they chose, the students are encouraged to incorporate into their sermons insights gained in the course. This past semester, thirty of forty-two seniors wrote their second sermon in a more inductive style. A few struggled considerably. Most completed the task competently. Some soared!⁵¹

During the last three years, what once was only an elective during Winterim has become a traveling presentation (usually condensed to seven hours) taken out to conferences. The presentation has now been made in seven different states and one province of Canada. About 300 parish pastors have been exposed to a discussion on narrative and inductive styles.

All this was shared to note that research in this final issue has been much broader than work done for this project.⁵² Extensive formal and informal feedback has been gathered for years, and now this project has added even more insights into this topic.

⁵¹ Our WLS worship department realizes that more and more of incoming students are children of a storied culture. While our basic deductive method serves a useful purpose in helping students think more deeply about ordering thought, many excel when allowed to combine sound theology with a narrative preaching style.

⁵² Not surprisingly, this issue was not specifically mentioned by any lay people in the Delphi group. It is not surprising that style of sermon construction is something pondered much more by preachers than by hearers.

Everything I have seen confirms what a professor from another seminary stated. Many pastors are interested in studying what's "going on" in homiletics today. In the survey, significant interest was shown in learning more about alternate styles of preaching.

What the survey and interviews further consolidated for me is what I have observed from the workshops. There are basically four groups of pastors in the WELS when it comes to alternate styles of preaching. There are the suspicious. They are suspicious that alternate styles of preaching are merely concessions to the spirit of the age that pays more attention to style than substance. They are convinced that deductive, theme, and part preaching is Lutheran and moving to anything else might forfeit more than style. To put it another way, somehow, although this was never on our campus to my knowledge, they feel they were taught that there is one way Lutheran pastors should (or even must) preach. The survey, and my own experience, would seem to suggest that this group might be about 20 to 25 percent of WELS pastors. They tend to be my age or older.

Then there are the curious. They have not branched out from the theme and parts deductive method taught at seminary. Some of them have here and there taken some tentative steps with bits and pieces of more narrative or inductive preaching. At times they too seem to have the impression that the ghost of homiletics professors are scowling at these attempts. They would like to have more detailed information before trying too much more. The survey, and my own experience, would suggest that this second group would be about 35 to 40 percent of WELS pastors. The curious tend to be my age or older, although there are quite a few also among those out ten years or less.

Then there are the committed. These brothers have begun to use other styles of preaching or at least pieces of it in a considerable number of their sermons. Some have moved this direction with determination even though they too at times have shared with me some ghost sightings! Typically they have moved to these other homiletical patterns because they too found that texts often refused to play dead and allow themselves to be slipped, corpse-like, into a one-size-fits-all preaching suit. Often, many of the textual and preaching instincts they have followed have been quite sound. The committed tend to be found among younger pastors, but they can be found scattered through all the years of ministry experience. I would estimate that this third group is about 15 to 20 percent of WELS pastors.

Then there are the borrowers. These WELS pastors have also grown tired of the straightjacket of the theme and parts deductive method. But they have made changes not so much because the texts they worked on seemed to demand another style, but because they have done some comparing with popular preaching models found, for instance, among mega-churches. They tend to have shifted to a much more didactic, less formal style of preaching. Frequently, these same pastors have left behind pericopic preaching. These pastors tend to be found among those out ten to twenty-five years. The survey gives considerable help with approximating the size of a large part of this group, since the survey asked about the frequency of choosing texts from the pericope. I would estimate this final group to be about 5 to 10 percent of WELS pastors.

With thanks to God for all the helpful feedback pastors have provided, there are currently four basic parts to the presentation. Especially for the sake of the suspicious and the borrowers, there is considerable time spent in the first part addressing what cannot change,

what may change, and what must change in Lutheran preaching. The suspicious are happy to hear that the workshop it is not all about style trumping substance, the borrowers are happy to hear that a seminary professor is actually acknowledging that things can (or even must!) change in Lutheran preaching. At the same time, the suspicious are challenged to recognize that some things they might list as “unchangeable” are not so, while the borrowers are challenged in reverse to consider whether what they may have discarded as “dispensable” might not be. This first part also strengthens the two large groups in the middle (the curious and committed) in what they need to continue or to begin to make wise decisions on changes in style. Preliminary readings for this part of the workshop are a brief essay on the theology of Lutheran preaching (a summary of what is found in the second chapter of this project) and a brief essay on the importance of sanctified rhetoric written in the WLQ by a highly respected sainted systematics professor. That essay is eye-opening for many who assumed (wrongly) that WLS professors didn’t value such issues of “style.” From this point on, workshop attendees are constantly reminded to apply sound theology to everything that follows. Homiletical style must serve biblical theology, not rule it.

In the second section of the workshop, the focus is on comparing and contrasting tendencies of the old homiletic and the new homiletic. What is stressed is that Lutherans have never sworn allegiance to either camp, although WELS preachers were much closer to embracing Broadus than Craddock. In the discussion, theological challenges Lutherans would have with either camp are analyzed. Preliminary reading for this section is a compilation of brief articles seeking to define the old and new homiletic, as well as definitions of some alternate preaching styles found among new homiletic practitioners. This section is very helpful to experienced

pastors who often have heard little or nothing about this. Even most of those committed to making use of more inductive and narrative patterns have never formally studied these contrasts.

In the third section of the workshop, pastors are introduced to a series of “bits and pieces” of narrative and inductive style that could be used in more deductive sermons. The bits and pieces focus on developing a more oral style—being lighter on our homiletical feet without becoming theological flyweights.⁵³ This section confirms the instincts of the committed while giving the suspicious and curious some ideas they might quietly put to use. It also suggests to the borrowers that there may be better ways to break out of the perceived WELS homiletical straightjacket. Two WELS sermons that combine deductive and inductive elements are the assigned reading for this part. A sermon with such a combination is also preached live or watched on video. The viewing and discussion of actual sermons helps those who need concrete examples of what we are talking about. Usually by this time, many of the cautious are more interested, and even some suspicious are heard to remark that some of these things might not be so bad!⁵⁴

Between the third and fourth sessions, pastors divide up into groups to discuss how they could incorporate narrative or inductive ideas in their next sermon. Before coming

⁵³ Recall heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali’s mantra: “Float like a butterfly. Sting like a bee.”

⁵⁴ In the first offerings of this workshop to pastors, I often moved ahead with far too little caution. I foolishly forgot my own experience and did not anticipate the amount of caution and suspicion there would be. The first presentation happened to be in the church where my father baptized me fifty years ago. There was a bit of a baptism by fire that I had to undergo. To shift the analogy: such humble pie can be very nutritious!

to the workshop, pastors were encouraged to do basic exegetical work on the text. These small group meetings discussing common texts often prove a favorite part of the workshop.

In the final session, we begin with feedback from each group about how they might approach their particular text.⁵⁵ That is followed by a brief overview of Eugene Lowry's homiletical plot. The main purpose of this session is to offer pastors a path they could use to preach an entire sermon in a more narrative or inductive pattern. The preliminary reading suggested, but not required, is a selection from Lowry's book *The Homiletical Plot* (Lowry 2000). Interested pastors are encouraged to purchase the book and read the whole thing. To help make the reading and discussion more concrete, one or two sermons are shown; one by Lowry, and the other by a seminary professor who preached a Lowry-loop sermon on Ash Wednesday at WLS. That professor's sermon is in appendix 1. The Lowry-loop is a congenial narrative form for WELS preachers since it is essentially a one-part law/gospel template. However, before anyone hands Eugene Lowry the Miss Lutheran Congeniality prize, clear concerns are also sounded about Lowry's low view of Scripture. The workshop then ends with planning time in which each pastor is asked to list one or two things discussed during the workshop that he would like to incorporate into his preaching.

What is only mentioned briefly during the current workshop (though discussed more during the on-campus course) is the ultimate goal: preaching every text in a way that is most congenial to the style of writing and pattern of logic of the inspired author. We note that

⁵⁵ Since there is much more time, those attending the class during summer quarter (and in the near future, God willing, online) write out a complete sermon in a more narrative or inductive style. This has the side benefit of sending them back home with their next sermon almost ready to go!

Lowry's loop can be just as foreign and unfriendly to many a text as any theme and parts deductive straitjacket has ever been. What deserves even more attention is an insight that was mentioned in more than one interview which confirmed what was noted earlier about WLS students. Not only are the Scriptures rich in multiple styles of communicating, but pastors may have greater or lesser strengths in certain styles of preaching. Some excel at more deductive sermons and only get dizzy if they try to loop with Lowry (although remembering that they are preaching and not giving an essay is critical!). Others excel at more inductive patterns and need to be given permission to soar on their narrative wings (while avoiding the opposite problem of soaring Icarus-like too close to the stylistic sun). Especially among the rising generation of young pastors, asking them to spend years preaching chiefly in a deductive, theme and parts manner is like asking a whole generation of Davids to fight in Saul's armor. It's not very helpful to David and worse, it allows too many giants needing to be slain to continue threatening the ranks of God's people.

When it comes to resources, the course already exists. Books by Craddock, Greidanus, Goldsworthy, Long, and Lowry have all provided helpful insights, although there remains much in Craddock, Long, and Lowry with which Lutherans will differ theologically. There have been at least two additional resources that pastors in interviews and survey have requested. One is to help pastors to grasp better how to approach the challenge of doing exegetical work in longer narrative passages. While original language Greek and Hebrew work is still critical, the way to go about it differs from how the pastor might handle a shorter epistle text. Rapid translation of the story line that pauses only at key sections seems to be the wiser approach. Others have asked for different sermons (one deductive, one inductive) on

the same text by the same preacher. This would allow pastors to note distinctions without getting caught up merely in matters of individual writing or preaching style.

I finish this issue, and this lengthy chapter, by noting that God has allowed me in this tenth key issue to glimpse the clearest picture of what this project put into action can look like. It has been a thrilling sight!

CHAPTER 4

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND INITIAL EVALUATION

The previous chapter already outlined the content of the comprehensive plan as it revealed the ten key issues. This chapter will now outline how this plan will be shaped and delivered as well as describing the alpha evaluation that concluded the research.

The Basic Structure of the Plan

The title of the plan, taken from Isaiah 52:7, will be Gospel Messengers with Ever More Beautiful Feet. As mentioned earlier, this plan's shape and delivery method was altered significantly by a telephone conversation with the administrator for the WELS Commission on Worship. Many pieces began to fall into place when the opportunity was given to serve as editor of *Preach the Word* for two years beginning in September 2010.

Preach the Word is distributed free of charge to all WELS pastors and seminary students. The interviews and survey work indicated that *Preach the Word* enjoys an exceptionally high degree of readership among WELS pastors (97 percent of WELS pastors read it at least occasionally, 67 percent read it almost every time). Pastors particularly appreciate the brief four-page format that allows them to read it cover to cover in fifteen to twenty minutes rather than relegating it to the "future reading pile" that often just gathers dust (and guilt!).

Serving for two years as editor of *Preach the Word* (twelve bimonthly issues) offers an invaluable platform to expose WELS pastors to this comprehensive plan for continuing

education in preaching. As outlined below, the initial issue would give pastors a brief overview of what the plan is seeking to accomplish, and the final issue would be encouragement to continue to use the resources that have been made available. The remaining ten issues of my editorial tenure would cover issue by issue the ten critical areas of growth in preaching for WELS pastors as identified by the research.

For each of the ten areas of growth in preaching, the articles in the four pages of *Preach the Word* would seek to give specific encouragement and a brief sharing of ideas of what could be done to improve that area of preaching. Even if some of the pastors never pursued at that time any further study in that area of preaching, there would already have been at least some opportunity to spark ideas for growth.

The goal, however, would be to present the material in such a winsome and compelling way that many dig beyond those fifteen to twenty minutes. The articles would reference more detailed articles and specific practical resources that would be available through a dedicated link on the WLS Web site. At the Web site they would also find a growing library of good sermons (videos and full text) with study/discussion guides. These sermons would seek to give concrete examples of putting growth to work. The hope would be that not only would individual pastors consider making use of these detailed resources, but that groups of pastors (informal study groups or pastoral circuits and conferences) might make use of the materials to study together that particular preaching issue.

In addition, those navigating to this part of the WLS Web site would find a thoroughly indexed and searchable archive of articles from the first thirteen volumes of *Preach the Word*. Over the years almost every identified key issue has been treated—some in

considerable detail by several authors. While all back issues are currently available on the C/W portion of the WELS Web site, there is no index of topics or any easy way to search the entire archive.

In addition, pastors would also find on the Web site reviews of homiletics books, articles, and essays that pastors or professors have found helpful. Study guides would be prepared for use by individuals, small groups, or circuits and conferences.

After each issue of *Preach the Word* becomes available, there would be opportunities made available for pastors to participate in live online chats with the editor or other pastors or professors who have a strong interest in that particular area of preaching.

The final element of this project will take many years to produce. The goal would be to develop a face-to-face or online course and/or briefer workshop for every one of the key issues. Some of the key issues are broad and varied enough that it may be wise to develop more than one course or workshop for that issue. Here in particular it would be wise to enlist other professors and active pastors in the WELS to partner in developing these courses and workshops. This would allow the courses/workshops to be developed more quickly as well as give them a greater depth and breadth than one author could ever provide. When completed, these courses/workshops would provide the opportunity to probe each of these issues much more deeply than the newsletter or the Web site information could typically make possible. Perhaps most important of all, these courses/workshops would be designed to provide another interactive forum for pastors to learn from one another.

Other plans, not technically part of this project, would include the writing of an updated textbook for seminary students and pastors. Our current textbook (*Preach the*

Gospel by Richard Balge and Joel Gerlach) has served our synod well, but it was published in 1982 and shows its age. It is also my plan to repeat the survey and a Delphi group every three to five years to chart growth in preaching and to identify new issues that are becoming a concern to pastors and those who listen to sermons.

Another part of the plan is the preliminary publicity that is important to build interest. Advance publicity would include an article in the News and Comments section of the *WLQ*'s summer 2010 edition. Since this program seeks to benefit not just pastors but those who hear their sermons, there would also be an article in *Forward in Christ* (the synod's official monthly magazine). This article, during the summer of 2010, would focus on helping God's people recognize the importance of providing their called workers with the time and financial resources that would encourage them to continue to grow in their ministries. Attention would also be drawn to the emphasis our recent synod convention placed on helping called workers strive for excellence. Simultaneously there would also be a similarly themed feature article in the *Together* online newsletter that is produced by the office of the WELS president. The last piece of preliminary publicity would be a segment on the WELS Connection. The WELS Connection is a professionally produced monthly video newsmagazine that is offered to all WELS congregations. Most of our WELS congregations show these video segments each month after worship on a designated Sunday. An interview has already taken place with WELS Connection producers.

Of course, at the beating heart of this plan are the twelve issues of *Preach the Word*. The details of what will be emphasized issue by issue have already been laid out in the previous chapter. What was not reported there are the focus points for the introductory issue,

the companion introductory issue for lay leaders, and the concluding issue of *Preach the Word*. The introductory issue would seek to spark interest and enthusiasm for pastors to give attention to the ten key issues that will be introduced over the following twenty months. The special emphasis of the introductory issue would be to help pastors grasp why continuing professional growth is so vital for pastoral ministry. The articles will also encourage them by seeking to help them see the many different ways they may have already been growing—expanding an often all-too-narrow view of learning beyond formal classrooms and degrees. In particular, the lead article will help them ponder the importance of a full three-article approach to ministry. Pastors will be urged to consider that they use First Article gifts, to proclaim Second Article truths, with Third Article confidence. There will also be a brief overview provided so that pastors can know in advance when a particular preaching issue of special concern to them will be addressed. At the end of this issue, pastors will be encouraged to contact the editor with questions, concerns, and resources they have found helpful for the *second* key issue.¹ The introductory issue will also emphasize a key fruit of the research that was done in this project: this project is very much brother pastors working together and encouraging one another. A seminary professor may be the organizer of the material, but the whole program is very much brothers strengthening brothers.

The concluding issue will encourage pastors to continue to contribute to, and make use of, the growing body of resources on the WLS Web site. They will also be encouraged

¹ Because of production deadlines, by the time the pastors are reading one newsletter, the next is already heading to final production. That is why concerns, ideas, and resources would be sought for the second key resource. The preliminary publicity will need to ask pastors to provide material for the first key issue.

to apply to every area of their life and ministry whatever they have learned about lifelong and self-directed learning. Preaching does not exist in a vacuum.

At the same time the first issue is distributed to pastors, there will be a companion issue of *Preach the Word* directed to lay leaders. This issue will have a similar focus to the preliminary publicity that was already aimed at lay people (Forward in Christ, Together, and the WELS Connection). This lay edition will also give a brief overview of what will be shared with pastors over the next twenty months. This issue will urge the leaders of congregations to begin or continue to support all their called workers with the time and resources needed to continue to grow in the ministry. In particular, I will encourage lay leaders to apply to their congregation's called workers the same understanding of the need for continued growth that many of them experience at their own place of employment. This issue will introduce a plan currently being developed at WLS to offer a scholarship that would match dollar for dollar whatever congregations contribute toward the tuition of their called workers for on-campus, off-campus, or online courses. We want congregational leaders to know that WLS is their partner!

Here is the issue-by-issue timetable for the two volumes of *Preach the Word*.

Table 2. Gospel messengers with ever more beautiful feet

<i>PTW</i> Volume 14	Issue covered	<i>PTW</i> Volume 15	Issue covered
September/October	Introduction	September/October	Partnering with peers
November/December	Christocentricity	November/December	Postmodern culture
January/February	Law and gospel	January/February	Sanctification
March/April	Time management	March/April	Sermon delivery
May/June	Time in the Word	May/June	Sermon styles
July/August	Partnering with pew	July/August	Final encouragement

The Alpha Evaluation

On Monday, November 16, 2009, the final step of research for this project took place. Two focus groups of pastors, WLS professors, WELS leaders, and lay people (both men and women) were assembled at WLS. The goal was to have focus groups that represented the same groups who provided input in the initial research.

Two separate groups were planned in order to compare and contrast the feedback from each group. The first group met at 7:00 p.m. and the other group at 8:15 p.m. One hour was set aside to gain feedback from each group. To make the most of that hour, each participant had been provided with a fourteen-page summary of the project focusing on the purpose of the focus groups and the comprehensive plan itself. As they read the information

provided, each individual was encouraged to note what he or she believed to be the plan's strengths and weaknesses. They were also asked to bring along suggested improvements.

As the focus groups met, their responses were recorded on blank sheets of newsprint that had been taped to the walls of the meeting room. In order not to lose all the details of ideas shared, the group was also informed that a digital recording was being made of the discussion. Afterward, I produced a complete transcript of both focus group sessions.

After listening to the feedback live, producing the transcripts, and pondering what was said, I assembled a top-ten list of suggestions made by those in attendance. The numbered list below seeks to capture the ten most helpful suggestions gained from the focus groups. Each of these will become modifications to the plan as it is delivered.

1. There was an overwhelming consensus among all present that there was much worthwhile material in the program for encouraging preaching in the WELS. However, the concern was that the program not compromise the acceptance enjoyed by Preach the Word by overwhelming its concise format. To that end one pastor present urged me to study the approach a previous editor of Preach the Word had followed of producing issues with multiple brief articles each of which could then have more detailed follow-up on the Web site. Others suggested that the number of sub-issues for each key issue be shortened so that pastors can focus on the most important ones. Others weren't so concerned about the number of sub-issues as long as it was made clear that pastors were being offered a smorgasbord from which they could choose to focus according to their unique strengths and weaknesses in preaching.

2. Two or three mentioned that the introductory issue would need to give a clear overview of the entire project so that pastors could see the forest for the trees.
3. Several pastors and professors mentioned that an excellent companion piece would be developing a detailed tool for self-evaluation of preaching as well as a similar tool that pastors could use with peers and members. These tools would help pastors gain a clearer picture of preaching strengths and weaknesses. They believed that would help focus pastors' attention.

4. Repeatedly group members stated that this ambitious project could move ahead only with sufficient manpower assistance (especially technology help).
5. Several urged that it be clearer that the focus isn't merely learning to preach better to long-time members. They believed the project needs more focus on how to speak to those who are new to Christianity or new to the WELS. One pastor shared this comment from a prospect who had attended several services, "Pastor, what do you mean by 'eternal life'?"
6. Several urged the project to focus more on helping pastors understand how men and women listen to preaching with slightly different ears.
7. Pastors and professors urged more regular contact during this process through more than just Preach the Word. Looking for ways to keep in touch via e-mail or online resources could be critical to maintaining momentum.
8. Pastors and professors urged a clear definition of terms so that the project doesn't unintentionally encourage caricatures of what it means to keep Christ central in our preaching or to proclaim law and gospel.

9. One professor expressed a concern (and others agreed) that talking about “preaching Second Article truths” could be misunderstood by Lutheran preachers to mean that we don’t preach on First Article or Third Article truths.
10. Finally there was an overwhelming encouragement by the lay people present to make the most of the gifts of lay people both to provide feedback on preaching and also to share ministry tasks so that pastors have time to focus on their preaching. One pastor cautioned that we do this without losing sight of the whole picture of the doctrine of vocation.

As this project is put to work, I plan to take these excellent comments and cautions to heart. As I come to the actual writing of the newsletters, I plan to return both to the earlier detailed research and to the transcripts of the focus groups. God willing, listening carefully to such feedback now should help greatly in avoiding missteps down the road. I will also be modeling the very partnering with others that I will be encouraging pastors to do.