



## DP Vantage Point

---

*For Christ and for His world SWD Magnifies partnerships,  
Multiplies ministries, and Maximizes resources.*

Rev. Dr. John C. Wille  
SWD president

Herman Sasse writes this to Lutheran pastors in the days prior to World War 2, a time not that much different than our own:

If we want to arise out of this distress, then we must first of all blame ourselves for the failure of the past years and not the world. *We are to blame* for the failure to make our thoughts and desires reality. It is absolutely necessary that we remind ourselves that up to this point every true renewal of the church has begun with a movement of repentance. This repentance includes our readiness to place all of our plans, and especially all of our pet ideas, under the judgment of God's Word. Only that which remains in the fire of this judgment, that which is purified from all vanity, which has already inflicted so much damage in the church, can have merit in the church's new structure. Sasse, Herman (2013-01-09). Letters to Lutheran Pastors - Volume 1 (Kindle Locations 11531-11535). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle.

It is not church politics that brings about such a change, nor is it strategic plans that bring about change. What brings about change is repentance, getting down on our knees confessing our failure and our sin. As part of that repentance, it is time for us to dig into Holy Scriptures, "to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them", to see ourselves as the sinners we are, to allow the Holy Spirit an occasion to hone our appreciation for and our understanding of the Gospel. Then, in this generation, for this generation, and for the next generation it is time that we honor our vocation as God's people.

This is... **"Our Time to Confess Christ as Savior"** It is the nature of the church to confess Christ courageously and boldly, proclaiming forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus.

Confessing Christ Jesus as Savior is what early New Testament church did quite well. It is part of their identity, part of their personality. For a moment let's step back and look at what has happened in these first four chapters of the Book of Acts. One of the items that amazes me whenever I read these chapters is that the early New Testament church is growing, constantly expanding. One of the noteworthy refrains that we hear over and over again in the Book of Acts defines that:

- Acts 2: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Then again in
- Acts 5:14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.

Don't you wish that would be the refrain of the church today? These early Christians were doing something right. What was it? They were consistently and boldly confessing Christ Jesus as Savior. Here's the pattern that develops in the Book of Acts.

- Acts 1 Peter tells the group of 120 that it is time to replace Judas with "one of these men must become with us a witness [μάρτυρα] to his resurrection."
- Acts 2 Peter gives powerful testimony as he confesses his faith. The one who denied Jesus in the face of servant girl in the darkness of Maundy Thursday, now is bold as he explains to the crowds, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."
- Acts 3 Peter tells the lame beggar: "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"
- Again in Acts 3 Peter tells the Sanhedrin: "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The reaction of the Jewish leaders is startling. These are the same men who not two months prior had sentenced Jesus to die. Now they are paralyzed. St. Luke tells us "*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*" They had been with Jesus. Do people react that way after interacting with you? We will come back to that.

First, notice who is at the center of the early church's witness? Who is at the center of their life? Whose name do they confess again and again? Nothing deters them. Though Peter and John are told never to speak or teach the name of Jesus again, they cannot abide by that. They are bold. Peter says, "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*" Is that true of us?

Later as Peter and John rejoin their fellow believers, this is their corporate prayer: "*And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.*" Is that our prayer? That is an important question for us in our day.

You know we live in a time when the pastoral office has been corrupted to one degree or another. Brothers, it is time for repentance. The laity has also been distracted by peripheral piffle; namely, things that don't really mean that much in the grand and eternal scheme of things. We can so easily get wrapped up in our budgets and deficits, so overwhelmed by the declining numbers, so wrapped up in our conflicts that we have neglected to read and study Holy Scriptures. Pastors can become so wrapped up in administration, running from one meeting to the next, and not have enough time to fulfill their proper calling as shepherd of God's people. For pastors and laity alike, the question is: Are we so busy, so concerned about other priorities, budgets, governance and policies, the piffle of the church, that we have pushed the Gospel to the very fringes of our life together? Has forgiveness become just another word for us? What does the cross, the resurrection, the promise of eternal life mean to you?

How do we continue to cling to that as we live in a world that is corrupt and twisted? The prayer of the early church sets us a wonderful example to follow. "Lord, look upon their threats and grant to

your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” There are threats from within that affect our witness, that tempers our confession. There are confused priorities that take our eyes and hearts away from the heart of the Gospel. If you asked a person on the street, what would they say your congregation is about, how would they answer? If you asked an average member that same question, what would they say? While the church may need to function with business principles, the heart of the church is still Christ Jesus, crucified, risen, and ascended.

We are called to be about the message that our Lord Jesus has shared with us. Pastors and laity alike that is our core vocation. Article V of the Augsburg Confession takes us to the heart of why the church exists, says,

- That we may obtain this faith, *the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted*. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, 2] the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear 3] the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.

It is the reason that this CUW chapel exists. The reason your church was built: to be a place where Christ is believed, proclaimed and confessed. On the day that your church was dedicated these words were spoken:

- Let the doors of this church be opened for the preaching of the saving Word of God in accordance with the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, for the administration of the holy Sacraments according to the institution of Christ, and for offering to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This is... **“Our Time to Confess Christ as Savior”** It is the nature of the church to confess Christ courageously and boldly, proclaiming forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus.

[Part of the sermon for the closing service of the 2015 SWD Convention]

Rev. Dr. John C. Wille  
South Wisconsin District LCMS, President

## **A bit from the Lutheran Confessions:**

**Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VIII, par. 9** Therefore, in order that we may not despair, but may know that the Church will nevertheless remain [until the end of the world], likewise that we may know that, however great the multitude of the wicked is, yet the Church [which is Christ’s bride] exists, and that Christ affords those gifts which He has promised to the Church, to forgive sins, to hear prayer, to give the Holy Ghost, this article in the Creed presents us these consolations.

**Smalcald Articles: Power and Primacy of the Pope, Art. XXII 22]** But they cite against us certain passages, namely, Matt. 16, 18f.: *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church*; also: *I will give unto thee the keys*; also John 21, 15: *Feed My sheep*, and some others. But since this entire controversy has been fully and accurately treated elsewhere in the books of our theologians, and everything cannot be reviewed in this place, we refer to those writings, and wish them to be regarded as repeated. Yet we shall reply briefly concerning the interpretation [of the passages quoted].

**23]** In all these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles [and does not speak for himself alone, but for all the apostles], as appears from the text itself. For Christ asks not Peter alone, but says: *Whom do ye say that I am?* And what is here said [to Peter alone] in the singular number: *I will give unto thee the keys; and whatsoever thou shalt bind*, etc., is elsewhere expressed [to their entire number], in the plural Matt. 18, 18: *Whatsoever ye shall bind*, etc. And in John 20, 23: *Whosoever sins ye remit*, etc. These words testify that the keys are given alike to all the apostles and that all the apostles are alike sent forth [to preach].

**24]** In addition to this, it is necessary to acknowledge that the keys belong not to the person of one particular man, but to the Church, as many most clear and firm arguments testify. For Christ, speaking concerning the keys adds, Matt. 18, 19: *If two or three of you shall agree on earth*, etc. Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the Church, just as also for this reason the Church has principally the right of calling. [For just as the promise of the Gospel belongs certainly and immediately to the entire Church, so the keys belong immediately to the entire Church, because the keys are nothing else than the office whereby this promise is communicated to every one who desires it, just as it is actually manifest that the Church has the power to ordain ministers of the Church. And Christ speaks in these words: *Whatsoever ye shall bind*, etc., and indicates to whom He has given the keys, namely, to the Church: *Where two or three are gathered together in My name*. Likewise Christ gives supreme and final jurisdiction to the Church, when He says: *Tell it unto the Church*.

**DP Ramblings:** Some might wonder why I refer back to the church fathers. My answer to that lies in the words of Walther who writes, “**Patres fuerunt lumina, non numina, indices, non iudices, ministri, non magistris**” (the fathers were lights and not gods, teachers and not judges, servants and not masters). Walther, C.F.W. (2014-01-18). Walther's Works: Church Fellowship (Kindle Locations 3599-3601). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

A more modern take would be: we cannot know where we are going until we know where we have been. We are not confessional Lutherans in the vacuum of this present day. Rather we stand on the shoulders of the theological giants who have gone before us, who teach us what it means to be a Lutheran Christian in this world where we find ourselves. I am reminded of Ronald Reagan's comment that those who don't know history are condemned to repeat its mistakes.

## **Other SWD Tidbits...**

**1) Our New World; And so it begins...**Over the last couple weeks three of our congregations have been contacted by same-sex couples about the use of the parish for weddings and/or membership in the congregation. In at least one of the cases the pastor and his board of elders are convinced that the request came, not from individuals, but from a group attempting to create an issue.

What's the best answer when someone contacts your congregation about such matters?

- Remember Kevin Theriot's comments earlier this summer at the convention? He went to the article in each congregation's constitution that describes our Scriptural and confessional subscription. It is also advisable for your congregation to have and abide by a facility use policy.

Attached to this Vantage Point is the information that was shared some time back by the LCMS International Center regarding our confession regarding “Marriage/Church Usage Policy Suggestions”; if you haven’t, my encouragement is that your congregation take a serious look at these suggestions.

- Then, if you and/or your congregation are contacted regarding same-sex marriage and/or church usage, please contact my office. It is important for us both to track and to stand together on this issue.
- That said, I am reminded of St. Paul’s Words to the Corinthians: *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*[1 Corinthians 6:9-11]
- The culture in which we live presents us with an opportunity to witness to both sin and grace. We are not just against same-sex relationships. We are for Christ. We stand with Christ. We have been called to new life; a life defined by forgiveness purchased by the blood of Christ, a life that is different from the world in which we find ourselves. In a world focused on death, our focus is on life, on the risen Christ. Continue to hold up Christ Jesus as the living Savior.

**2) Our New SWD Education Executive:** On Sunday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Christopher Cody was installed to serve as our new SWD Education Executive. That took place at Mount Olive Lutheran MKE where Chris had served as principal.

Chris brings a wealth of experience to the position. He is well-versed in both Wisconsin Choice and cross-cultural school ministry. In the “Weekly Schools Note” Chris tells us about himself: “I was born and raised in West Allis, WI and was blessed to receive a Lutheran education in the South Wisconsin District. I attended St. Paul’s Lutheran School in West Allis, Martin Luther High School in Greendale, and Concordia University in Mequon (CUW). After graduating from CUW, I taught middle school social studies at St. Peter-Immanuel Lutheran School on the northwest side of Milwaukee until 2007. I accepted the Call to be Principal of Mt. Olive Lutheran School in 2007 where I served until last week. I am honored to work alongside of principals, teachers, and others in the schools of the South Wisconsin District.



We welcome Chris to the SWD staff!! We are blessed to have such faithful and caring teachers as Chris!!

**3) Our New Circuit Structure:** As the result of June's convention we have a new circuit arrangement. There are 26 new circuits, with a host of new circuit counselors. I don't have all the circuits memorized yet, and I'm sure you don't either. So that everyone knows exactly who is in your circuit attached to this VP is a listing of the various circuits.

As part of the visitation process Karen is contacting each of our circuit visitors to set up a time when I can visit with their elders or leadership, and/or to preach at a Sunday worship to talk about our "life together" as the part of the church in SWD.

**4) A New Experience, Lobbying on "the Hill":** So that you know, the last week of July I spent a day on Capitol Hill in DC with Jim Sanft visiting the offices of both Representative Paul Ryan and Senator Ron Johnson. Jim Sanft as you may know is the president of Concordia Health Plans. As president, Jim is part of cross-denominational group that works to defend our First Amendments rights, especially as those are impacted by the Affordable Care Act [ACA].

At his request I joined him on Capitol Hill to talk about our concerns regarding the impact of the Affordable Care Act on our Concordia Plans and our desire that both the House and the Senate pass a bill that would allow CHP and CRP to serve our LCMS workers without compromising our confession of faith.

We met with Senator Johnson himself and with a staffer for Paul Ryan. It was an interesting experience, a learning moment for me. As was suggested by President Harrison, I wore my clergy collar. The reaction to "the collar" in the halls of Congress was enlightening and humbling. There was respect and recognition of the office by most.

I make mention of this because depending on how this unpacks we may need your help in sending letters to our Representatives and Senators, urging them to support the bill. Should that be necessary we will let you know

## **5) Calls and Vacancies:**

### **Calling Congregations:**

- Beloit – Messiah (evaluating)
- Delevan – Our Redeemer (associate pastor)
- Franklin – Risen Savior (evaluating)
- Mayville – St. John (senior pastor)
- Milwaukee – Hope
- Oshkosh – Good Shepherd
- Racine – Holy Cross (evaluating)
- Racine – Prince of Peace
- Random Lake/Batavia – Immanuel & St. Stephen (evaluating)
- Sheboygan Falls – St. Paul (associate pastor)
- Town Wilson/Waldo – Trinity/St. Thomas
- Wales – Bethlehem
- Waupun – Pella
- Wauwatosa – Our Redeemer
- Wauwatosa – Pilgrim

**Pastors considering a divine call:**

- James Daub – St. Paul, Havelock, NC to Pilgrim, Wauwatosa
- Andrew Johnson – St. Paul, Lapeer, Michigan to Prince of Peace, Racine
- Jonathan Thomas – Salem, Orange, California to Our Redeemer, Wauwatosa
- Christopher Truelsen – St. John, Lanesville, IN to Pella, Waupun
- Kurt Wenzelburger – Divine Redeemer, Hartland to Christ the Rock, Rockford, IL

**Pastors accepting a divine call:**

- Keith GeRue – Trinity, Girard, IL to Trinity, Menasha (pastor/principal)
- G. Gregory Hovland – Our Savior, Green Bay to St. John, Portage
- Thomas Mickelson – Emeritus to St. Paul/St. John/Trinity, Neshkoro
- Sean Willman – St. John, Mayville to Good Shepherd, Pleasant Prairie

**Pastors declining a divine call:**

- Steven Vera – Bethlehem, Sun Prairie to Golden Valley, Golden Valley, Minnesota

**6) Prayer considerations:**

- **Peter Kelm** as he continues cancer treatments
- **Don Hackbarth** as he recovers from his 4<sup>th</sup> stroke
- **Wally Hass** as he receives cancer treatments
- **Warren Graf** as he was diagnosed with stomach cancer
- **Joan Wille**, President Wille's mom as she is hospitalized after a fall
- **President Harrison and his family** after a fire destroyed their home

May our Lord bless!!

**Rev. Dr. John C. Wille**  
**President, South Wisconsin District-LCMS**  
Office: 414.464.8100  
Mobile : 414.839.9162

***Confessing Christ for the Next Generation***

*It is time for us to be distinctly Lutheran, to plant new churches, to honor our vocation,  
and to embrace our communities.*