

11-1-2016

Making Time for Growth: Discipleship for the Families of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church

Jon Pedersen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pedersen, Jon, "Making Time for Growth: Discipleship for the Families of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church" (2016). *Doctor of Ministry Projects*. 252.

<https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/252>

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.

Please **HONOR** the copyright of
these documents by not
retransmitting or making any
additional copies in any form
(Except for private personal use).
We appreciate your respectful
cooperation.

Theological Research Exchange Network
(TREN)

P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA

Website: www.tren.com
E-mail: rwjones@tren.com
Phone# 1-800-334-8736

ATTENTION CATALOGING LIBRARIANS

TREN ID#

Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

MARC Record #

Digital Object Identification

DOI #

Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

MAKING TIME FOR GROWTH: DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE
FAMILIES OF SHEPHERD OF THE HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Written by

JON PEDERSEN

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


Randy Rowland


Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: November 1, 2016

MAKING TIME FOR GROWTH: DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE
FAMILIES OF SHEPHERD OF THE HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

A DOCTORAL PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JON PEDERSEN
NOVEMBER 2016

ABSTRACT

The Need for Sabbath and Support for the Discipling of Children

Jon Pedersen

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Seminary

2016

The goal of this ministry project is to create a strategy for confronting the challenges that threaten the fulfillment of the responsibilities laid upon the parents of children baptized at Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church in Lockport, Illinois. The problem is not just a lack of knowledge or skill in how parents can disciple their children for faith in God; equally at fault is the lack of time in a family's schedule caused by society's pressure to ignore Sabbath.

Through an examination of both classical Lutheran theology and its critique by both evangelical and Lutheran theologians, an argument is put forth that discipleship is not contrary to the Lutheran emphasis of "salvation by grace through faith." Simultaneously, a case is made that, due to our present anxiety-laden economic system, there is an increasing pressure to ignore God's gift of Sabbath and thus a tendency to forget who we are and whose we are.

This ministry initiative proposes a strategy that seeks do three things at the same time: better equip parents for the work of discipling their children, plant within families a thirst for God's gift of rest, and create a structure of support as these families begin a distinctively counter-cultural path. The equipping of parents is facilitated by new aspects of the congregation's Sunday school and confirmation instruction. The thirst for Sabbath is established through a proposed quarterly practice of Sabbath-keeping and a yearly assessment of family commitments. Parental support is given by the organization of a parents' small group. The overall goal of this initiative is to better equip parents to say "no" to those things that draw their family away from God, enabling them to say "yes" to those things that draw the family nearer.

Content Reader: Randy L. Rowland

Words: 289

To all pastors, Sunday school teachers, confirmation teachers,
and families of faith—may this work be helpful and faithful

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank both Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church and St. Peter Lutheran Church for their encouragement, support, and contribution to this project. Thank you to my wife, Sonya, who was always willing to help me discern the ideas I threw at her in this long process; Mike Markwell, who was willing to experiment with new forms of Christian education; and the other members of SOTH's leadership team who prayed for me and this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT	
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1. SHEPHERD OF THE HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH: A CONTEXT	9
PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	30
Chapter 3. THEOLOGY OF THE NEW MINISTRY INICIATIVE	52
PART THREE: PRACTICE	
Chapter 4. MINISTRY PLAN FOR NEW MINISTRY INTIATIVE	75
Chapter 5. THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE MINISTRY INICIATIVE	101
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	119
APPENDICES	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY	133

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Whether it is infant baptism or adult “believer” baptism, the fact remains: baptism has never been meant to stand on its own as a path towards right relationship with God. Following his resurrection, Jesus gathers his disciples to make one last proclamation: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit *and* teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20, italics mine). In what would become known as the Great Commission, the word “and” is critical. Making disciples is a process of both gathering (baptizing) and teaching. Jesus, in the Gospel of Mark, states the importance of “and” in a different way: “The one who believes *and* is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16, italics mine).

In the liturgy of baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, a charge is made to the parents and sponsors of a child who is to be baptized:

In Christian love you have presented this child for Holy Baptism. You should, therefore, faithfully bring her to the services of God’s house, and teach her the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. As she grows in years, you should place in her hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for her instruction in the Christian faith, that living in the covenant of her Baptism and in communion with the Church, she may lead a godly life until the day of Jesus Christ.¹

This charge reflects the importance of the “and” mentioned above. In the baptism of a child, the parents and sponsors are given the responsibility of providing for the

¹ American Lutheran Church, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 121.

completion of the Great Commission. At the end of this charge, the presiding pastor asks the all-important question, “Do you promise to fulfill these obligations?” In the dozens of baptisms that I have seen and performed, not one parent or sponsor has answered, “No.” Yet, for many parents, the resounding “Yes” does not last long. This is evidenced by the irregular attendance in “the services of God’s house” as well as the high degree of biblical illiteracy when these same children enter into our middle school and confirmation ministries. We, as church leaders of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church in Lockport, Illinois, need to do a better job of equipping our parents for the work of this ministry.

The Challenges to Fulfilling the “Yes”

Due to a host of social, technological, political, and economic issues, the place of the church in society has moved from the center of communal life to the crowded edge. Church has become one among many demands upon a busy family life.² The pressures associated with maintaining a two-income family, higher homework expectations placed upon students of all ages, increased options for extracurricular activities, and an explosion of entertainment and media have made for greater demands upon a family’s time and energy and lesser time for the faith formation of our next generation. While the intention of parents to fulfill the charge given to them at the baptism of their children may be sincere at the moment they were given, the obstacles—both obliged from the outside and self-imposed from the inside—are greater now than ever.

² Dave Daubert, *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2004), 11.

The challenge of discipling the next generation will not be addressed with simply the teaching of new techniques or appeals to “just try harder.” The challenge is something much more fundamental: finitude. For all earth-bound created beings there exists merely 168 hours in one week. On this side of eternity, there is a finite amount of time, energy, and resources. One simply cannot participate in all that is presented; choices have to be made about how we choose to invest our time and energy. One must develop the ability to say “no” to certain things in order to say “yes” to something greater.

Saying “No” in Order to Say “Yes”

During the first centuries of the Church, a large percentage of people baptized were adults who came out of the pagan religions of the Roman Empire. Those who were being baptized were called to reject the false gods of their upbringing in order to accept the God whom we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The central part of our baptismal liturgy reflects this history. The pastor begins by saying, “I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.” Afterwards he or she asks a series of six questions:

*Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?
Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?
Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?
Do you believe in God the Father?
Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?³*

³ American Lutheran Church, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 123.

The early Church understood that in order to draw close to God and follow him, we first must say “no” to those things that draw us away from God.

Thesis

The purpose of this ministry project is to create a community of parents which provides, models, and supports spiritual practices that lead to discipleship among families. However, because the work of this community of parents is done within the context of already over-committed lives, the beginning point cannot be found in the teaching of traditional spiritual practices. The beginning step of this project is a reintroduction of the concept of Sabbath as a temporary time of ceasing one’s normal activities: taking a spiritual “time-out.” Before faith practices can be passed to another generation, intentional time must be carved into one’s daily and weekly life. Sabbath, as “holy time,” must be found and honored.

An Outline of the Project

The first part of this doctoral project explains the context of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church (hereafter, SOTH) in Lockport, Illinois, and the “not so unique” cultural, theological, and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the decline of the participation of young families within its ministry. SOTH is a congregation in transition within a denomination in transition within a city in transition. Attention is given to how Lockport has evolved from a small, blue-collar industrial town to an outlying suburb southwest of Chicago, surviving a history of repeated civic disappointments that have given the impression of a perpetually underperforming town.

SOTH not only has a geographic context but a religious heritage as well. SOTH is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, a denomination that is in the midst of its own demographic and cultural challenges, as it sees its constituency aging and “brand loyalty” among its younger generations diminishing. Finally, the families of SOTH exist within a nationwide context of mounting college costs alongside rising academic standards. Increasingly demanding homework expectations and the often elusive chase of scholarship money from any available source create more and more stress on the family calendar and lifestyle.

The second part of this doctoral project is a literature review of six books that are foundational to its thesis. First is *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Perspective*, edited by Richard Bliese and Craig Van Gelder. This is a compilation of essays connected to the overall theme of what evangelism means within a Lutheran history and context. Following this review is the similar but more practical book by Lutheran pastor Michael Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church*. Both of these works recognize that a fundamental paradigm shift from membership to discipleship is necessary for the future of the Lutheran Church.

The next works to be reviewed are more scholarly in nature. Walter Brueggemann’s *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No in a Culture of Now* reintroduces the importance of the commandment to “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” Brueggemann recognizes that this commandment is a fundamental means of tying together the vertical commandments at the front edge of the Decalogue with the horizontal commandments at its end. Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* provides a connection between the misreading

of the popular Lutheran critique of works versus grace and discipleship. In this work, Willard stresses the need for not just an understanding of what Jesus taught but how he lived as well.

Finally, the last two books are a practical application of both Sabbath and the teaching of faith practices within the context of a busy family lifestyle. Presbyterian Pastor MaryAnn McKibben Dana's book, *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time*, documents her family's uneven journey of following the commandment to consecrate and respect a Sabbath day. McKibben's often amusing account outlines some of the realistic challenges that she, her husband, and three young children experienced as they learned to follow a day of rest. The last book reviewed is Pastor Rich Melheim's *Holding Your Family Together*, an introduction to a very practical series of daily faith practices that can be done within the busy lives of Lutheran families.

Following the literature reviews, the third chapter of the project centers on faith formation as an extension of the Lutheran understanding of baptism and the parental responsibilities toward their baptized children. The chapter continues with a biblical study on the importance of Sabbath and its relationship between God's gifts of rest, trust, inclusion, freedom, and identity. The final portion of this chapter is dedicated to the challenges of respecting the biblical Sabbath. These challenges include the secular imitations of Sabbath (i.e. "me-time" and "family time"), the Christian misunderstandings of Sabbath (i.e. Phariseeism and Blue Laws), and the contentious, age-old Lutheran conflation of justification and sanctification.

The fourth part of the project introduces a ministry plan for the creation of a community that presents, supports, and sustains the practices of faith formation within the

context of a busy, suburban lifestyle. However, as already stated, before faith formation can become a sustained habit, the issue of over-committed family schedules must be addressed. Thus, concurrent with the introduction of the basic faith formation practices of prayer, study, worship, service, and giving, a multi-faceted introduction to the fundamental practice of Sabbath will be made starting first in a retreat setting. The retreat will be followed by the encouraged participation in a small group dedicated to the support of faith formation (and Sabbath keeping) in the participant group. This group will be led by a group of previously trained pilot project participants.

The final chapter of the project includes a timeline for the implementation of the project, an outline of the retreat, the participants of the pilot project small group, and the resources needed for its successful completion. Concurrent to the beginning of the small group of pilot participants, a larger target group of parents will be recruited for a later retreat and kickoff of new small groups using the original pilot group as leaders. Also included in this section is an assessment tool in the form of a questionnaire given both at the project's beginning and after six months.

Without a biblically based means by which the families of SOTH can evaluate the “busyness” of their lives, the practices of discipleship (spiritual formation) will just add another layer of burden over the top of already over-burdened lives. It is as true for suburban Chicago in 2016 as it was for the Israelites of 1400 BC: given a finite measure of time, attention, and allegiance, we must learn to say “no” to things that draw us from God in order to say “yes” to those things that grant us greater communion with him. God's word through Moses still applies today: “Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. . . Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God

brought you out from there with a mighty hand. . . therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:12, 15). Without remembering to cease, we will cease to remember.

CHAPTER 1

SHEPHERD OF THE HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH: A CONTEXT

Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church is located in the small city of Lockport, Illinois, thirty-five miles southwest of downtown Chicago. A careful listening to the variety of accents of those who attend SOTH will inform the listener as to the flavor of the area. In one conversation one can hear the vestiges of the elongated vowels and slow speech common to the dialects of the Scandinavian Upper Midwest. In another conversation one can distinguish the quick cadence and nasal qualities of the early twentieth century South Chicago dialect, an accent that could just as well be from Boston, Massachusetts or Brooklyn, New York. Yet a third conversation could yield the slight Southern drawl common to many who grew up in Central or Southern Illinois. Thus, Shepherd of the Hill reflects the city of Lockport as a crossroads of white Southwest Chicago culture and the rural ethnic nature of the rest of Illinois.¹

¹ Suburban Stats, "Current Lockport, Illinois Population, Demographics and Stats, 2016," accessed May 27, 2016, <https://suburbanstats.org/population/illinois/how-many-people-live-in-lockportwhite>. Shepherd of the Hill is virtually 100% white.

Lockport, Illinois: A History of Unfulfilled Civic Potential

Lockport was founded in 1836 as the administrative headquarters of the soon to be built Illinois & Michigan (I&M) Canal. The I&M was constructed to connect the city of Chicago at Lake Michigan with the Illinois River, ninety-five miles to the west, thus completing a North American thoroughfare from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico via the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Valley.² Completed in 1848, the I&M Canal was the first step in providing the transportation infrastructure to make Chicago the city it is today. The population of Chicago at the time of the opening of the canal was 12,000 people. By 1854, that population had increased six-fold to more than 74,500.³ By the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, Chicago was the fifth largest city in the United States with a population of nearly 300,000.⁴

Lockport hosted the first of seventeen locks between Chicago and the connection of the canal to the Illinois River. Thus the city took on the name Lockport and became a suitable shipping point and center for the administration of the canal. The original offices, public landing, and grain warehouse, all built in 1838, still stand and now house a local history museum and restaurant.⁵

At the opening of the canal in 1848, it seemed as if Lockport's future as a transportation and manufacturing hub would be promising. That optimism was short-

² Michael Conzen and Kay Carr, eds., *The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor: A Guide to Its History and Sources* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988), 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, "Population of Chicago, Illinois by Decade," accessed January 25, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tablo.txt>.

⁵ John Lamb, *Images of America- Lockport, Illinois: The Old Canal Town* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999), 7.

lived, however. In 1854, the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad was completed between the western end of the I&M at LaSalle, Illinois and Chicago proper. This connection bypassed Lockport entirely, passing instead through Joliet, the next canal town five miles to the south. The builders of the railroad intended its use to extend and supplement the canal, not to compete with it. But, the speed and reliability of the train in most kinds of weather soon proved the more durable and useful alternative.⁶ This was the beginning of a series of major civic disappointments that has seemed to plague Lockport until the present.

Being touched by the railroad was the advantage that Joliet needed to replace Lockport as the local center for commerce and industry. By the 1870s Joliet was a major national center for iron and steel production.⁷ For Lockport, all was not lost, however. The construction of the canal uncovered major quarries of limestone and marble between Lockport and Joliet. These quarries were crucial sources of limestone for the rebuilding of Chicago after the great Chicago fire of 1871.⁸

Chicago's rapid growth in the later decades of the 1800s brought a tremendous challenge: what to do with the sewage waste of a population that now numbered more than 1 million people. Through a marvel of civil engineering, the flow of the Chicago River was reversed as a new and larger canal was built: the Chicago Sanitary and Shipping Canal. Completed in 1900, the canal passed within a mile of the old I&M

⁶ Conzen, *The Illinois and Michigan Canal*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

Canal, not only closing the I&M but making Lockport the first stop of the flow of bathroom waste from America's second biggest city to the Gulf of Mexico.⁹

The Chicago Sanitary and Shipping Canal did bring at least one benefit to Lockport. Because of the access to the bigger canal and the small Chicago & Alton Railroad (which by now passed through Lockport), the Texas Company (Texaco) decided to build an oil refinery in Lockport in 1911. For the next seventy years, Texaco was Lockport's biggest employer. However, in a surprise move, the company decided to close its facility in 1981 and, to add insult to injury, the site of the refinery was named as an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site shortly thereafter.¹⁰

As Lockport's industrial base began to wane in the 1970s, the construction of the growing freeway system of Chicago towards the west began to facilitate Lockport's slow conversion from a small, industrial town to a mid-sized exurb of Chicago. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Will County was one of the fastest growing counties in the United States. In the seven years from 2000 to 2007, the population grew by more than a third.¹¹ One of the final pieces of Metro Chicago's system of toll roads and freeways was the completion of Interstate 355 in 2007, connecting the Western Suburbs of Chicago to Interstate 80 near Joliet. During its construction the I-355 promoted great hope of an economic boom to match the population boom. Lockport, as with the rest of the I-355

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Gary Ward, "A History of Texaco in Lockport," Lecture of the Lockport Area Genealogical and Historical Society, Lockport Public Library, Lockport, Illinois, July 18, 2015.

¹¹ Ashley Rueff, "I-355 Extension Fails to Push Development into the Fast Lane," *Chicago Tribune* (November 26, 2012), accessed January 25, 2016, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-11-26/news/ct-met-355-broken-dreams-20121126_1_extension-interstate-highway-economic-development.

corridor cities, was required to ante up millions of dollars to help complete the project. One of the city's chief investments was in the preparation of a multi-acre lot for a proposed Target and Home Depot strip mall alongside of the toll road's exit. Sadly, as if to add one more item to the list of civic disappointments, the 2008 housing crash occurred before Target and Home Depot could lay its first course of cement blocks. They both withdrew their plans for construction. To this day, the city-built parking lots next to this undeveloped open space remain as a monument to this unfulfilled dream.¹²

DNA of Modern Lutheranism: The State Church

The history of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church parallels and reflects the history of its host city. The congregation was formed in 1965 with the joining of two predecessor Lutheran congregations. Zion Lutheran Church was founded in 1875 as a congregation of the Swedish Augustana Lutheran Synod. For ninety years it ministered to the Swedish-American immigrants on the south side of Lockport. Trinity Lutheran, founded in 1932, was a congregation of the predominately German-American immigrant denomination called the United Lutheran Church of America. By the early 1960s, it was clear that it made more sense to minister to the people of Lockport together rather than apart. In 1965, a new pastor was called to shepherd its merger and a highly visible nine-acre plot was donated to build a new sanctuary. Since its construction in 1970, a forty-foot-tall stained glass representation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has been one of Lockport's most noteworthy sites along its busiest thoroughfare. SOTH saw significant growth during the "buster" population bubbles of the 1970s and early 1980s. But as these

¹² Ibid.

demographic bubbles began to deflate, the attendance peaked and then began a slow and steady decline, in spite of its advantageous location and the rapid growth of its surrounding area.

An Unhealthy Inheritance from the European State Church

Even though Shepherd of the Hill is a merging of two separate immigrant Lutheran identities and does not claim a direct connection to a European Lutheran state church, it cannot escape the legacy of a traditional Lutheran view of mission and church planting. When waves of immigrants began making their way to the United States from the Lutheran countries of Northern Europe, the state churches of these birth countries sent “mission” pastors to the United States to begin congregations. These were church starts with a particular focus: to search for and gather the Lutherans from those specific countries. The Danish Lutheran Church in America, for instance, was founded under the mandate to “provide religious leaders, both lay and clerical, for the Danes in America.”¹³ Pastors of the Swedish Augustana Church were charged with going to areas with Swedish immigrant populations in order to minister to Swedish Lutherans. In other words, they were called to gather only their own baptized flock. Those first generations would be primarily Swedish (or Danish, Norwegian, German, Finnish) speaking. The concept of evangelism was not understood as the making of disciples of “all nations” but rather the gathering of the lost sheep of one nation, the particular host country.

¹³ E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 267.

For the modern Lutheran Church, it has been hard to escape from the DNA of the predecessor Lutheran bodies, especially in its ideas of evangelism. For the early generations of American Lutheranism, the strategy of evangelism was “boats and babies.”¹⁴ As long as Lutherans kept immigrating to the United States and as long as the Lutherans already here kept having babies to baptize and as long as those babies grew up to “self-identify” as Lutherans, the Lutheran Church could perpetuate into the successive generations. Richard Bliese, author of *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, said it well; for most Lutherans, evangelism was reduced to “finding the Lutherans in the neighborhood and inviting them to church.”¹⁵

An underdeveloped understanding of the theological roots of the Protestant Reformation in general and the Lutheran Confessions in particular has led to a skewed view of the purpose of church. In part, this misunderstanding emerges from an ecclesiology that is not well defined within the Lutheran confessional documents. Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* simply states,

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers, among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached [with one accord] in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.¹⁶

¹⁴ Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2005), 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶ Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 32.

Dallas Willard, in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, is highly critical of this minimalist view of church. He pointedly proclaims that as long as the church is only minimally defined as the place where “the gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered,” there is the tendency to believe that there is no real need for its congregants to “buy in.” Attendance for church services for a few hours per month (or year) is all that is sufficient.¹⁷

Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard saw the results of this in the Danish Lutheran Church of the late nineteenth century. Lutheran Christianity of the nineteenth century began to come apart at the seams. It had lost a sense of mission that proclaimed that “Christianity means essentially to be a missionary.”¹⁸ When the sense of mission was lost, so was the concept of evangelism. Pastor Mark Hanson, Bishop Emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, jokingly quipped, “It’s been said that the average Lutheran invites someone to church every twenty-three years. If that is not bad enough, research also shows that it takes three invitations before people who are invited come. That makes for sixty-nine years and most of us do not have that much time.”¹⁹

The influence of the state church model on the Lutheran church cannot be overstated. In a state church model, baptism is synonymous not with discipleship but with citizenship. It is a model of church that is more about being a member than being a disciple. As beautiful as the Lutheran teachings about baptism can be, baptism can also

¹⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 146-147.

¹⁸ Bliese, *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

be trivialized into an item to check off of a checklist, the same way that one applies for a birth certificate or a driver's license. In baptism, the first part of Jesus's Great Commission is fulfilled. But, more often than not, the second part (teaching what Jesus has taught) is reduced to a few years of Sunday school and two years of confirmation classes. No matter how dynamic and pedagogically sound the Sunday school or confirmation program is, it has never been intended to take on the full weight of discipleship. After all, once one has their citizenship, what more is needed?²⁰

Another inheritance from the Lutheran state church is a strong but unhealthy clericalism. The Lutheran pastor is part of a professional class of clergy, trained to do the ministry of the church while, more often than not, most of the congregation sits back and watches. When the ministry of a church is centered on the clergy, the pastor is seen as the only "real" evangelist and the only "real" minister.²¹ Christopher Wright, in his book *The Mission of God's People*, states this point very bluntly, "Believe it or not, God did not invent the church to support the clergy. . . People don't go to church on Sundays to support their pastors. . . The pastor goes to church on Sunday to support the people in their ministry."²² In a theological tradition that still claims as one of its central tenets the "Priesthood of All Believers," the Lutheran church has been a slow adapter to "equipping the saints for ministry."

²⁰ Michael Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 13.

²¹ Bliese, *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, 34.

²² Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 272.

The ELCA: A Lutheran “Big Tent”

Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (hereafter, ELCA). In the modern milieu of denominationalism, the ELCA is unusual; instead of being founded as a break off of a larger body through some sort of sectarian theological battle, the ELCA was founded by a series of mergers between smaller ethnic-based Lutheran church bodies. The ELCA is, by its very historical DNA, a Lutheran “big tent.” As waves of Northern European Lutherans made their way to the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the respective state churches of Germany and Scandinavia sent their missionaries to gather their own. These “old country” Lutheran church bodies were far from homogeneous, however. They ran the gamut from the extremely “high church” United Lutheran Church in America (who at times resembled more the Episcopalians than frontier Lutherans) to the Norwegian pietist Lutheran sect called the Haugeans, who were so distrustful of clergy that they forbade their pastors to wear robes.²³

During the first couple of generations, these Lutheran bodies were cultural touch points to the home country and culture. But soon, as children of immigrant communities began to leave and marry the children of other immigrant communities, the differences between the different ethnic bodies became less pronounced. Thus, beginning as early as 1890, a series of mergers began to take place. Finally, in 1988, the ELCA was born out of more than eighteen predecessor bodies.²⁴ Each of these predecessor bodies were

²³ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 185.

²⁴ ELCA, “ELCA Family Tree,” *ELCA.org*, accessed on February 2, 2016, http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_Family_Tree.pdf?_ga=1.23510394.1584882318.1370897192.

Lutheran in that they accepted the same Lutheran confessions. However, as mentioned above, the ecclesiology of the Lutheran confessions was so open-ended that these different bodies expressed their piety and polity in radically different ways. The ELCA could never have been formed by forcing all of its congregations into the same exact mold; it had to be “big-tent.”

A Diminishing Lutheran “Brand Loyalty”

As one would expect, with the passing of each generation, the links to one’s ethnic heritage become increasingly stretched. Thus Lutheran brand loyalty has diminished as one’s ethnic identity no longer is a reliable means of maintaining a church’s viability. In 2015, the children of Shepherd of the Hill are one more generation removed from the ethnic Northern European roots that were so fundamental within the American Lutheran DNA. The state church assumptions are no longer valid; it is no longer assumed that a person of Swedish or German ancestry is, by birth, Lutheran.

The difficulty of drawing and keeping the individuals and families of the Millennial, Gen Y, and Gen X generations is not just a problem for the ELCA. It is a challenge for all denominations. The United States is in the midst of a cultural paradigm shift. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the church was at the center of American culture. Through the early 1960s the church was more than a religious institution; it was a cultural touch point of being an American. As Dave Daubert, author of *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation*, declares, “Protestant Christianity was

the mark of being a loyal America.”²⁵ Evidence of its place in society was found in a whole host of places, from the insertion of “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance to the inclusion of a Boy Scout merit badge for “God and Country.” The church was seen as a place that not only shepherded Christians but trained citizens and blessed the culture.²⁶

The successive generations have not experienced church in the same way. At best, the general culture is now neutral about the Church; at worst it is openly hostile towards it. Since its founding in 1988, the ELCA has seen a steady decline, now counting a little less than 3.8 million congregants from its original 5 million.²⁷ Shepherd of the Hill mirrors that same decline. Its average weekend worship numbers have dropped by nearly a third since the year 2000, despite the growth of its surrounding community. Its internal demographics have edged older with now more empty nester households than families with children. What is glaringly obvious is an almost complete absence of high school youth and young adults in each of the three weekend services, in spite of confirming an average of seven to ten eighth graders every year since its inception. Church has been moved to the edge of culture, often times placed in direct competition with a vast array of other commitments and activities.

²⁵ Dave Daubert, *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2007), 11.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ ELCA.org, *ELCA Facts*, accessed February 2, 2016, <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/ELCA-Facts>.

The American Congregation: From Center to Edge

It would be impossible to list all of the reasons why church has been pushed off its exclusive perch at the center of American society. Some would place the blame on the repeal of Blue Laws. Their logic would say that if there were no open stores, restaurants or gas stations, people would be more inclined to spend Sabbath at church and with family. Others would lay the blame at the feet of sports and recreation programs that no longer respect the importance of Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings.²⁸ Yet others mourn that we are no longer the homogeneous Christian culture we once were. With the increase of immigration from countries with non-Christian majorities, the resulting multi-cultural, multi-religious civic identity has made uniformly honoring Sabbath an impossibility.

Not all of the church's loss of civic luster can be placed at the feet of cultural change. There are financial challenges that bear great weight on a family's choice to remain engaged with a church congregation. For the families of the middle class, the need for two incomes is now the norm. Not only are both parents employed, they are probably working more hours. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the average full-time worker put in 164 extra hours of paid labor per year, the equivalent of an entire extra month of employment.²⁹ Some of the reasons behind this are obvious. The median sale price for a new home sold in 2010 is 31 percent more expensive than in 1980 (prices

²⁸ In previous generations throughout many communities of the United States, Wednesday night was designated "Church Night." As a mark of cooperation between school districts and the local churches, no games or practices were scheduled after 4:00 pm on Wednesday afternoons in order to leave room for religious education.

²⁹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Practice of Saying No* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 124/333, Kindle edition.

adjusted for inflation), while the real buying power of the median salary only increased by 11 percent.³⁰ In part, the increase of price is a product of market forces outside of the control of a middle-class family. Home builders prefer to build bigger and more expensive homes. The sizes of homes in square footage built in that same thirty-year period have increased by 36 percent.³¹ It is only because of the difference in mortgage interest rates between 1980 and 2010 (13 percent and 5 percent respectively) that the increase in housing costs has not been more severely felt.

The increase of college tuition rates has had a much more severe effect on the budgetary future of the middle class household than the increase of housing costs. In 1980, the average cost for tuition, room, and board at a public university was \$7,342 (in 2015 dollars). The median household income (also in 2015 dollars) was \$46,650. Thus, the tuition, room, and board accounted for 15.8 percent of a family's income, a difficult but possible slice of a family's income to maintain. In 2010, the average cost for the same university was \$17,710, a 34 percent hit for the median family income of \$52,000. The average increase for private colleges and universities has been even more dramatic.³² Not even taking into consideration the rising costs of healthcare, utilities, taxes, etc., it is reasonable to say that for a family to afford sending their children to a college or university, more than one income is needed.

³⁰ U.S. Census, *Median Sales Prices of New Homes Sold in U.S.*, accessed on January 9, 2016, www.census.gov/const/uspricemon.pdf.

³¹ U.S. Census, *Median and Average Square Feet of Floor Area in New Single-Family Houses Completed by Location*, accessed on February 2, 2016, www.census.gov/const/C25Ann/sfttotalmedavgsqft.pdf.

³² College Board, "Tuition and Fees, Room and Board over Time of 1975-76 to 2015-16, Selected Years," *Trends in Higher Education*, accessed on January 8, 2016, www.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/tuition-and-fees-and-room-and-board-over-time-1975-76-2015-16.

Saying “No” and the Fear of Parental Malpractice

Most of the families of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church come from professional backgrounds and most have high aspirations for the academic and career possibilities of their children. But few, if any, can afford to pay 34 percent of their income towards college expenses per year per child. This creates a tremendous pressure to either search for scholarship money or look for less expensive (and less prestigious) alternatives. Elizabeth Hunter, managing editor for *Gather*, the magazine published for the women of the ELCA, speaks of the incredible pressure modern day parents are placed under. “Most parents I talk with hope to offset private school tuition or loans with academic, sports, or music scholarships. By not signing [my children] up for everything, was I dooming them for mediocrity?”³³

The push for keeping children in as many activities as possible is a relatively new kind of rat race that has descended on the modern family. Pastor MaryAnn McKibben Dana, in her book *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family’s Experiment with Holy Time*, speaks of the same sort of pressures as Hunter, “You don’t want your kids in three sports, but that’s what those around you are doing. . . Some would consider it parental malpractice not to give your kids as many opportunities as you can handle.”³⁴ McKibben warns against the perilous consequences of the constant drive to go, do and be. But it is

³³ Elizabeth Hunter, “We All Need Sabbath,” *Gather for Faith and Action* 25 (September 2015): 4.

³⁴ Mary Ann McKibben Dana, *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family’s Experiment with Holy Time* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2012), 1075/3603, Kindle edition.

so easy to fall into the trap. “I see how overloading one’s children is such a gradual process – 1000 small, well-intentioned decisions, not a single cataclysmic blunder.”³⁵

No Child Left Behind and Common Core: Too Much Homework

Not all of the blame of the familial rat race can be laid at the feet of parents. For a variety of reasons, the amount of homework assigned by schools has also tied up more and more of the precious 168 hours of the family week. In 2013, the University of Phoenix conducted a survey of more than 1000 full-time teachers regarding the amount of homework they assigned. The results were telling. Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers assigned an average of 2.9 hours per week. Middle school teachers averaged 3.22 hours per week. High school teachers averaged 3.5 hours per week in just one major subject, leaving the possibility that a high schooler could have up to 17.5 hours of homework per week.³⁶ It is not difficult to understand why high schoolers are so reluctant to get up for Sunday morning worship.

This amount of homework, especially in the lower grades, flies in the face of the recommendations from the National Education Association. The NEA recommends a limit of ten minutes per night per grade level.³⁷ For example, a first grader should have no more than ten minutes of homework assigned per night, a sixth grader sixty minutes,

³⁵ Ibid., 265/3603.

³⁶ Tanya Burden, “Homework Anxiety: Survey Reveals How Much Homework K-12 Students Are Assigned and Why Teachers Deem It Beneficial,” *U of Phoenix News* (February 25, 2014), accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.phoenix.edu/news/releases/2014/02/survey-reveals-how-much-homework-k-12-students-are-assigned-why-teachers-deem-it-beneficial.html>.

³⁷ Kelly Wallace, “Kids Have Three Times Too Much Homework, Study Finds: What’s the Cost?” *CNN News* (August 12, 2015), accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/12/health/homework-elementary-school-study/index.html?sr=tw081215toomuchhomework1030AVOPtopPhoto>.

and a twelfth grader 120 minutes. Yet in a study involving questionnaires filled out by more than 1100 parents, the amounts assigned were up to three times as much.³⁸

These studies do not address the motivation behind the teacher's desire to assign more than the recommended homework. However, it is not difficult to sense a general anxiety among school faculties caused by both the constant barrage of standardized testing and increasing parental expectations that a school is pushing hard enough to make sure that their children are as prepared as possible for the college search. Walter Brueggemann touches upon this theme in his book, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No in a Culture of Now*. With the emphasis towards teaching by testing, there is an incessant pressure on schools and students alike for constant performance. This is magnified by the additional pressure on children to be able to be admitted into the "right" schools.³⁹ This is only a subset of the general anxiety felt in the market place. Advertising and consumerism alongside of a job market tilted towards management continue to remind us that we do not produce enough.⁴⁰ The false gods of the marketplace demand endless production, "more and more bricks to store more and more surplus wealth."⁴¹ We, as parents, pass that same anxiety onto our children.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No in a Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2014), 14, Kindle edition.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

Extracurricular: No Longer Extra

The anxiety over college costs goes beyond accepting escalating academic demands on behalf of our children. It also spills into the myriad of extracurricular activities demanding the constant attention of parents. Parents become the full-time chauffeurs for endless soccer games, piano lessons, and dance classes, at least part in the desire to arm a college application with a sufficiently impressive resume of extracurricular activities.⁴²

One of the major obstacles that leads to the increasingly full calendars of the suburban family is the explosion of options for youth sports. Over the course of the past century, professional and intercollegiate sports have taken on a progressively more sacred role in American society. Craig Harline, in his book, *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl*, puts forth the theory that for the American consumer Sunday football is not an ignoring of religion but rather a new form of the “sacred.” What once was considered “worldly” has now become sacralized.⁴³ Dr. Rolf Jacobson of Luther Seminary agrees with him: “It is easy to assert that based on how much money, time, and emotion we devote to following and participating in sports, sports is a god in our culture.”⁴⁴

The newest wrinkle in our obsession with sports comes in the field dominated by youth sports in general and independent club sports in particular. A summary of a series

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Craig Harline, *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 333.

⁴⁴ Rolf Jacobson, “Sports Fandom: Worthless Idol and Wonderful Thing,” *Word & World: Theology for Christian Ministry* 35 (Fall 2015): 319.

of interviews with Christian youth leaders in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area confirmed this concern. In their professions, youth sports are consuming more and more time of the youth involved.⁴⁵ Interscholastic sports have always had a draw for many junior high and high school youth. But the advantage of interscholastic sports has always been that there is some sort of publicly accountable regulation as to the length of season, number of games, and length of practices. Within the relatively new field of “club” sports, there is little or no regulation. The club sport world exerts a tremendous pressure on the family system in financial and time commitments, not to mention the physical toll taken on the athletes themselves.⁴⁶ The problem here is not with the athlete, it is with the parent. Some parents have an unrealistic picture of the benefits of sports for their children, especially in its ability to win scholarships and an opportunity to play at the professional level. According to these youth leaders, many of the parents are “chasing dreams through their children.”⁴⁷

Shepherd of the Hill: “Called Out” of Its History and Surrounding Culture

One of the definitions of the word “church” is a body of Christ that is “called out” of its surrounding community. Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church has been “called out” of Lockport, Illinois and thus carries with it some of Lockport’s challenges. Like Lockport, it can tell a frustrating story of unrealized potential. Like Lockport, its people are linked to the greater Chicago area. Like Lockport (and the rest of suburban America),

⁴⁵ Mark Granquist, “Christian Youth Ministries and Youth Sports: A View from the Trenches,” *Word & World: Theology for Christian Ministry* 35 (Fall 2015): 341.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 342-343.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

the families of SOTH face an ever-increasing temptation to over commit, trying to stuff more and more obligations into a finite set of hours and days.

Shepherd of the Hill has also been called out of the theological and historical “big tent” of the ELCA. Its historical DNA, for better or worse, is linked to a five hundred-year-old state church mentality that values membership over discipleship and an attitude of gathering one’s own over reaching out beyond Lutheran circles. As fewer of her youth self-identify in the traditional Lutheran ways that connect to countries of origin, the historical and cultural place for church has shifted from the center of communal life to the crowded edge. With each passing generation, the Lutheran church is losing more brand loyalty. Yet, the first step of solving any problem is to admit that there is a problem. The second is to define it. Once defined, the next step is to search for solutions prayerfully and systematically.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the development of the thesis of this project, a number of resources became critical to its process. Of course the following six books are not the only sources for the writing of this project, but they are fundamental in its three components. First, they consider the challenge of discipleship within a Lutheran context. Second, they highlight the importance of both the traditional spiritual disciplines (e.g. solitude, silence, prayer, service, worship, study, etc.) and a space in one's life that these disciplines can occur, i.e. a reclaiming of the concept and practice of Sabbath as "holy time." Third, they provide a practical application of Sabbath and spiritual disciplines within the lives of young families. Each of these three components is necessary to guide the thesis of this project from theory into praxis. The six works of literature are reviewed in order of the above mentioned vital components.

The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution

by **Richard Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, eds.**

In the forward of *Evangelizing Church*, Mark Hanson, then the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of American, writes, "Read this book at your own

risk.”¹ Very simply, this series of seven essays around the theme of becoming an evangelizing church challenges the very core of what many parishioners and pastors have experienced as what it means to be a Lutheran. This book is nothing less than a prophetic call to reexamine the way that Lutheranism has taken the core of what it means to be Lutheran, i.e. justification by grace through faith, and made of it a call to a passive and individualistic faith without a clear reason for discipleship or evangelism. Bliese writes, “Lutherans seem to lack one essential requirement for fulfilling their missionary task. They lack a compulsiveness for sharing the good news of God’s Kingdom in Jesus Christ.”² In other words, Lutherans lack a “why.” So much emphasis has been placed on God’s activity in salvation that an expression of what is (or should be) humanity’s activity is lost. We, as a Lutheran Church, have so completely cut the connection between salvation and discipleship (as well as between justification and sanctification) that “word and sacrament become something just for us and the focal point of our life together becomes what happens within our building provided by a professional minister. . . . We reduce the church to a distribution of grace.”³

The historical reasons for this are easy to understand. Martin Luther’s emphasis of grace over works was a necessary corrective of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church of his day. Over the course of time, the correction became the normative. As each generation passed with this new normative, it often produced a monster of a completely different stripe: a passive, mechanistic denomination that became satisfied

¹ Bliese, *Evangelizing Church*, ix.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

with “going through the motions” of baptism, confirmation, word, and sacrament.

Lutheranism developed the tendency to become what Kierkegaard mourned as a “church that had forgotten that it was a missionary.” Good theology without leading to a life of action was not enough.⁴

In language reminiscent of Martin Luther’s rail against the Roman Catholic Church, Bliese and his colleagues decry a miserable seven-fold captivity of the word and sacrament in the Lutheran church. These seven prisons include: a misplaced exclusivity on the work that takes place on Sunday morning; hollow ritual confusing performance ritual with genuine engagement with a living God; tribal prisons that lock the message of Jesus into the social-economic culture of white, middle class, Northern European ancestry; an addiction to clericalism; a reduction of the Gospel to a mere “gospel of sin management”;⁵ and a love of power and success.⁶

The parts of the above list that correspond most closely to the thesis of this project are the misplaced exclusivity of Sunday morning (what *The Evangelizing Church* calls “the Sermonic Cage”), the tribal prisons, and the addiction to clericalism. While the Sermonic Cage and clericalism are intimately connected, there are important differences. Worship is a critical component of the faith practices of nearly every Christian community. However, when evangelism and discipleship are restricted to the professional activity in one liturgically specified time, limited to one morning per week, the church has lost its way. In the same way that one cannot restrict communication with

⁴ Ibid., 24-25.

⁵ This phrase comes from Dallas Willard’s book, *The Divine Conspiracy*.

⁶ Ibid., 42-43.

one's spouse to one hour per week and hope to grow in love, one's relationship with God belongs in the realm of all 168 hours of the week.

The Sermonic Cage is exacerbated by the professional nature of Lutheran worship. Music is provided by a professional organist, an amateur choir is directed by a trained choir director, most of the prayers are written by paid church staff and the sermon is given by a well-educated professional clergy. The Lutheran addiction to clericalism creates the impression that the only "real" communicator of the Gospel and the only "real" diaconal minister is the trained and ordained pastor. The self-imposed ethnic, social-economic tribal prison reduces the mission of the church "to a geographically and contextually defined playground inside of which members feel comfortable and safe."⁷

As with the prophets, the call is not only to point out the shortcomings of the church, but also to propose viable solutions. Once again, *The Evangelizing Church* returns back to the accepted norms of the Lutheran faith by quoting Luther himself. For Martin Luther, the definition of evangelism is "what promotes Jesus as good news for people." Even more simply put, "Evangelism is Jesus coming to people."⁸ The renewed call of the Lutheran church needs to be a reclamation of the central doctrine of "The Priesthood of All Believers." When the professional clergy returns to Paul's explanation of the pastor's role in Ephesians 4:12, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry," they become the means by which God calls, liberates, equips and sends the church. A new emphasis on both baptism *and* catechism must be made. Bliese and his colleagues

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 45.

conclude, “The means of grace will function evangelically in our post-Christian culture when adult baptism and catechism become the norm for which other forms of baptism and teaching for children draw their lessons.”⁹

The call to follow Jesus was not given to an institution but to human beings. It is a gift and a call to every baptized person. Therefore the equipping of every member to know and share their faith is the central task of every congregation.¹⁰ The gifts and responsibilities given to ordained pastors are not higher or greater than the gifts given to all members of the body of Christ.¹¹ Worship alone will not develop these gifts. It must be done in relationship with discipleship.

Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church

by Michael Foss

Michael Foss’s introduction to *Power Surge* both lays out the crisis in contemporary American Protestantism and the potential solution. Foss states, “Most mainline and established churches are dying because they only try to take care of their members. Three out of four will close over the next 25-30 years. . . . Most mainline churches are already irrelevant to the needs of postmodern people.”¹² A little later in the same chapter, he proclaims, “Churches are losing members in droves. All too many folks

⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹¹ Ibid., 116.

¹² Foss, *Power Surge*, 2.

whose names still fill churches' membership rolls have long since slipped out the back door. The two most common reasons given: burnout and boredom.”¹³

The solution, at least in part, comes also within those first few pages. All that the church needs comes from the power of the risen Christ who works through the people who consciously open their lives to Him in discipleship: “When we teach, train, equip, empower, encourage, support, and challenge people in their calling as disciples of the risen Christ, the power of Christ’s life surges through the church.”¹⁴ The key to this is a change of paradigm from a membership model of church to a discipleship model.

Like the authors of *Evangelizing Church*, Foss sees the vestiges of the European state church as serious impediments towards moving forward in a world dominated by postmodern pluralism. Church membership and clericalism are both disincentives towards the real work of the church: discipleship.¹⁵ Membership is fundamentally different from discipleship. When one thinks of church membership, the mind inevitably wanders to the other affiliations in our lives that require membership (e.g. health club, Costco). Membership in these settings speaks of one’s financial relationship as obligated dues. Discipleship treats our financial interaction with the church as stewardship. Membership unavoidably suggests that the given relationship between individual and institution is for privilege and prerogative. Discipleship is, at its heart, about taking up

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

one's cross and serving in the name of Jesus. Simply put, membership is about getting while discipleship is about giving.¹⁶

The paradigm shift is not just between membership and discipleship; it is in the very role of the pastor. A pastor who sees his or her call as “doing” the ministry of the church is no longer needed or desired. Rather, the pastor must reclaim the call to “equip the saints for the work of ministry,” drawing from the wellspring of his or her own relationship with the living Christ.¹⁷

There are two aspects of Christian leadership in which Foss focuses the majority of his work: the importance of spiritual grounding within Christian leadership as it seeks to cast vision in faithful, pragmatic ways and the nuts and bolts of what Christian discipleship looks like in an easily understood way. While the former is incredibly important, it is not directly applicable to the present project. The latter serves not only as an easily understandable way to teach discipleship, it also models what Foss means by a faithful and pragmatic way to communicate vision.

The name of Foss's book, *Power Surge*, is an acronym that incorporates six discipleship practices: prayer, worship, reading of Scripture, service, reunion of small groups, and giving.¹⁸ Over and over again, Foss teaches that these practices must begin with Christian leadership: “When prayer is as natural as breathing to those who lead, it soon becomes as natural as breathing to those who follow. When prayer is a wellspring

¹⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁸ Prayer, worship, and reading provide the consonants for the word “power.” The words service, reunion, and giving form the word “surge.”

from which the leader obviously drinks living water, all those around him or her begin to thirst for some of the same.”¹⁹

Regarding the importance of worship, Foss states, “No stately liturgy, hallowed and ancient hymns. . . can make up for clergy who simply go through the motions.”²⁰ Service within a congregation can be best promoted and encouraged by a leadership that knows how the congregation is contributing to the well-being of God’s world. Here is a place where the difference between membership and discipleship is made obvious. In a culture of membership, it is assumed that the church staff and key volunteers are there to serve the membership (or serve the community on the membership’s behalf). A culture of discipleship teaches that all are called to follow Jesus, the “one who has not come to be served but to serve.”²¹

The reunion of spiritual friendships, i.e. small group ministry, is a critical part for spiritual growth. Once again, even the leadership is expected to be involved in these means for the sake of mutual accountability and conscientious practice of the marks of discipleship. Finally, the importance of giving is emphasized, with tithing of one’s take-home pay in support of ministry and mission as a reasonable expectation.²²

Foss’s six marks of discipleship form a central tenet in the teaching of the young families of this ministry project. Equally as important, however, is the expectation that the leadership of SOTH will practice these same tenets and draw from their strength.

¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²⁰ Ibid., 95.

²¹ Ibid., 101.

²² Ibid., 104.

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives

by Dallas Willard

The central claim of Dallas Willard's *Spirit of the Disciplines* is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing: following Him in the overall style of life he chose for Himself, a style that included solitude, prayer, simple living, intense study of God's word, and service to others. What we are currently doing as church is not reliably producing people who are like Christ and thus we need a deeper insight into this constant interaction with the Kingdom of God as a real part of our daily lives. Willard names this a "transforming friendship with Jesus."²³

Like both *Evangelizing Church* and *Power Surge*, Willard articulately defines the difficulty that most of our Christian traditions have in accepting that we have a part to play in our becoming Christ-like. In an especially applicable criticism of Lutheran theology, we have confused works and merit. Salvation is more than just the forgiveness of sins, it is the power to live a new, Christ-infused life. Luther himself taught faith as a living thing, "O this faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing. . . It does not even ask whether good work should be done; but before the question can be asked, it has been done already."²⁴ When we read Luther correctly, says Willard, we understand faith to be a powerful life force giving the means for a transformation of a person's character and personality and an extra-human power over the evils of this present age.²⁵ If all that is

²³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix-xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

necessary for the formation of spiritual life is the “teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments,” as is stated in the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession*, the mindset will automatically follow that there is no requirement except the weekly attendance of church services.²⁶

The solution for this kind of transformation is more than just doing as Jesus “said”; it is doing as Jesus “did.” When one looks at the skill of a professional athlete, it is obvious that behind Ted Williams’s 1941 .406 season or Stephan Curry’s eleven 3-pointers in one game, there are innumerable hours of practice. They have spent a lifetime of unseen preparation of both mind and body to be able to do what they are doing. Even being the Son of God, Jesus was not relieved of such preparation to do as He did.²⁷ Willard proclaims, “To live as Christ lives is to live as He did all His life.”²⁸ In that way teachings such as “The Sermon on the Mount” are not just a list of teachings to emulate but “a statement of the life we will live when the Holy Spirit is getting its way with us.”²⁹

Willard’s fundamental challenge for the leader of any church community is a simple question, “What is your group’s plan for teaching your people to do everything Christ commanded?”³⁰ This becomes the chief task of practical theology: to “develop for practical implementation the method by which women and men interact with God to fulfill the divine intent for human existence.”³¹

²⁶ Ibid., 146-147.

²⁷ Ibid., 3-5.

²⁸ Ibid, 5.

²⁹ Ibid, 8.

³⁰ Ibid, 16.

For Willard, the unseen work behind the scenes can be found in the practice of the age old spiritual disciplines of the Christian tradition. These bodily disciplines are the means by which we can draw from the power of God; they are our means to “plug in.”³² These spiritual disciples are the activities of mind and body that can bring our total being into effective cooperation and under divine order.

Willard divides the disciplines into two categories: the disciplines of abstinence and the disciplines of engagement. As one might surmise, the disciplines of abstinence include solitude, silence, fasting, simple living, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. The disciplines of engagement include study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission. Here is where Willard separates himself from the work of Foss in *Power Surge*. Where Foss only emphasizes the need for the disciplines of engagement, Willard begins with the importance of solitude and silence: “It is solitude alone that opens up the possibility of a radical relationship with God that can withstand all external events up to and beyond death.”³³

What is of unique importance with regard to the present thesis is found in the disciplines of abstinence. What we do in abstinence is to “keep a steady resolve to give up anything that comes between ourselves and God.”³⁴ The language of abstinence comes incredibly close to the language of Sabbath keeping. The fundamental question asked in observing the Sabbath is, “What must I cease or what must I say ‘no’ to in order

³¹ Ibid., 15.

³² Ibid., 55.

³³ Ibid., 101.

³⁴ Ibid., 158.

to say ‘yes’ to a deeper relationship with God?” It would be a stretch to say that solitude and silence are synonymous with Sabbath, but they certainly overlap. The fundamental concern of this project is to create a community of discipleship within the families of Shepherd of the Hill in a way that does not add to already overburdened lives. Thus, before small group fellowship and the rest of the disciplines of engagement can be done, a serious conversation about Sabbath, i.e. disciplines of abstinence, must take place.

Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now

by Walter Brueggemann

Walter Brueggemann, in this very short and dense book, addresses a subject that most of the rest of Christian society has ignored for more than a generation: what to do with the commandment that bids us to “respect the Sabbath and keep it holy.” After the repeal of most of the nation’s Blue Laws and as we look on as quaint the somewhat arbitrary Sunday prohibitions to play cards or go to the movies by the pietism of previous generations, Sabbath seems to be a product of another cultural planet. For most, it is easily the commandment of the Decalogue judged most “out of touch” and irrelevant in today’s lifestyle. Brueggemann makes the case, however, that it is far from irrelevant. In fact it is the commandment that forms the “crucial bridge” between the vertical commandments of the first tablet and the horizontal commandments of the second.³⁵ As is common in much of Brueggemann’s work, he emphasizes how the call to rest and remember is a call to resist the anxiety of oppressive economic systems. Christians from both the liberal and conservative sides of the theological spectrum find this to be the most

³⁵ Brueggeman, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 1.

difficult commandment to follow because, like Israel in Pharaoh's Egypt, they are both plugged into an economic system that demands more and more production.³⁶ As Jewish scholar Michael Fishbane explains, "Sabbath . . . concerns the maintenance of a distinct faith identity in the midst of a culture that is inhospitable to all distinct identities."³⁷ It counteracts a cultural mindlessness and "cultivates a theological mindfulness" that urges people of faith to divest from the endless demands of our economic reality.³⁸

Brueggemann separates his book into four chapters that outline four distinct purposes of the Sabbath as found in the Old Testament. He begins with how Sabbath is framed in Exodus 20: a means to resist a return to the anxiety of the oppression of Pharaoh's economic demands. The "other gods" spoke of in the First Commandment pertain to the gods of Egypt that demand endless produce. These were the gods who required more and more bricks (Exodus 2) to store more and more surplus wealth.³⁹ There was no Sabbath rest in Egypt. The First Commandment is the declaration that the God of the Exodus is unlike all the gods the former slaves had known. This was a God who was a Sabbath-keeping God. YHWH rested on the seventh day and keeps that day holy (Exodus 20:11). This is a God who has no hunger for increasing the store of commodities. This is a God who hears the voices of those left behind in the system.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 93/1231.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Honoring the Sabbath is a means by which we continuously choose between the gods of restlessness and a God of rest. The gods of restlessness are typified by the many supervisors and taskmasters who keep telling us that we do not produce enough as well as an educational system that puts on incessant pressure to be admitted to the “right” schools and thus lays down a seemingly endless series of tests and extracurricular proofs.⁴¹

Under the systems of Pharaoh “we are bound to dishonor our parents, killing violence, and the general acquisitiveness pushed upon us by advertising and economic competition.”⁴²

The following chapter examines a different use of Sabbath in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy, the emphasis on the Sabbath commandment is not as much about rest as equality. “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there . . . therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15). On Sabbath you do not have to do more, sell more, control more, or know more than your neighbors. The call in all of Deuteronomy is to remember. If you fail to remember the coercive system of Pharaoh that God rescued you from, you are doomed to repeat it in endless competition.⁴³ When one is free from the endless competition, one is then also free in order to serve the widow, orphan and foreigner.

The remaining two uses of Sabbath indicated by Brueggemann are a resistance to exclusivity, as outlined in Isaiah 56:3-8, and a resistance to multitasking found in Amos

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 30.

⁴³ Ibid., 40.

8:4-8. The former looks at the prophet's reminder to the post-exilic community that those who once were excluded, i.e. the foreigner and the eunuch, are invited to God's holy mountain. The only prerequisite is that they keep the Sabbath. In other words, as long as they also take time to rest and remember the God of restfulness and freedom, they too should be included.⁴⁴ The latter, a resistance to multitasking, is a rail against a misuse of Sabbath that sees it as only "punching the time clock." The prophet Amos points the finger toward those who do not allow the rest and remembering of Sabbath to inform their economic choices. "Hear, this, you that trample on the needy . . . saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain . . . ' Surely I will never forget any of their deeds" (Amos 8:4-5, 7). Brueggemann sees this constant watching of the clock in our present obsession with efficiency and multitasking in the "drive to be more than we are, to control more than we do, to extend our power and our effectiveness."⁴⁵ The result is a "divided self with full attention given to nothing."⁴⁶

As this project seeks to create a community of discipleship among the young families of SOTH, the reclaiming of some sort of Sabbath must be part of the conversation. If there is no withdrawal or divestment from society's constant pressure to produce, there will be no room for discipleship to occur.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time

by MaryAnn McKibben Dana

While on vacation with her husband and three small children, MaryAnn McKibben, a Presbyterian pastor from the suburbs of Washington D.C., felt a particular call to reexamine how she and her family were living the hurried life of a young suburban family. "I feel muddled by my own spiritual contradiction. I want my children to live an unhurried childhood even as I jam tiny feet into shoes while scooting out the door so we won't be late."⁴⁷ She was observing the consequences of living a life under the constant drive to go, do, and be. "Over the course of 1000 small, well-intentioned decisions" she and her husband had been gradually overloading their children.⁴⁸

McKibben and her husband then set out on a year-long experiment to honor the Sabbath. In her study of what that was to mean, she was struck by Moses's command to remember that the Israelites were once slaves in Egypt and thus not to fall back into slavery. McKibben realized that her slavery was to a Type A personality, the desire to control any and all things.⁴⁹

The McKibben Dana family began the process of discerning how Sabbath could be done in their familial life. What day? How often? How strict? What constituted work? How would they handle the weeks when honoring the Sabbath was not an option? She recognized immediately that these initial decisions could be confusing and "wishy-washy"; McKibben wrote, "It was like saying to God, 'We'll trust you to provide what

⁴⁷ McKibben, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, 243/3603.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 272/3603.

we need, and we want to put this practice at the center of our lives. *So we'll be penciling you in when it's optimal for us.*"⁵⁰ As she and her family began observing a weekly Sabbath, McKibben soon discovered she was not indispensable for the world; the world would survive her absence for 24 hours a week.⁵¹

Sabbath creates a special relationship with time. Rabbi Abraham Heschel, in his seminal book, *The Sabbath*, calls the Sabbath a "palace of time."⁵² Sabbath observation flies in the face of what the rest of society deems valuable, namely achievement. Instead, Sabbath declares that relationships with God, family and neighbor have the supreme value. Our calendars, not unlike our checkbooks, are spiritual document and even statements of faith. Our calendars betray what we are afraid to say out loud, "We believe in self-importance—keeping up appearances of having it all together. We believe we are in control of our own lives."⁵³ McKibben then goes on to say later that Sabbath is "not a date but an atmosphere" created to make room for something lovely to happen.⁵⁴

McKibben's honest appraisal of how her family had fallen into the middle-class suburban rat race serves as a beginning point of how all families can honestly assess the calendars of their lives. She acknowledges the incredible pressure put on the parents of school age children. "You don't want your kids in three sports, but that is what the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 318/3603. Italics mine.

⁵¹ Ibid., 700/3603.

⁵² Ibid., 506/3603.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 756/3603.

families around you are doing . . . Some would consider it parental malpractice not to give your kids as many opportunities as you can handle.”⁵⁵

After a few months of weekly Sabbath observation, one of the values that went into the decisions for Sabbath day activities was the resolution to avoid hurry. McKibben and her husband could agree to do nearly anything on the Sabbath, e.g. chores, errands, Christmas decorating, “as long as it was completely unhurried.” They realized that hurry sucks the joy out of what should be pleasurable activities. God gave the Sabbath as a type of vaccination against the breakneck speed of life, a sort of “spiritual snow day” in the rat race of life.⁵⁶

Reflecting back on the year that McKibben and her husband had learned to observe Sabbath, one of the most significant things garnered was that there is no such thing as an abundance of time. “Saying ‘yes’ to something good has meant saying ‘no’ to something else that is also good.”⁵⁷ Sabbath teaches a holy scarcity, an acceptance of finitude. There will never be enough time on this side of eternity. “Even when we focus only on the things that are good and nourishing and important for ourselves, our families and the world, there is still not enough time . . . Our hope is not in there being enough time but in there being enough grace to muddle through the scarcities of our days.”⁵⁸ This is a truism on which a community of discipleship hangs. There is not enough time to do all things, even good things. Sabbath is a daily reminder of this.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1075/3603.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1807/3603.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3247/3602.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 3305/3602.

*Holding Your Family Together: Five Simple Steps to Help Bring Your Family Closer
to God and Each Other*

by **Rich Melheim**

Pastor Rich Melheim, in his book *Holding Your Family Together*, sets forth a vision that would bring a smile to the lips of any parent: “Imagine raising a daughter who wouldn’t think of going to bed without talking to you about her highs and lows every night, even though she’s 16 . . . [and] a son who won’t turn out the lights without asking you about your day, praying [with] . . . and blessing you.”⁵⁹ The question is: how can one bring that vision into reality? Melheim acknowledges a sad fact: while most parents want to give the best to their children, few create the space in their daily lives to make that happen. “Most parents who dedicated their children to God long ago haven’t dedicated a single night in their home to God ever since.”⁶⁰ In his book, Melheim sets out a way to build faith in the family using a daily regiment called the “Faith 5.” The Faith 5[©] consists of sharing one’s highs and lows, reading Scripture, applying that Scripture to the highs and lows, praying, and blessing each other.

The early parts of *Holding Your Family Together* build a physiological basis for much of what Melheim teaches. He explains with sufficient detail the relevant chemical systems to support his initial suggestion. This leads to a surprising suggestion: before

⁵⁹ Rich Melheim, *Holding Your Family Together: Five Simple Steps to Help Bring Your Family Closer to God and Each Other* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publisher, 2013), 146/4152, Kindle version.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3288/4152.

beginning the evening Faith 5[©], encourage a good pillow fight.⁶¹ Melheim uses the rest of the book to break down the importance of each step in detail.

Defending his position not only theologically but neurologically and sociologically, Melheim states that sharing the highs of the day reminds us of the truth that God is good all of the time: “Sharing them every night surrounded by people who celebrate with us plants seeds of gratitude and . . . is a great and godly way to grow a grateful adult.”⁶² Equally important is the creation of a sacred and safe space to share our lows. The sharing of our lows counteracts what Melheim names “The Voldemort Effect.” It drains the power of evil by naming it and bringing it out into the open. Melheim quotes a number of psychological studies that name the stress-related symptoms that nearly one in three children experience, e.g. headaches, stomachaches, trouble with sleeping. The benefit is not just for those who are sharing, but for those listening as well. Active listening to the lows of others allows the listener to focus on something else than his or her own pain.⁶³ Melheim notes, “Admitting lows before God and each other will show your family that God is bigger than their biggest complaints . . . [and] that it is OK to verbalize what is on their hearts.”⁶⁴

The second step, the reading of Scripture, helps begin a process of wise discernment within our children; it enables them to begin to distinguish what is truth and what is “sawdust and manure.” Included in this section are some sobering statistics about

⁶¹ Ibid., 442/4152.

⁶² Ibid., 752/4152.

⁶³ Ibid., 771/4152.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the amount of “screen time” our children watch. Some studies suggest that children are watching as much as 7.5 hours of media per day. With that media comes an average of thirty-eight sexual references and nearly twenty-two murders each day. Returning to his fascination with brain science, Melheim reminds the reader that the things in which we engage the most of our time are the things that tend to hardwire our brains.⁶⁵

Step three involves the application of the reading of Scripture to the highs and lows of the day. The fundamental question asked is, “What is God trying to say to my life? What does this verse mean for me?” To counteract our tendency to skim along the surface of life, this step invites the family to go deep.⁶⁶ In “going deep,” the child is developing a capacity for the retention of a memory of faith, thereby fulfilling Moses’ imperative to the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy: to remember.

Step four is praying about the day’s highs and lows. “Prayer teaches your children that they can go to you and together they can go directly to the throne of God. They learn to get their praises and problems off their chests and give the trouble of the day over to God.”⁶⁷

The final step of the Faith 5[©] is to bless. Blessing is more than just to wish well for someone. “Blessing has the power to change realities and usher in new ones . . . Spoken in faith and received in faith, it has the power to transform lives and invent a future of hope.”⁶⁸ Blessing does not originate with the person who blesses, it flows from

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1222/4152.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1756/4152.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2390/4152.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2749/4152.

God, as giver. In blessing, we become partners of God, naming and claiming the one being blessed as children of God and calling them to live up to that name.

The nightly pattern of Faith 5[©] accomplishes one of the central goals of this thesis. It gives the parents of this community of discipleship a concrete place to begin the lifelong task of fulfilling the promises they made at the baptisms of their children.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF THE NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE

Evangelical academic, Dallas Willard, in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in Christ*, defines discipleship in very straightforward terms. Willard writes, “Discipleship is learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I.”¹ For Willard, discipleship is an apprenticeship of Jesus that includes not just classroom learning but an “on-the-job” training as well. Many, if not most, Lutheran theologians look upon such attempts to cultivate growth in the Christian life with a great deal of skepticism. The history of Lutheran theology has always had a very ambivalent relationship with the concept of discipleship as it is defined in modern evangelicalism. Lutheran scholar, Robert Kolb, claims that he could not even find the word “discipleship” mentioned in Lutheran writings until Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, over four hundred years after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.² Luther himself doubted the human ability to contribute to such growth:

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in Christ* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 283.

² Robert Kolb, “Discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition,” lecture given at the Fourth Annual Crossing Conference, January 23, 2012, accessed June 21, 2016, <http://concordiatheology.org/2012/03/discipleship-in-the-lutheran-tradition/>.

“He saw that the nature of the old Adam and Eve always was to exploit programs designed to improve the lot of nominal Christians.”³ In other words, Luther carried the strong suspicion that humanity’s attempt to emulate Jesus could all too easily become a type of “do-it-yourself” righteousness which violated the central core of his understanding of the gospel message: “For by grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In the classic Lutheran understanding of the Law-Gospel dialectic, God continues to use the Law to reduce sinners to nothingness and then the Gospel to create new beings in Christ. Understood as such, discipleship is something that God does to the believer, rather than something the believer does for God.⁴ Representing this branch of Lutheran scholarship, Professor Mark Mattes of Grandview Lutheran University states it as such, “The degree to which we are where God wants us ultimately to be is solely in God’s hands. . . and not in our estimation. Luther’s insight is always that old beings are prone to self-righteousness, especially in religious and moral matters.”⁵

Membership Versus Discipleship

Also problematic for much of Lutheran scholarship is any kind of separation between church member and disciple. Willard acknowledges that discipleship, defined as an “apprenticeship of Jesus,” creates a two-tiered dimension within a church community.

³ Mark Mattes, “Discipleship in Lutheran Perspective” *Lutheran Quarterly* XXVI (2012), 146.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

According to Willard, it is possible that one can be a Christian (i.e. a member of a congregation) and not become a disciple of Jesus Christ.⁶ Lutheran pastor Michael Foss, in his book *Power Surge*, agrees. The foundation of Pastor Foss's program for church growth is predicated on the distinction between membership and discipleship. Within the classical branch of Lutheran scholarship, this sounds suspiciously close to a spiritual hubris based upon the human effort of a few over against the Christian lives of the rank-and-file member: a sort of "super-Christian" category of believer somehow more justified before God than the rest. For those espousing this classical Lutheran view, when a distinction between member and disciple is made, the promises of God made to *all* in baptism are called into question.

A Lutheran Definition of Discipleship

Ironically, it is the non-Lutheran, Dallas Willard, who reaches back into Luther's teachings to debunk Lutheran suspicion about discipleship. Willard uses Luther's teachings about faith and God's ability through faith to change the lives of those who believe in him to prove his point. According to Willard, Luther saw in faith a powerful life force within an individual, capable of transforming one's character and personality. Willard quotes Luther at length, "O, this faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing! It is impossible that it should not be ceaselessly doing that which is good. It does not even ask whether good works should be done; but before the question can be asked, it has done them."⁷

⁶ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 291.

⁷ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 40.

Thus, it is entirely possible to speak of discipleship within a Lutheran context. In fact, given its centrality in the life, ministry, and commission of Jesus, it is necessary to do so. However, given the particular sensitivities of Lutheran theology towards any kind of “self-righteousness,” the purpose and goal of discipleship must be carefully defined. It must be clearly understood that discipleship does not answer the question of how we are justified before God. Rather, it answers the question of the purpose of one’s life as a faithfully called and baptized believer in Jesus. For Luther, the fact that we no longer need to justify ourselves liberates our nature; we can love and honor God for God’s own sake and not our own. Paul Althaus, in his book *The Theology of Martin Luther*, states it this way, “[The person saved by faith] is now completely free to use all he has, can do, and suffer to serve his brother.”⁸ Thus, the molding of the character and personality of a believer is critical as we live out our lives as redeemed children of God.

Here, a careful vocabulary regarding discipleship must be maintained to clearly communicate a correct Lutheran understanding of discipleship. Long-time Luther Seminary professor, Gerhard Forde, put it this way, “There is a kind of growth and progress [in the Christian life], it is to be hoped, but it is growth in grace, a growth in coming to be captivated more and more. . . by the totality, the unconditionality, of the grace of God.”⁹ Therefore, according to Forde, Lutheran discipleship, properly understood, is not a question of building a new Tower of Babel so that one can climb

⁸ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 308

⁹ Mattes, “Discipleship,” 149.

closer to God. Rather, it is the excavation of a cistern in the heart increasingly capable of receiving God's over-flowing grace.

The Connection of Discipleship to Baptism

A proper Lutheran understanding of discipleship is inextricably connected to a theology of baptism. According to Martin Luther, baptism is more than a casual reference to Matthew 28:18-20 where Jesus conjoins baptism with teaching as the proper program of disciple-making; baptism sits at the center of the Christian life. It is important here to see baptism as Luther saw baptism, not as a human act but an act of God. For Luther, the doctrine of baptism is nothing less than the doctrine of justification in concrete form.¹⁰ This is consistent with the Lutheran understanding of sacraments in general. In Lutheran theology, a sacrament is an action commanded by Christ, consisting of the combination of a physical sign and a promise of God. Christ commands us to baptize in Matthew 28:19. Water is the physical sign and the promise comes from a variety of places in Scripture, most notably Mark 16:16 and Romans 6.¹¹ Mark writes in chapter sixteen, "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved." Paul states in Romans 6:4-5, "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." The sacrament of baptism gives the believer a guarantee in the

¹⁰ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 356.

¹¹ Holy Communion is the only other sacrament that fits the Lutheran definition. Jesus commands that it be done when he says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). The bread and wine serve as physical elements and the promise comes in Matthew 26:28, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

form of a pledge or seal of God's promise. Therefore a sacrament seeks to strengthen faith especially in moments of doubt.¹²

Baptism may be a one-time act in one's life, but it is an act that is constantly present.¹³ It is more than just an act of initiation; it is a state of being. A proper understanding of baptism is not to say, "I was baptized," but rather "I am baptized." In the *Large Catechism*, Luther writes, "To appreciate and use baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us and we must restate, 'But I am baptized.' And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life."¹⁴

Faith Completes Baptism

Baptism, in the Lutheran understanding, is not a work that we do but a treasure that God gives to us. But, as opposed to a sixteenth-century conception of the Roman Catholic *ex opera operato*, Lutheran theology insists that faith must be present for the sacrament to be beneficial to the believer.¹⁵ The *Augsburg Confession* states in Article XIII, "Sacraments are signs and testimonies of God's will towards us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith. Therefore they require faith and they are rightly used when they are received in faith."¹⁶ A sacrament that is not received in faith is a

¹² Ibid., 346.

¹³ Ibid., 354.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, in Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 442.

¹⁵ *Ex opera operato* translates "out of the work, worked" an understanding that a sacrament can have benefit even without faith being present.

treasure that remains unopened. Luther teaches his pastors in the *Large Catechism*, “Just by allowing the water to be poured over you, you do not receive Baptism in such a manner that it does you any good. But it becomes beneficial to you if you accept it as God’s command and ordinance so that in baptism in the name of God, you may receive in the water the promised salvation.”¹⁷

It is at this intersection between baptism and faith that the parents’ role as a discipler of their children becomes critical. The overwhelming majority of the baptisms that are done in a Lutheran context are baptisms of infants. Luther states, “We bring the child to be baptized because we think and hope that it will believe, and we pray that God will give it faith.”¹⁸ It logically follows that, in most situations, an infant will depend upon his or her parents, sponsors, and congregation to be a means by which the gospel is proclaimed and lived out. As mentioned in the introduction of this doctoral project, parents are given a particular duty at the baptism of their children, a charge that is worth mentioning again. The liturgy of baptism found in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* tasks the parents with a set of responsibilities designed to cultivate faith in the lives of their children:

In Christian love you have presented this child for Holy Baptism. You should, therefore, faithfully bring her to the services of God’s house, and teach her the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. As she grows in years, you should place in her hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for her instruction in the Christian faith, that living in the covenant of her Baptism and in

¹⁶ Phillip Melachthon, *Augsburg Confession*, in Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 35.

¹⁷ Luther, *Large Catechism*, in Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 440-441.

¹⁸ Alhaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 358.

communion with the Church, she may lead a godly life until the day of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Within this list of obligations given to the parents of the newly baptized are the tasks of making a disciple: the parents are to involve the child in prayer, worship, study of Scripture, service, fellowship, and giving. These are the very components that Pastor Foss uses in his book on discipleship to make up his acronym, “PoWeR SuRGe.”²⁰ It is in these acts of parental responsibility that a seed bed is created (or a cistern is hewn) through which the baptized can both hear and experience the faith that God provides. It is in the fulfillment of our baptismal obligations where the practices of discipleship can become acceptable to a Lutheran theological mindset.²¹ It is also here where membership and discipleship overlap. Church membership entails discipleship as long as the baptized (or their parents and sponsors) take these charges seriously.²² In the end, Luther speaks of baptism in much the same way as much of Evangelical Christian scholarship speaks of discipleship: “we must always be baptized more and more until we fulfill the sign of baptism—the symbol of dying and rising again—perfectly on the last day.”²³

The proper understanding of discipleship in a Lutheran sense is not a question of becoming more saved; it is a question of the faith formation needed in order to live out the promises made in baptism. Discipleship is the process of growing in a radical trust in

¹⁹ American Lutheran Church, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 121.

²⁰ Foss, *Power Surge*, 88-89.

²¹ In the Lutheran tradition, when a person who is old enough to answer for himself or herself is baptized, these same obligations are laid upon them personally. This same charge is also given to our baptized youth on the day they affirm their baptismal faith in the liturgy of Confirmation.

²² Mattes, “Discipleship,” 151.

²³ Alhaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 355.

the God through whom we are saved. Discipleship is the means by which our cisterns are hewn in order to be able to receive the grace that God so wishes to bestow upon us.

The Connection between the Spiritual Discipline of Solitude and Faith Formation

Dallas Willard, in the introduction of his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, makes a bold claim: the only way for Christianity to be a guide for current humanity is to take the need for human transformation extremely seriously and seek to clarify and exemplify realistic methods for these human transformations.²⁴ Willard defines the task of practical theology as the “development for practical implementation of the methods by which women and men interact with God to fulfill the divine intent for human existence.”²⁵ This is a task that we, as church, have failed more often than not. If one were to ask the leadership of our congregations for a plan for the teaching of our people to do everything Christ commanded, how would we answer? Most of our churches would fail to understand the question, let alone produce a plan.²⁶

Willard purports that one can become more like Christ not just by doing as he taught us to do, but by following the style of life he chose for himself, i.e. the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer, simple living, etc.²⁷ There is more to the transformation of

²⁴ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

character than PoWeR SuRGe; it is the spiritual disciplines that show how “we can effectively offer our bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:2).²⁸

For reasons already stated in this chapter, the language of Willard’s proposals can be problematic for Lutheran ears. For many, the radar of “self-righteousness” will no doubt be activated and these ideas be dismissed out of hand. In *Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard responds to such criticism by accusing the Lutheran church of “falling into the grip of a false opposite of grace to ‘works’ that has been caused by a mistaken association of works with ‘merit.’”²⁹ In other words, according to Willard, grace is not in opposition to works. Rather, grace is in opposition to the idea that works produce some sort of merit unto salvation. Jesus prayed, fasted, sought solitude, served, gave, and sacrificed, yet no one accuses him of “self-righteousness.” Paul also practiced these spiritual disciplines as he urged his congregations to do the same. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul commended the congregation to “keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9). Yet no one criticizes Paul of attempting to convince his congregations to do “meritorious” acts for their salvation. These acts were simply means by which Jesus, Paul, and the Philippians were able to receive the grace of God in their lives. Willard states as such in his definition of the disciplines for spiritual life: “[Spiritual disciplines] are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with divine order.”³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁹ Ibid., ix.

³⁰ Ibid., 68.

Willard divides the spiritual disciplines into two categories: the disciplines of abstinence and the disciplines of engagement. The disciplines of abstinence are, as the name suggests, intentional times of withdrawal from either society or one's normal activity. These disciplines include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. The disciplines of engagement usually, but not always, involve the reentering of one back into community. They include study, service, worship, prayer, confession, celebration, fellowship, and submissiveness.³¹ Even though there is ample evidence that each of the disciplines is biblical and critical for the Christian life, they are not of equal importance. The discipline of solitude is foundational to rest. Willard goes so far as to call it "the beginning of the spiritual life."³²

In the wilderness experience that began Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4), Willard makes the unusual claim that the Holy Spirit carried Jesus into the wilderness not to weaken him but that there be the best possible condition for the trials he would receive: "Solitude alone opens the possibility of a radical relationship that can withstand every external demand up to and including death."³³ Jesus was not weaker at the end of forty days of fasting, but stronger. Solitude, with the ironic intention of seeking audience with God, creates the underpinnings for study, prayer, generosity, and the rest. It is in "Spirit-soaked" solitude that one is confronted with the false self and thus, in good Lutheran language, the Law is allowed to "teach us to long for the Savior."³⁴ Solitude creates a

³¹ Ibid., 158.

³² Ibid., 161.

³³ Ibid., 101.

³⁴ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 258.

space in which God’s grace is allowed to nest. Blaise Pascal once wrote, “I have discovered that the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact: they are unable to stay quiet in their own room.”³⁵

Where the Discipline of Solitude and the Practice of Sabbath Intersect

It is at this place that the foundational spiritual discipline of solitude intersects with the ancient practice of Sabbath-keeping. Since the institution of the Law of Moses, Sabbath-keeping has had a fundamental role in creating the stage where God’s grace can be regularly received and celebrated. The root of the Hebrew word, sabbath (שַׁבָּת), means to desist or to cease.³⁶ Sabbath, in this understanding, is a periodic reorientation of life where one ceases what is normally done for the purpose of reconnecting with God. This meaning runs parallel with the disciplines of solitude and silence, whose purpose is to seek the quiet presence of God. In his lectures, Willard often quipped, “God, as a rule, does not compete for your attention.”³⁷ Sabbath turns down the volume and brings one back to focus, a necessary act in a world that is increasingly full of noise and frenetic activity.

Before one can embrace the idea that Sabbath is a means by which God’s grace is given room to operate in one’s life, it is necessary to understand what Sabbath is not. From the time of the writing of the Bible all the way to the present, the purpose of God’s

³⁵ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 358.

³⁶ C.F. Evans, “Sabbath,” in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1950), 205.

³⁷ Dallas Willard, “Spirituality and Ministry” lecture given at Fuller Seminary, Sierra Madre, CA, June 5, 2012.

gift of Sabbath has often been lost in a myriad of misinterpretations. When one thinks about Sabbath, inevitably a number of images comes to mind, e.g. Jesus' consistent battle with the religious leaders of his society as to what was and was not allowed on the Sabbath day. The confrontations with the Pharisees of Jesus' day as to whether healing was allowed on the Sabbath (Mark 2) or whether one could carry a cot home from the edge of the Pool of Siloam (John 5) seem arbitrary, if not cruel to our twenty-first century ears.

The same pharisaic strictness was observed sixteen centuries later within Dutch Reformed communities. The sixteenth century *Heidelberg Catechism* asked a series of questions to its catechumenates about proper activity on the Sabbath: "May one travel on Sunday? May a hunter hunt on Sunday? May a student study worldly arts and science on Sunday? . . . Should one hold meat and fish markets on Sunday?"³⁸ According to the catechism, the answer is a resounding "No!" Centuries later, as those same Dutch Reformed communities made their way to the United States, they carried with them the same sabbatical prohibitions. These prohibitions helped to form what would later come to be known as "Blue Laws." These laws set strict restrictions on nearly every form of public commerce on Sundays. In 1961, forty-nine out of the fifty states had some kind of Blue Laws on their books.³⁹ Now, some fifty years later, a view of society that prohibited the playing of cards, the attendance at Sunday afternoon movie matinees, or

³⁸ Reformed Church, *Heidelberg Catechism*, quoted in Craig Hairline, *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl* (New York: Doubleday), 86-87.

³⁹ Hairline, *Sunday*, 314.

the opening of the local grocery store seems quaint at best, if not impractical and hypocritical.

However, in the busyness of modern life, even secular society is beginning to recognize the need for a regular, Sabbath-like rest. For many, the Sabbath has lost its biblical roots but still is longed for in some secular form. Often, the secular type of Sabbath takes the form of “me” time with its encouragement to disengage from one’s responsibilities and “spend your fringe time on yourself.”⁴⁰ Other times, the need for Sabbath is expressed in “family” days or leisure activities. But, in comparison to the biblical Sabbath, these secular versions are incomplete at best. In her *New York Times Magazine* article, “Bring Back the Sabbath,” journalist Judith Shulevitz states the need for a return of biblical Sabbath-keeping: “Leisure activities are not the same as Sabbath rituals. Religious rituals do not exist to promote togetherness, [rather] they convey to us a certain story about who we are.”⁴¹ Mary McKibben, in her book, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, asks the same question, “So how is Sabbath time different from family time. Is this about family bonding, or is there something deeper going on?”⁴² In the end, she concludes, “Sabbath provides some intentionality to our life together. . .[it] puts the focus on God and God’s gracious invitation to rest from one’s work. That’s what distinguishes

⁴⁰ Heidi Stevens, “More Me-Time in Five Easy Steps,” *Chicago Tribune* (January 4, 2016), accessed January 17, 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/stevens/ct-seizing-me-time-fringe-hours-balancing-20160104-column.html>.

⁴¹ Judith Shulevitz, “Bring Back the Sabbath,” *New York Times Magazine* (March 2, 2003), accessed December 27, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/02/magazine/bring-back-the-sabbath.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁴² McKibben, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, 515/3603.

it from family time.”⁴³ While Sabbath always implies rest and a withdrawal from one’s normal activities, the converse is not necessarily true; rest does not always imply Sabbath. Sabbath is a “quiet space” that involves an intentional seeking to reconnect with God. It creates space for God’s grace and healing to take place.

Sabbath as a Declaration of Freedom from Anxiety

Karl Barth wrote, “A being is free only when it can determine and limit its activity.”⁴⁴ The ability to limit one’s activity is woven within the very cloth of creation. The story of creation was written in such a way as each day is seen as a step towards the completion.⁴⁵ Each day builds upon the accomplishments of the previous day. Day Two’s separation of the waters above from the waters below is predicated on Day One’s creation of light. The creation of seed-bearing plants depends upon Day Three’s appearance of dry land. Each day crescendos to the next until the crown of creation comes: “humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). However, the climax of the creation poem of Genesis 1 is not the creation of man and woman, neither is it the gift of blessing that God gives humankind nor the vocation of multiplying and having dominion over the rest of creation. Rather, the end of creation is Sabbath rest: “And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done and he rest on the seventh day” (Genesis 2:2). Sabbath rest is part of creation.

⁴³ Ibid., 550/3603.

⁴⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Practice of Saying No* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2009), 70/333, Kindle version.

⁴⁵ Shulevitz, “Bring Back the Sabbath.”

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Sabbath as Resistance*, calls the commandment to “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy” the most difficult of all commandments for our society to obey. Brueggemann states that the call to rest “summons us to intent and conduct that defies the most elemental requirement of a commodity-propelled society that specializes in control and entertainment. . .as well as anxiety and violence.”⁴⁶ While the overwhelming majority of SOTH parents would never think of murder, adultery, theft, or perjury, most are deeply involved within an economic system of very high anxiety that regularly excludes the keeping of Sabbath. The “ceasing” involved in remembering the Sabbath is a bold declaration of freedom from oppressive, anxiety-laden work situations and the over-commitment found in the participation of their children’s activities.

Sabbath Makes Worship and Service Possible

Patrick Miller, in his *Interpretation Commentary* on the book of Exodus declares that “Sabbath is the ‘crucial bridge’ that connects the Ten Commandments together.”⁴⁷ The commandment to remember the Sabbath looks back to how we are to relate to the God who rests in the first three commandments and it looks forward to our concern of neighbor in the following six.⁴⁸ Without the intent to “cease and remember,” we will not be able to remember God nor neighbor.

⁴⁶ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 118/1231.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 156/1231.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The presentation of Sabbath in the Old Testament is about liberation and identity. This is a radically different understanding than the often-times arbitrary burden of Sabbath law found in the pronouncements of the Pharisees of the New Testament gospels. Brueggemann identifies four uses of Sabbath in four different locations of the Hebrew Bible, two of which are applicable to this doctoral project. Firstly, Exodus 20 is a declaration to the Israelites that this God who rescued them from Egypt is fundamentally different from the “gods” they knew in the country of their oppressors. Secondly, Deuteronomy 5 teaches Sabbath as a means to consistently stop to remember *not* to enter back into a life of anxiety and frantic production which typified the life they experienced in slavery in Egypt.

Both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 present the call to remember the Sabbath as an alternative to the life style found in the Egypt from which they had just been freed. What differs between the two is the reason. The reason for Sabbath in Exodus is given in verse 11 of chapter 20, “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.” As the commentary of the *Interpreter’s Bible* states, “[In Exodus] the ultimate meaning of the Sabbath is . . . an expression of God’s own nature.”⁴⁹ As God is a God of rest in Genesis 2, we are called to imitate him. This is in radical opposition to the way that the Israelites experienced the Egyptian pharaoh who also claimed to be a god. Brueggemann writes that in the call to remember the Sabbath the Israelites “are invited to awareness that life does not consist in frantic production and

⁴⁹ George Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), 985.

consumption that reduces everyone else to threat and competitor . . . work stoppage permits a waning of anxiety, so energy is redeployed to the neighborhood.”⁵⁰

Brueggemann reminds the reader of how easily modern society and our present economic structure have returned us back to a life under foreign gods: “see how we are harassed by supervisors and taskmasters who keep reminding us that we do not produce enough.”⁵¹ The oppressive system does not end at the work place, but continues into our education system as well. The only thing that changes is the commodity produced; instead of widgets or dollars being produced, it is test scores and admission to the right schools. This also spills into our supposed “recreational” activities. This is evidenced by over-stressed parents who chauffeur their children to the next tennis or soccer or piano lesson in order to build resumes for a future college admission form.

As we practice the rhythms of Sabbath, we become accustomed to saying “no.” Barbara Taylor reminds us, “[As we learn to say ‘no’] we can gradually become able to resist the killing rhythms of driven-ness and depletion, compulsion and collapse.”⁵² Mary McKibben calls Sabbath a “vaccination against the breakneck speed of life.”⁵³ She names Sabbath a “spiritual snow day.”⁵⁴

This is where obedience to the call for Sabbath is an act of subversion against the false gods of production and anxiety. This is also where obedience to the call for Sabbath

⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *The Sabbath as Resistance*, 468/1231.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 316/1231.

⁵² Taylor, *The Practice of Saying ‘No’*, 199/333.

⁵³ McKibben, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, 1609/3603.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1810/3603.

is a bridge to the final six “horizontal” commandments. Brueggemann writes, “Those who live in the death system of Pharaoh are bound to dishonor parents and non-productive kin . . . bound to killing violence . . . bound to reduce sexual intimacy to exploitive commodity . . . bound to be committed to acquisitiveness.”⁵⁵

The Deuteronomic version of the commandment to honor the Sabbath carries a second facet to Sabbath keeping. While there are some differences in the specifics of what Sabbath-keeping may look like, the most substantive difference is found in the “why” of Sabbath. This “why” is found in verse 15 of Deuteronomy 5. Where Exodus 20 emphasizes that keeping the Sabbath is an extension of a God of rest, Deuteronomy is more interested in a declaration of an identity as a person freed by God. Deuteronomy 5:15 states, “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” The purpose of Sabbath observation is that the Israelites remember that they once were slaves and now they are not because God has delivered them from their slavery. In effect, Sabbath is a weekly reminder of the Passover.⁵⁶ If you forget where you have come from and what God has done for you, you will inevitably give your lives back over to the competitive and anxiety-laden nature of frenetic activity.

In the end, Sabbath is more than just a call to rest and remember; it is a means of grace. In remembering, we are called to put away the idea that we can control all things

⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 516/1231.

⁵⁶ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible*, 985.

and run the show. McKibben compares Sabbath to the idea of tithing. In the same way we trust that God will provide all that we need and more with 90% of what we keep after the tithe, we are reminded that God will provide all the time that is needed as we obey the command to honor the Sabbath.⁵⁷ At the end of her year-long experiment of Sabbath-keeping within her busy family, McKibben writes these words, “Even when we focus on the things that are good and nourishing and important for ourselves, our families and the world, there is still not enough time. But our hope is not in there being enough time but in there being enough grace to muddle through the scarcities of our days.”⁵⁸

Saying “No” in Order to Say “Yes”

Barbara Taylor reminds us that the ancient wisdom of the Sabbath always proclaims that saying “yes” to God is not possible without first saying “no” to God’s rivals.⁵⁹ As has been previously discussed in the introduction of this project, the public obligation given to the parents of a child to be baptized (or a person old enough to answer for themselves) is not the only part of a baptismal liturgy. From the earliest centuries of the Christian faith to the present, a fundamental series of questions have been asked that communicate a foundational truth that Taylor alludes to above: it is impossible to say “yes” to God without first saying “no” to those things that draw you away from God. In the baptismal liturgy, the pastor asks, “Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? Do you

⁵⁷ McKibben, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, 3058/3603.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3330/3603.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *The Practice of Saying ‘No’*, 268/333.

renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?”⁶⁰ It is a given that in the first centuries of the ancient church there was a different understanding as to the powers that could draw one away from God. The assumption was that one would have to give up their allegiance to the false gods of the past, be they Zeus, Caesar, or Zarathustra. For the twenty-first century Christian, the subset of false gods to be rejected may have changed but the over-all goal of drawing one away from God remains the same. Their strategies remain as dangerous and insidious today as they were two thousand years ago. Anxiety, busyness, restlessness, materialism, and over-commitment are the weapons of choice and all are used disguised in the good intentions of preparing our children for “the future.” All too often, this future excludes a relationship with God.

The fact remains that regardless of how talented or equipped one may be in multi-tasking, the same constraints apply to all created beings: there are 168 hours in one week. On this end of eternity, time is our most finite commodity. One simply cannot do everything presented to them, no matter how valuable, educational, or preparatory it may be. It is just as important to learn to say “no” to that which society purports as “good” as it is to say “no” to that which society has identified as “evil.”

In suburban Middle America, there is no shortage of activities in which we can place our children, most of them, in and of themselves, are “good,” i.e. valuable for education or development. Because of this, the need to reclaim a type of periodic Sabbath is more important now than ever if we, as parents, are to take seriously the obligations we accepted at the baptism of our children. Without staking out time for the

⁶⁰ American Lutheran Church, *The Lutheran Book of Worship*, 123.

intentional work of discipleship with our children, the baptisms that they received in infancy will not be “completed” in the way that Martin Luther envisioned in the *Large Catechism*. Faith must be present and faith depends upon a trusted messenger. Romans 10:14 proclaims, “How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” More often than not, within a family of faith, the parents are that “someone” to proclaim Jesus. The trusted proclamation does not come out of thin air. It comes from the consistent and intentional practices of discipleship: prayer, worship, Scripture, and service. Periodic Sabbath, as a time of ceasing from the frenetic pace of familial and economic commitments, provides the daily and weekly means by which faith is modeled and grace received.

PART THREE

PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PLAN FOR NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE

It has been argued throughout this project that the need for life-long discipleship is not only biblical, but Lutheran as well. In Jesus's farewell discourse to his disciples in the Gospel of John, he states, "I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). It is the continuous connection of branches to vine that builds and maintains faith in this God who promises life and salvation. While our identities as children of God are declared in baptism, they are lived out in the life-long components of discipleship: prayer, worship, study of Scripture, service, fellowship, and giving.¹ It is a relationship of faith that completes our baptism.² Faith formation is not just reserved for Sunday school and confirmation; it is a lifelong journey,

¹ John Roberto, in his book, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*, would include the celebrating of liturgical seasons, learning the Christian tradition, and celebrating of rituals and milestones into this list of discipleship practices. Roberto's book reflects a more historically Roman Catholic point of view that appeals to the Roman Catholic roots of Lutheranism.

² Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 355.

Discipleship: Not Just for Babies and Their Parents

When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America published its new hymnal in 2006, the liturgy of Holy Baptism was nearly identical to the liturgy of the 1978 hymnal with one noticeable addition: a recognition of the place of the church congregation and other people of faith in the discipleship of the baptized. In the 2006 hymnal, immediately following the charge the pastor gives to the parents of the child to be baptized, he or she then turns to the sponsors and asks, “Sponsors, do your promise to nurture [this child] in the Christian faith as you are empowered by God’s Spirit, and to help [him or her] live in the covenant of baptism and in communion with the church?”³ The pastor then turns to the congregation and asks them an all-important question, “People of God, do you promise to support [this child] and pray for [him or her] in their new life in Christ?”⁴

These additions to the liturgy of Holy Baptism acknowledge a truth that should never be ignored by people of faith: faith formation is more than just “me and Jesus.” In most cases, it is the parents who are the primary disciplers of their own children, but they are not the only influences. For the baptized, God uses other people of faith as a means to model trust in Jesus. The 2006 liturgy recognizes that it really does “take a village” in order for faith to grow. In baptism, a person becomes part of the body of Christ as represented in the local congregation. In the faith life of a child, the baptismal sponsors and the congregation each have their role as teachers and models of faith. Rarely do

³ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 228.

⁴ Ibid.

parents fulfill the obligations given to them by the pastor at baptism if they are not an active part of a congregation.⁵

The Need for Support in Saying “No”

The role of the faith community is just as important for adults as it is for children. The author of the book of Hebrews writes, “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25). The New Testament assumes community in its more than two dozen different imperatives regarding how to treat one another, e.g. “love one another” (1 John 3:14), “lay down our lives for one another” (1 John 3:16), “confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16), “be hospitable to one another” (1 Peter 4:9), etc. Faith formation is a team sport. The word “disciple” implies that there is not only an apprentice but also a mentor. While the master that we are to emulate is Jesus, the implication is that our mentor will be a fellow disciple. In the Great Commission, Jesus gives the imperative to “go and make disciples” to other human beings, a group of disciples who are a bit further down the road of discipleship. In the same way that Alcoholics Anonymous sees the need of mentorship and mutual accountability as a part of its successful programming, this ministry plan recognizes the importance of a community of faith. In order to take

⁵ Most Lutheran churches will record a newly baptized child as a “member” of the congregation even if their parents are not. I am generally not in agreement with this practice, although I can imagine situations when this would be the correct pastoral decision. If a parent comes to me for the baptism of his or her child and is not part of our congregation, I remind them that we are baptized into a body of Christ as lived out in a community of faith. I then encourage them to “get to know us” for a few weeks before making that decision.

seriously the obligations one accepts at the baptism of a child (as well as the obligations one agrees to at one's service of Confirmation), communal support is needed.

For reasons already delineated in the previous part of this project, the call to disciple our children is also a call to buck the prevailing winds of a culture that seek to frighten us into over-commitment. This initiative is more than just a call to discipleship in the traditional, evangelical components of prayer, worship, Scripture, service, fellowship, and generosity. This project recognizes that, for true discipleship to happen, a section of the finite 168 weekly hours must be re-prioritized. In other words, in order to say "yes" to the faith formation of one's family, there must be a conscientious "no" to those things that compete for the time that it takes for said faith formation. This project is as much a call towards familial "holy time" (i.e. a type of Sabbath) as it is to the specific practices of discipleship.

A Preferred Future for the Families of Shepherd of the Hill

The preferred future for the families of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church is a formation of a community of young families who have created space in their busy lives not just for the faith formation of their children, but an increased participation in their own discipleship as well. This community will serve not only as a traditional fellowship group for prayer and Bible study, but it will also provide support and accountability for the maintenance of familial "holy time," i.e. Sabbath.

The Goals for This Ministry Plan

The five goals of this ministry plan are related to both the need of lifelong discipleship and the importance of creating a space where that daily and weekly discipleship can take place. Four of the five goals are aimed primarily towards the participant families. Firstly, by the end of the implementation phase of this ministry project, the participant families will be able to understand and embrace the call to faith formation for both their children and themselves. In part, this is a call to remember both one's own baptism and the promises made at the baptism of their children. Parents must be able to answer the fundamental questions about the Lutheran faith, such as: What is Baptism? Why is it important? Does baptism equal salvation? How can I fulfill my responsibilities to my child after baptism? etc.

Secondly, this ministry project seeks to encourage the participant families to actively participate in a small group that acts both as a means of discipling for the parents of the baptized as well as a means of support for their battle against over-commitment. This project must be seen as more than just a class on baptismal responsibilities and education; it must also recognize a family's temptation to over-load the family calendar, putting the relational wellbeing between spouses and the spiritual health of the family at risk.

Thirdly, as a biblical strategy for the family in the above-stated battle, a major goal for the participant families of this project is to understand the purpose and importance of Sabbath both historically and theologically. Here, some latitude must be taken with regard to what is commonly understood as "Sabbath." As defined in this project, Sabbath is not necessarily equated as a day of the week, be it Saturday or

Sunday. Rather, Sabbath is an understanding of “holy time,” i.e. time that is regularly set aside for honoring the God who sees rest as the completion of creation and has called us to periodically cease our activities in order to remember not to fall back into slavery. Here, Sabbath is also defined as a daily pattern of family prayer, Bible reading, and blessing as well as regular weekly worship.

The fourth and final goal for the participant families of this project is to periodically take time in a retreat setting to both calculate and evaluate the effect of the cumulative time commitments of their families. In order to have a more dispassionate look at one’s own life, a time of retreat must be taken at least every year for the sole purpose of assessing the time commitments of the family and faithfully (and logically) making responsible decisions for the upcoming year.

The fifth goal is the development of a rubric that aids in the management of family commitments. As pastor of SOTH and leader of this initiative, I am responsible for creating this rubric by the beginning of the retreat. The purpose of this rubric is not to be a tool for the development of greater efficiency; this is not just a means to be better at multi-tasking. Rather, the purpose of this rubric is to provide a means to approach one’s own calendars in a thoughtful, faithful, and comprehensive way that takes into account not only the education and activities of their families but also the health of the family’s relationships with God and each other.

A First Step towards a Family Altar: New Sunday School and Confirmation Expectations

Beginning in early September of 2015, the children's Sunday school of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church began a new weekly format. During the final fifteen minutes of each period each class would finish their discussion of the lesson and gather into a circle in order to "Do the Faith5[®]." As already mentioned in Chapter 2 of this doctoral project, the Faith5[®] is the program of family faith formation developed by Reverend Dr. Rich Melheim. Its five components are the sharing of high and lows, reading (or re-reading) of the day's Bible verse, application of the verse preferably using the themes of the highs and lows, praying for the adjacent person regarding the highs and lows, and a blessing of that same neighboring person.⁶

In preparation for the beginning of the school year, the Sunday school small group leaders were not only trained in classroom management techniques but also in the facilitation of this new program. In the new format, the majority of the traditional curriculum would be provided in the opening plenary session using songs, Scripture-reading, and story-telling. At the end of the large group plenary, the children were then separated into age-appropriate small groups: preschool/kindergarten, first/second grades, third/fourth, and fifth grades.⁷ As the small group leaders were now free from having to develop their own Sunday school lessons, it seemed fitting to change their nomenclature; instead of "Sunday school teachers" these men and women were now children's "small

⁶ Melheim, *Holding Your Family Together*, 395/4152.

⁷ Middle school students from sixth to eighth grades help with the plenary session as readers and skit team.

group leaders.” Given that the small group leaders were not responsible for the bulk of Sunday school instruction, they would be able to focus their attention on modeling other forms of faith development, such as prayer and spiritual friendships.

In addition to the traditional learning of the stories of the Bible, there were four overall emphases regarding the new Sunday school format. Firstly, a priority was placed on providing a safe place for children to share the week’s victories and struggles during the sharing of highs and lows. Our goal was to become a community that could respectfully and graciously listen and empathize with each other. Secondly, it was the desire of our leadership team that our children become comfortable in praying for and blessing each other. This was also true for the small group leaders, many of whom started the year uncomfortable in praying aloud. Thirdly, this format provided a practical means by which Scripture could be applied to the lives of the children. As one of the Faith5[©] components, the application of Scripture has the intention of helping the child to develop basic theological skills. Melheim calls this “going deep” in an age that prefers to skim along the surface.⁸ Finally, the most significant emphasis was that the children take these new-found faith practices back into the home with them. At the end of each Sunday school hour, the children would take with them a Faith5[©] family guide with the intention that, as the children have become comfortable in sharing highs and lows, praying, and blessing, so would the parents.

The same sort of format was also implemented within our middle school confirmation ministry. Similar to the new Sunday school format, the last fifteen minutes

⁸ Ibid., 1733/4152.

of each class period were reserved for Faith5[®] activities. The only difference between Sunday school and confirmation was that confirmation parents were encouraged to join with their children for these final faith-building steps. As the weekly curriculum was brought to a close, the class was divided into small groups that would include the parents. A few minutes were taken to sum up the evening's lesson and then each student and adult would share their high and low for the week. The evening would then conclude as they took time to pray for the person either to the right or left and then bless each other using a written blessing while making the sign of the cross on each other's foreheads. The purpose of including the parents in the final Faith5[®] activities was to provide a space where the idea of praying for and blessing each other would not be strange. As part of their confirmation workbooks, a daily routine of sharing highs and lows, Scripture, prayer, and blessing was expected to be completed in the home.

This change of Sunday school and confirmation formats was the first volley into an intentional and expected practice of daily "holy time" (or Sabbath) within the homes of our congregants. One of the difficulties that was observed for our families regarding the daily practice of Faith5[®] was finding a time that works. Melheim suggests that bedtime is the most practical and beneficial for this practice.⁹ But, even this is not an easy solution. If there are children of a variety of ages, which bedtime is used? What happens when the children go to bed after the parents or the parents work second or third-shift jobs? Or, as is often the case, what happens when there are so many activities crammed into the few evening hours, e.g. homework, practice of musical instruments,

⁹ Ibid., 279/4152.

sports practices, etc., that an extended time of faith formation just adds another fifteen minutes to an already lengthy bedtime ritual? Another common suggestion for a family “holy time” is the evening meal at the dining room table. However, for the same reason as use of bedtime, the obstacles to using a family meal are predictable. As the family schedule becomes more and more impacted by activities for each child, the common meal where all family members are present is an increasingly rare commodity.

There were also other considerations regarding the use of Faith5[©] in the evenings. What happens when there are significant age differences between children? Can the concerns of a twelve-year-old girl going through the throes of puberty be understood by a five-year-old brother? Therefore, the question was raised whether these five faith practices should be a private sharing between parent and child or part of the daily practice of the entire gathered family.

Even if a workable time could be found within the busy family schedule, there was another commonly reported difficulty. Many of our parents were still not comfortable praying aloud even with their own children.¹⁰ At the beginning of the new confirmation year, a simple format for prayer was given to both our parents who were participating as well as to our students. When giving thanks for the weekly high, the prayer was, “Lord, thank you that _____.” When asking for addressing the weekly low, a simple plea was given, “God, please help _____.” This was helpful for those individuals who were most unaccustomed to prayer.

¹⁰ For many of our confirmation families, there is an obligatory nature to getting their children through confirmation, a kind of Lutheran cultural rite of passage that may or may not have anything to do with a relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, in many of these families, prayer, reading of Scripture in the home, and worship are, at best, unwelcomed homework or, at worst, an intrusion to a busy family’s nightly routine and thus often ignored.

This issue was further complicated when one of the parents is not a believer. The “unequal yoke” of a mixed marriage is already exposed in the Sunday morning routine of worship and Sunday school; now these families have been asked to repeat the obvious division every evening as well. The question remains of the role of the unbelieving parent in this distinctly familial and Christian practice.

Early and Often: A Ministry for Newborns and Their Families

Logic dictates that “early and often” is best practice when beginning the reclamation of Sabbath as “holy time” for the families of our ministry. With this in mind, a new ministry began early in 2016 for the parents of babies and pre-preschool toddlers: *Mommy, Daddy, and Me*. Facilitated by our preschool director, the new ministry uses songs, games, and story time to teach an infant version of Faith5[®]. The advantages to offering programming at this level are obvious. Firstly, this was a chance to help the parents of newly baptized children begin to carry out their baptismal charge as early as possible. In the pre-baptismal meeting with parents, it was of great help to have a program ready for them to begin right away. Secondly, this new class filled a critical gap in our desire to have a birth-to-young-adult discipling program.¹¹ Thirdly, it was the hope of this new ministry that the practice of praying with and blessing become as natural as feeding and changing diapers. If parents have prayed out loud with their child since birth, then the later Faith5[®] manifestations would not require a major adjustment. Thus,

¹¹ Another gap will be addressed in September 2016, when weekly high school programming will be resurrected after an absences of many years. When a new youth ministry coordinator was brought on staff in 2014, it was recognized that a high school youth program would have be grown organically from the groups we had more control over: middle-school and upper elementary. After two full years, we are ready to begin this new ministry.

Mommy, Daddy, and Me became our strategy of preemptive attack in the reclamation of family Sabbath. The track record for this new ministry has not been long enough to begin to determine its affect.¹²

Family Sabbath: Taking a Deep Breath Together

Approximately eight years ago, Pastor Kara Root accepted a call to pastor Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church in a transitioning neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota. When Pastor Root began her call, Lake Nokomis Presbyterian (hereafter, LNPC) had already been embroiled in the painful process of discerning how to respond to the “mainline decline,” manifested in a shrinking membership and little prospect for growth. The intergenerational congregation had shrunk to an average weekly worshipping attendance of thirty and the prospect of closing the doors was definitely on the table. As part of their discernment process, they created several meetings of small groups, meeting regularly for conversation and prayer, and asking of themselves the question, “Are we finished, or does God have more for us?”¹³

In the midst of the congregation’s discernment, the Holy Spirit revealed that God still had a future for LNPC. As part of God’s continuing call, the following questions were put forth: “What is worship? How can we do it more intentionally? Does it have to be done the same way every week?” Out of this the notion of a periodic honoring of the Sabbath was born. Thus, a new idea was initiated: on the second and fourth Saturday of

¹² Unfortunately, the facilitator for this ministry encountered some significant health difficulties after the first couple of meetings of this ministry. God willing, we will be able to begin again in October, 2016.

¹³ Kara Root, telephone interview with the author, Homer Glen, IL, July 25, 2016.

every month, the community would gather for a quiet, candlelit worship that would serve as a gentle beginning to the next twenty-four hour period of “purposefully stopping.” The instructions for the Sabbath were at once simple yet challenging. In a world that constantly attempts to make them “do,” the people of LNPC would use the Sabbath to just “be.” Root explains,

The guidelines we give ourselves are to try to do nothing from obligation, to pay attention to the struggle to stop and offer even that as a gift of gratitude, to get outside some, to play some, to do something that gives us delight. To be with others if we’re alone a lot. To be alone if our lives are crowded. To make the day *different* than our ordinary days. To pay attention to what our souls need. And to rest.¹⁴

At the end of each Sabbath, participants were encouraged to share their reflections on the congregation’s website.

The size and setting of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church are significantly different from LNPC. Thus, cutting and pasting LNPC’s program of Sabbath-keeping into the liturgical practice of SOTH would not be practical. However, there is another custom that LNPC has incorporated into its yearly life cycle that would be easily adapted to SOTH and would be beneficial for its mission and ministry. Roughly three times a year, LNPC sponsors an introductory Sabbath retreat aptly titled, “A 24-Hour Deep Breath Retreat.” The Deep Breath Retreat is designed to give a hospitable initiation to the concept of Sabbath for those who may be unfamiliar with the practice. While the normal bi-weekly retreat begins with an evening worship, the Deep Breath Retreat begins an hour earlier with an hour-long orientation to Sabbath. A candlelit, vespers-like

¹⁴ Kara Root, “Making Space for Sabbath,” *Renew 52, Ideas to Change the Church: 50+ Ideas to Revitalize Your Congregation from Leaders under 50*, ed. David Lose (St. Paul: Luther Seminary Press, 2012), 93.

worship service and communal Sabbath meal follow the orientation. Pastor Root then explains that the following twenty-four hours are a home retreat, “a whole day free from obligations to listen and respond to the longings of your heart.”¹⁵ The retreat experience ends with a closing blessing done at home, with the hope of bringing the gifts of Sabbath into the work week of the participants. As with the bi-weekly Sabbath experience, worshippers are encouraged to share their reflection on LNPC’s congregational website.

This ministry project proposes the same sort of periodic home Sabbaths. Approximately, four times per year, an invitation will go out to the entire congregation to share in the reclamation of the traditional sabbatical “ceasing.” The participant family is encouraged to take a break from life’s rat race and seek to do only the activities that bring joy for the participant and family. The intent of Sabbath is not to add more stress and guilt upon an already over-burdened lifestyle. Therefore, there are a number of accommodations that must be taken into consideration in the timing and practice of the planned twenty-four-hour retreats. First, the Sabbath meal is not a potluck but a simple supper either prepared on-site or catered. It would be counter-productive to ask for a dish to be brought, thus increasing the workload of the attendee. Reservations will be recommended as well as a suggested donation per meal. Second, the timing of the home retreat will correspond with a normal break of children’s Sunday school. At SOTH, the Sunday school year is divided into trimesters. A one week cushion between each trimester is encouraged in order to alleviate a perceived competition between Sunday school and a ministry initiative that is aimed towards families with small children.

¹⁵ Karen Root, interview.

Therefore, the suggested dates for the home retreat will match up with the breaks in Sunday school.

In the same way that a Sabbath-keeping Jewish family must prepare a number of items ahead of Friday's sunset, a time of preparation for the home Sabbath events is also encouraged. The idea that one can just turn off "doing and producing" as one turns off a light switch is, at best, naïve. Approximately one week before the event, a flyer will be sent to each participant household with suggestions as to how the twenty-four-hour period could be used. Pastor Root proposes that the participants of LNPC's Sabbath events plan as if they were traveling for a vacation at least three hours away. (I would add that one think of the Sabbath destination as being a place without internet access.) Saturday morning before the retreat is a time to shut down the computer and other electronic devices, throw the extra work from the office into the trunk of the car, and do enough housework to make one feel comfortable for the next twenty-four hours. As some things are put away in order for a day of rest to be enjoyed, other things are taken out in preparation: a few board games, a half-read novel, and maybe a recipe or two to try as a family. It may sound counter-intuitive to plan for a Sabbath retreat, but the opposite is actually true; if one knows what to expect and has planned for it, the transition to "ceasing" is eased.

A very practical and beneficial beginning to each Sabbath day is the preparation of two very simple lists. On one side of a sheet of paper, each member of the family writes a list of things that he or she will say "yes" to during the home retreat. The "yes" revolves around the question, "What are some things that will help me remember whose I

am and who I am?”¹⁶ Perhaps it might be working on a quilting project or playing the guitar. On the other side of the paper, each member of the family is encouraged to make a list of things to say “no” to during the home retreat. This list is guided by the question, “What are those things that seem to rob me of my freedom on a non-Sabbath day?”¹⁷

At sundown of Sunday evening, the evening Sabbath prayer is given and a couple of focus questions are asked within the family, “Where did you experience peace today? Where did you experience God’s presence? What would you do differently for the next Sabbath retreat?” As storytelling is humanity’s most effective means of communicating victories and defeats, the participant families are encouraged to share their Sabbath experience in a section of SOTH’s website specifically designed for the familial celebration of Sabbath.

Of course, a more comprehensive goal would be that the families of Shepherd of the Hill choose to keep a Sabbath more often than four times per year. It is the hope that a planned, periodic break in order to cease will sufficiently whet the appetite for a more regular Sabbath observance.

Breaking the Cycle of “Rat-Race”: The Planting of a Vision

Pastor MaryAnn McKibben, in her book *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, expresses something that every busy parent knows but often seems powerless to counteract: losing control of one’s family schedule is usually not a consequence of a planned major decision. One does not set out one day and say, “It is my goal to be on the run from

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Monday morning to Sunday afternoon, every week of the year.” The beginning of being overwhelmed by scheduled familial demands is, as McKibben states, “a gradual process-- 1000 small, well-intentioned decisions, not a single cataclysmic blunder.”¹⁸ This steady decent into an overloaded and overcommitted life is all too easy to fall into and very difficult to escape. The majority of the families of SOTH, like church families everywhere, are extremely loyal and responsible. To back out on a promise or not follow through with a commitment is considered to be in extremely bad form. Consequently, this means that once one is submerged in an overcommitted family schedule—once one has said “yes” to soccer, baseball, dance, Girl Scouts, violin lessons, and the like—the obligation must run its course. The place to break into the cycle of over-commitment is before the obligations are made.

At the same time, if the faith formation of children is not, in some way, connected to the faith formation of their parents then it is unlikely that the discipling will survive beyond the formal Lutheran “responsibilities” of Sunday school, first communion, and confirmation instruction. In Martin Luther’s 1522 sermon on “The Estate of Marriage,” he writes, “Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops and priests to their children, if they make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.”¹⁹ The means for guiding the parents of Shepherd of the Hill toward the discovery of a vision of God’s purpose in the faith lives of their families

¹⁸ McKibben, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, 243/3603.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, “The Estate of Marriage,” trans. Walther Brandt, in *The Christian in Society II*, ed. Walther Brandt, vol. 45 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 14.

includes a two day, parents only, off-site retreat. Often times, it is nearly impossible to gain a healthy perspective on one's life and schedule while submerged within the schedule; therefore time must be taken above the fray for quiet reflection. For that reason, much of the off-site retreat will be a call to silence. This is not primarily a time for heavy educational content or even team building. Rather, this is a time, away from children, in order to breathe deeply together as parents.²⁰

As a preparatory activity for the retreat, each parent will be given a paper copy of a calendar for the upcoming twelve months. Run off on tablet-sized (eleven inch by sixteen inch) sheets of paper, the calendar for each month fills one side of an entire sheet. The parents are then asked to use a pencil to fill in all of the present obligations for both the parents as well as each child for the entire year. It is important that the regular, everyday (or every week) obligations (e.g. work, school, homework, worship, Sunday school, care for aging parents, etc.) be included in each daily space. Next, come the regularly scheduled extracurricular obligations such as sports, music, dance, scouts, etc. Following the daily and weekly commitments, those commitments that happen predictably but less regularly, such as school vacations, parent-teacher conferences, school holiday programs, visits to grandparents, etc. are included. Finally, with a different colored pencil, an intentional time of self-care both as individuals and as couples (if applicable) are included within the calendar. Examples of these self-care events would be date nights, evening family altar time, trips to the gym, scheduled recreational soccer, etc.

²⁰ The retreat is open to the full array of family formations presently within SOTH: biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, and single parents.

The purpose of the calendar activity is to create a tangible representation of the family's schedule for the up-coming year. MaryAnn McKibben refers to our calendars as spiritual documents: "to-do lists and Google Calendars are statements of faith."²¹ They say the things that we would never say aloud, betraying our own belief that because we are busy with good and important things, we are really in control.²²

It is important that the calendars be printed on just one side of each sheet of tablet paper in order to make it possible to look at the entire year at one glance, once laid out on a flat surface. This creates a different perspective than relying on a smart phone or Google calendar for one's view of daily, weekly, or monthly duties. The screen size of a smart phone or tablet is not adequate to the task of seeing one's whole year in an honest (and hopefully helpful) perspective. Finally, it is necessary that the calendar be filled in using pencil (either black or colored) in order to remind the participant that nearly all of these obligations are removable; literally none are written in stone. It is not the intention of this calendar exercise to incite feelings of guilt or anxiety. For most twenty-first century, suburban parents, those feelings already exist. This activity just lists the family obligations in one place and begins a process of reminding parents that choices can still be made about their schedules.

The retreat will begin with a short devotional that incorporates the meaning and purpose of the Old Testament Sabbath. As the time together begins, two candles will be lit in the fashion of the Jewish Sabbath service. The first candle reflects the Genesis 2

²¹ McKibben, *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, 559/3603.

²² Ibid.

understanding of Sabbath; we are made in God's image and, as God rested, we too are called to rest. The second candle corresponds to the purpose of Sabbath given in Deuteronomy 5; remember that we were once slaves, but we are now free. We are called to remember so that we do not fall back into slavery once again.²³ After the short devotional, we share a simple meal together and we are then invited into a time of silence. The participants are encouraged to take walks, sleep, work on puzzles, read side by side, pray, do yoga or whatever else the heart longs for. The silence is an important aspect as it serves as an attempt to create a boundary between Sabbath and the noise of everyday life. Dallas Willard, in his course "Spirituality and Ministry," taught that silence (and solitude) are the foundational spiritual disciplines. He writes, "Solitude and silence are fundamental because they cut so deeply into our dependencies on everything but God. Our desperate need is for times in which we are alone, in silence, doing nothing."²⁴

The silence will continue until the following morning's breakfast. At breakfast, a short devotional will be used to break the fast of silence. During breakfast, opportunities will be given to share what was significant about their refrain from talking. What about the silence was most enjoyable to you? What about the fast was most frustrating for you? After a thirty minute break, the group will gather once again for a forty-five minute study on baptism. The curriculum of the study is the pre-baptismal materials used with parents of children soon to be baptized (See Appendix A). The center of the study is a review of

²³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Practice of Saying 'No'*, 153/333.

²⁴ Dallas Willard, class notes for Spirituality and Ministry, June 6, 2012.

what the responsibilities are of parents who bring their children to be baptized into the body of Christ. As we look at the list of obligations, what are ways that we, as parents, sponsors, and church, can help each other fulfill the responsibilities to which we all said, “Yes”?

After another break, the group reconvenes with the written calendar of the upcoming year. Each family is asked to find a spot either on the floor or on a table (or two) big enough to be able to view all twelve months at once. The parents are then given a questionnaire to fill out (See Appendix B). The questionnaire is a guided reflection on what brings joy and stress. The questions include: As you reflect back on the past twelve months, what activities were life-giving to you? What about them did you love? Which activities were a challenge to you? What about them frustrated you? Which part of last year’s set of activities would you like to keep doing? Which part would you prefer to let go of? As you look at the up-coming year, what excites you? What do you dread? What about this year’s up-coming calendar is non-negotiable for you? What could be changed or modified if necessary? Can you manage this calendar for the up-coming year and still regularly do Faith5[©] as a family? Can you carry out your calendar and still find joy in your marriage (if applicable) and your family?

The preferred tone for this twenty-four hour off-site retreat is not judgment, but rather self-discovery. The primary objective of this retreat is that each family leaves having reflected upon the “spiritual” document that is their calendar and that they are able to articulate whether or not their proposed familial obligations will most probably lend time for the faith formation of their families without robbing them of needed rest and joy.

The Final (and Most Difficult) Piece: The Small Group

A theme throughout this entire doctoral project is the consistent temptation that society places upon the families of school-age children to over-commit. Unfortunately, instead of serving as an aid for parents to push back on the unreasonable demands of society, the congregational structure of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church encourages even more commitment. In part, this is a product of the awkward size of SOTH. According to author Kevin Martin's book, *The Myth of the 200 Barrier*, SOTH fits the characteristics of a transitional church. Martin defines a transitional church as a congregation between 140 and 225 in average weekly attendance. At an average of 190, SOTH is simply too big to be a small pastoral-size church and too small to be a program-size church.²⁵

There are a number of factors that transitional churches have in common. The factor most applicable to this project is the tendency to burn out lay leaders. Martin writes, "This size church has a shortage of real leaders. Therefore, the transitional-size congregation tends to overuse its leaders and give them multiple jobs."²⁶ Church becomes another source of stress for the already overworked parent.²⁷ Here is where the prospect of a small group for parents of young children is a two-edged sword. On one hand there

²⁵ Kevin Martin, *The Myth of the 200 Barrier: How to Lead Through Transitional Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 63.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Conventional wisdom of church ladies from the dawn of the American congregational experience is that, if one has children in Vacation Bible School, Sunday school, or youth group, he or she (most often she) is expected to dive in and volunteer.

is a need for mutual support in order to keep from overburdening one's schedule; on the other hand the small group itself becomes one more obligation on an already crowded schedule.

John Roberto, in his book *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century*, incorporates a variety of very important aspects into his proposals for family faith formation in the twenty-first century. It is not only in content that Roberto varies in his approach to discipleship ministry; it is also the shape of how that content is presented. Roberto, like Melheim, is a strong proponent of cross-generational ministry within the home. But where Melheim concentrates only on what happens within the home through his Faith5[©] pedagogy, Roberto sees also the need for faith formation of the parents. Roberto writes, "Parent faith formation . . . can happen through parents' and grandparents' participation in intergenerational faith formation at church and participation in church life. It can also happen through targeted programs of theological and biblical formation in a variety of learning formats."²⁸ One of those formats proposed by Roberto is the extensive use of online material along with the regular times of gathering for the adult participants.²⁹

In past attempts to involve SOTH families in a traditional, weekly, small group format, there has been very limited success. The collision between a weekly commitment to small group and one's busy family schedule has traditionally led to the ignoring of the former in favor of latter. There have also been attempts to over-compensate, developing

²⁸ John Roberto, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages and Generations* (Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Publications, 2015), 1036/2927, Kindle version.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1573/2927.

a completely online curriculum. That, too, has had very limited success. This project seeks a middle ground between the two. Following Roberto's idea of faith formation that blends both gathering events and online information, this small group faith formation takes into consideration not only the busy schedules of our young families but also the need for mutual support and prayer, i.e. the development of caring relationships that can only be done in person.

The parents' small group takes on the aspects of what appears to be an enhanced monthly book club. On the first Thursday of every month, the group meets to fellowship, pray for one another, and share the results of their guided monthly study.³⁰ Babysitting is a must, even if it means that the offer of babysitting in the home is made. The subject matter and the dates of the monthly meetings are given at the beginning of the programming year. While it is understood that emergencies do arise, there must be a maximum effort given to reserve these eight fellowship/studies to ensure maximum attendance.³¹

The curriculum for a year's worth of small group is split between the study of Scripture and/or church tradition and the development of family/relationship assets. Depending upon the depth of the material, two to three studies can be covered over the course of one eight month period of time. Examples of potential material are: Rich

³⁰ This proposal has its roots in the "circle," a traditional women's organization within most congregations of ELCA. In past generations, one of the most successful attempts for continuing adult Bible study has been groups of women who meet monthly for Bible study and prayer. These groups are called circles and are named for famous women of the Bible, e.g. Martha Circle, Lydia Circle, etc.

³¹ Summers in the Metro Chicago area are very difficult for planning. After a long winter embedded within a long school year, summer is a break from as much scheduled planning as possible. Thus the parents' small group is planned for just eight months. The meeting during the ninth month is the twenty-four-hour off-site retreat.

Melheim's *Holding Your Family Together*, Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*, or Philip Yancey's *Prayer: Does It Make a Difference*.

A major part of each "First Thursday Circle" is the sharing of victories and struggles. While, for some, the idea of sharing and/or praying for one another is difficult to imagine, this speed bump can be traversed with a gentle, but persistent hand. What follows is a review of the week's reading and questions. As part of the evening's agenda, an inquiry is made as to how each family's "Home Altar" is going. The intention of the question is not to bring shame, but support. The new assignment is then given for the following weeks. After a final prayer by the leader, the meeting is followed by some sort of dessert.

On each successive Thursday, an email/text is sent inviting each participant to enter into the group's online chat room. A couple of pertinent questions from the week's reading are posted and responses are invited. At the end of each week's group post is a recap of the victories and struggles for each family. Each family is invited to respond as to how God is at work. Depending on the material selected, video components of each curriculum are posted as needed each week. For instance, if the subject matter happens to be a book of the Bible, links are made to Luther Seminary's website, enterthebible.org. If the subject matter is Rich Melheim's *Holding the Family Together*, links are posted to the introductory Youtube videos of Rich Melheim teaching his Faith5[®] components.

A Multi-Pronged Attack to a Complicated Challenge

This doctoral project seeks to address one of the most significant conundrums of the modern American Lutheran church: faith formation in the age of over-commitment.

The problem is more than just the lack of a vision of faith formation for the parents of the newly baptized; it is the insidious nature of society's attempt to fill every waking hour with activity and anxiety. While the declared intention may seem good on the surface, i.e. building a better future for our children, the results are other: stress, exhaustion, and failure to disciple our children. This ministry initiative combines the need for a home altar (as played out by "doing the Faith5[©]" on a nightly basis) with a call to the ancient practice of Sabbath-keeping. Knowing that discipleship is a team sport, built into the project is communal support and accountability. The call towards a nightly home altar, a monthly circle of peers, quarterly in-home retreats, and a yearly off-site retreat are the multi-faceted attempts that parents of the twenty-first century Lutheran congregation need to fulfill the charge given to them at the baptism of their children: "to help their children grow in the Christian faith and life."³²

³² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 228.

CHAPTER 5

THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE MINISTRY INITIATIVE

The success of this ministry proposal will not depend upon a preacher's argument or a shame-inducing appeal to fulfill the parental obligations given at the baptism of our children. This proposal will need the power of the testimonies of those whose lives are being shaped by God through the daily practice of "holy time" and a periodic reminder of whose we are and who we are, Sabbath. Therefore, a very important step to the implementation of the ministry proposals outlined in Chapter 4 is the creation of a pilot project, populated by a small group of families who are willing and equipped to carve out the time necessary not only for living out God's mandate to rest and remember but also for the discipling of their children to take place. Before the pilot project team begins its preparatory work in the specific elements of the off-site parents' retreat and parents' small group, many of the components of the project already will have been in place.

Building upon What Has Already Begun

In the fall of 2015, SOTH began an important element of the overall project in the attempt to better equip parents to fulfill the public promises they made at the baptisms of their children. With the implementation of Richard Melheim's Faith5[©] curriculum in our

Sunday school and confirmation, a new expectation was introduced into the participant families; a daily “holy time” of sharing highs and lows, Scripture, prayer, and blessing is critical to the development of faith in children. As we move into our second year of this important emphasis, it is the hope of the leadership team that the parents and children will be both motivated and equipped to make this an important part of their nightly rituals.

Also beginning again in the fall will be the faith development class for parents of the very young, *Mommy, Daddy, and Me*. *Mommy, Daddy, and Me* is a faith-building initiative that seeks to use songs, games, and stories to help our parents begin to share God’s love and grace with their children at the earliest possible ages. It is the goal of the leadership team that this small group of parents and babies, led by a trained Christian early childhood education professional, begins to cement the practice of a “home altar” into SOTH family rituals from the very beginning of childhood.¹

Creating the Thirst for Rest: an Experiment in Sabbath

As has been already expressed throughout this ministry project in a variety of ways, the call to resurrect the practice of Sabbath-keeping may be the most foreign and complicated of all the components of this proposal. As Walter Brueggemann has often reminded us, Christians find Sabbath-keeping the most urgent but the most difficult of all the commandments. Regardless of whether we approach Scripture from a liberal or conservative bias, most of us are plugged into an economic system of acquisition not unlike what existed for the ancient Hebrews in Egypt.² Thus the need for constant doing

¹ This is also a terrific outreach to the families of our pre-school ministry, most of whom do not participate in any of SOTH’s ministries.

² Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 373/1231.

and producing has led to the ignoring of one of the most ancient means of marking one's identity as God's people: keeping the Sabbath.

The work of creating an atmosphere of Sabbath-keeping must be approached on a variety of fronts simultaneously. Without careful and gentle preparation, a sudden expectation to "keep the Sabbath" in the traditional understanding of that phrase will be met by young families with a combination of frustration, guilt, and hopelessness, thus dooming it to failure. This ministry proposal has gone to great lengths to remind its readers of the economic roots to the abandonment of Sabbath in our society. The feelings of anxiety caused by economic realities have seduced the suburban, middle-class family to involve their children in more and more activities. No parent wants to be accused of not doing enough to prepare their children for a bright economic future. Therefore, it seems almost heretical to push back against the powers that desire to use evenings and weekends to "fit in" more practices, games, and activities in order to create more items for an eventual college entrance application. The longer that the constant running from Monday morning to Sunday afternoon remains in place as the societal norm, the harder it becomes to envision an alternative. After four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, a call to freedom for the ancient Israelites must have seemed literally from another world.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of the famous novella *The Little Prince*, was once alleged to have said, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."³ Creating a yearning for resting in God is a major part of the strategy to

³ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Goodreads.com*, accessed online August 11, 2016, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/384067-if-you-want-to-build-a-ship-don-t-drum-up>.

introduce Sabbath-keeping to Shepherd of the Hill. In early October of 2016, the initial invitation to Sabbath-keeping will be given to the entire congregation. The first Saturday of November will begin the first of four quarterly “Deep Breath” in-home retreats. Done with adequate preparation and with enough “buy-in” from congregational leaders and pilot project participants, the experiment in Sabbath has the potential to instigate a thirst for God’s intention of a defined place and time for rest and remembering. Therefore, the Faith5[©] practices, *Mommy, Daddy, and Me*, as well as the “Deep Breath” in-home retreats will all be in motion by the time the work of the pilot project of this ministry proposal truly begins.

The Participants for the Pilot Project

In September of 2016, recruitment for a leadership team for the pilot project of this ministry proposal will begin. The pilot project seeks the parents of up to five different SOTH families. The preference would be that the participant families represent a broad spectrum of children’s ages and that at least one of the participant families be a single parent home. After an introductory meeting where the vision of this ministry project is presented, dates of meetings will be shared as well as dates of the trial off-site two day retreat planned for the early part of 2017.

The beginning monthly meetings of the pilot group will center on both developing the skills to be a small group facilitator and helping to refine the details of the implementation of this ministry project. As I no longer belong to the demographic of interest for this project (families with young children), continuing honest and insightful conversation is needed as to the practicality of the project’s particulars. Immediately, the

small group of pilot participants will begin to learn and model for each other what it means to be a caring community. The sharing of highs and lows, Scripture, prayer, and blessings will be part of every meeting. During the time between each of the meetings, weekly communication will take place asynchronously via access to a restricted *Google Plus* group, providing an online format that allows for the sharing of information and insight. *Google Plus* also allows for the sharing of video materials when necessary.

The pilot group will be encouraged to participate in the first of the “Deep Breath” in-home Sabbath retreats in November. The observations that come out of their experiences of this intentional day of resting and remembering will help in the revision of the next Sabbath experience in late February of 2017. Sometime in late January of 2017, the pilot group will be asked to participate in the first of the off-site, two-day retreats spoken of in Chapter 4. The elements of the retreat—the fast of silence, teaching about baptism, faithful assessment of the year-long family calendar, and the survey of joy—will be presented as if this pilot group were the participants of future retreats. The difference will be that there will be a greater time of analysis following the retreat to seek guidance on the best means of helping the families of SOTH both understand their role as the spiritual leaders of their families and evaluate whether their calendar of commitments will allow them to fulfill that role.

After returning from the off-site retreat, the pilot group will continue with their own monthly reunions, dividing their time between small group leadership training and preparation for the themes covered by the participant group beginning in March of 2017. As the pilot leadership group works ahead in the material to be covered, that will lessen

the need for more frequent face-to-face leadership meetings than the monthly ones scheduled for the 2017-2018 program years.

Timetable for Implementation

On September 7, 2016, confirmation classes begin for the 2016-2017 confirmation year. The “home altar” practices of sharing highs and lows, Scripture interpretation, prayer, and blessing will be emphasized and practiced at the end of each class. Material that facilitates the evening “home altar” practice in the home will be prepared and sent home with each student each week. The following Sunday, September 11, Sunday school will begin again and the same “home altar” practices, mentioned above, will be emphasized.

On September 20, 2016, preparation of material begins for the first in-home “Deep Breath” Sabbath retreat, including the search for options for a simple Sabbath meal. Two weeks later, the congregational newsletter will provide the first open invitation to the quarterly in-home retreat. Announcements during worship and inserts within the weekly worship bulletins will also be used. Included within the invitation will be an RSVP for the Sabbath meal. On October 31, materials—including instructions, suggestions for activities, and family recipes—are sent to families participating in the in-home Sabbath retreat.

November 5, 2016, the first quarterly, in-home Sabbath retreat begins at 5:00 p.m. with a Vespers-type worship service followed by a simple Sabbath meal. Following the meal, families are blessed and sent to their homes “to do nothing out of obligation” until sundown on Sunday evening. After the evening prayer that concludes the Sabbath day,

they are encouraged to do a simple reflection on their experiences, which can be shared with the pastor.

In mid-January 2017, a pilot leadership team for the parents' small group will be chosen. In mid-February, the bi-weekly, face-to-face "circle" meetings of the leadership team begin.⁴ Meetings on the off weeks will be done asynchronously, through SOTH's closed *Google Plus* format. A "Save-the-Date" announcement is given to the leadership team in order to make the proper arrangements to attend a late-March off-site Sabbath retreat.

On February 5, 2017, open invitations are given to those who want to participate in the next quarterly in-home "Deep Breath" Sabbath retreat. Two weeks later, the materials will be sent to the participant households. On February 25, 2017, the second quarterly in-home "Deep Breath" Sabbath retreat will begin with the same format as was used on November 5-6, 2016. Also in February, preparations will begin for a late March off-site Sabbath retreat for the pilot program participants at the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center, Oregon, Illinois.

In late-March 2017, the pilot program's first off-site retreat takes place with the goal of creating cohesion among pilot group members as well as debugging the off-site retreat format. Upon returning from the retreat, recruiting will begin for the new parents' monthly "circle" meeting starting in May, led by pilot/leadership group. As part of the

⁴ As the project commences there will be the need for more frequent meetings. Once the pilot team assumes its role as leaders of the parent "circle" group, face-to-face meetings will take place once a month.

recruiting, a “Save-the-Date” announcement will be made for the parents’ circle two-day retreat in early June.

On April 30, preparations are made for the third quarterly, in-home “Deep Breath” Sabbath retreat on May 20-21. The following week, on May 4, the new parents’ monthly “circle” meeting begins, led by pilot/leadership group. At that same meeting, requests for the off-site retreat’s RSVPs will be distributed. The advertising and preparation for the third, in-home Sabbath retreat will be executed in the same way as the first two.

On June 10-11, 2017, the first off-site parents’ retreat will take place with the same general format as the pilot project retreat in March. Three weeks later, on July 6, the last parents’ “circle” meeting will take place until September 7. Leaders will continue to meet monthly. August 13, 2017, preparations are made for the August 26 quarterly in-home Sabbath retreat.

The Right Kind of Leader for Pilot Project

When SOTH called its present youth ministry coordinator in August of 2014, it was obvious that the task of resurrecting youth programming at SOTH would not be easy. A quick glance at the demographics of those worshipping every Sunday revealed something that is sadly typical of most Lutheran churches: the absence of high school students. While SOTH would continuously see at least eight middle-schoolers affirm their baptismal faith every spring in the Rite of Confirmation, only one or two would

remain part of the worshipping community.⁵ The siren's call of sports, music, academic fervor, and new social opportunities seemed to immediately fill the void caused by an absence of quality high school programming. Therefore, the decision was made to build our youth ministries from the upper elementary and middle school levels on up.

However, it was soon discovered that the same challenges remain even among families of the middle elementary ages: club sports, dance, music, and excessive levels of homework have infiltrated even the households of elementary students.⁶

While we will not give up on our plans to reach out to the families of middle school and high school youth, the focus of this ministry project must be on the parents of the very young. Therefore the majority of the future leaders of the pilot project must be parents of children no older than sixth grade. Among those who fit this targeted demographic, there are obviously other criteria as well.

In the book *Making Small Groups Work*, authors Henry Cloud and John Townsend outline the need for clarification as to what the purpose and type a small group is going to be: "Small groups incorporate two threads that intertwine throughout meeting times: truth/structure and process/experience. The first thread involves the group's

⁵ Everything about SOTH's confirmation program has communicated that confirmation is a type of graduation from church. The confirmation service traditionally takes place in late May, concurrent to the end of the school year. The confirmands dress in rented robes not unlike robes used in middle-school promotions. There are the customary confirmation pictures taken, signed confirmation certificates distributed, and post-confirmation parties celebrated where gifts and cards are received and congratulatory cake eaten. In the same way that one does not expect to return back to middle school after one's promotion, this tradition's message is interpreted that once one has affirmed their baptismal faith on the day of confirmation, the obligation to church has been fulfilled. In an effort to change that not-so-subtle message, we have moved the day of confirmation to the last Sunday in October and have scheduled our high school youth programming on the same evening as confirmation class. The confirmand passes from confirmation to high school youth from one week to the next.

⁶ It is not uncommon for elementary-age club baseball and basketball teams to have between forty and sixty games a season.

structural makeup . . . how it imparts truth to its members. The second involves process elements . . . how much emotional closeness and experiences are right for the group.”⁷

While the overall purpose of the proposed small group for this project is to be a discipleship group, which would suggest a higher degree of structure, there are definite elements that require the need for process and experience. The aspect of discipleship is designed to help the parents of our children be more equipped and comfortable in knowing and sharing their faith with their children. However, a critical function of the small group is to help build mutual support for maintaining realistic levels of commitment within our families’ calendars. This combination of content material and the hope of an open sharing of one’s struggle with society’s expectations of parenthood require a leadership that is both grace-filled and truth-filled.

Proposed Responsibilities and Tasks of Leadership Group

The responsibilities for the participants of the pilot program who will eventually become the leaders of the parents’ “circle” small group are delineated in Cloud and Townsend’s work. Their job, first and foremost, is to facilitate that a number of things happen within the normal course of the parents’ small group. Firstly, the parents’ “circle” group must maintain a correct balance between grace and truth: “groups that offer either grace or truth leave members wanting something different and more . . . group members desperately need both.”⁸ Secondly, the group leaders need to be able to facilitate process. The vision of these circles of parents is to create a group that is a

⁷ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 117-118.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

mixture of both structured and process learning. The structured aspect of the small group is the easier of the two, as well-designed materials go a long way to communicate content. Facilitating process is more difficult, however. It requires developing strategies for getting the group “back on the path” and modeling a willingness to enter into deep conversations that often include speaking of life’s hurts. Thirdly, the leaders of the small group must be taught how to listen. Cloud and Townsend have very strong opinions about this ability: “A big part of the problem is that we think listening is just the ability to know what someone has said. And once we know what they have said, we feel permission to tell them what we think or feel . . . From a facilitator’s perspective, that is not listening. It is just waiting your turn.”⁹ Listening is more than just hearing the content of what is said; it is empathizing that you really care. The equation is simple: content plus feelings equals being understood.¹⁰ Finally, the facilitators need to be able to provide a safe place where “going deep” and the occasional confrontation is possible.

While the expected overall attitude and gift set for the leadership group is outlined above, the regularly scheduled specific tasks of the leadership group still need to be understood. It is the expectation of this ministry project that this group of leaders take on a number of responsibilities. First, the leaders are to be in agreement with the general outline, vision, and goals of the proposed ministry project. While 100% agreement is neither expected nor desired, there must exist a commonly shared confidence that this ministry proposal is a desirable and faithful direction for SOTH.¹¹ Second, the potential

⁹ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰ Ibid., 157.

leaders of this project are to be willing to regularly model Faith5[®] practices in their own home while, at the same time, heed the periodic sabbatical call to rest and remember in their own lives. Thus, the leaders of this project are expected to participate in the quarterly in-home “Deep Breath” retreats and the yearly off-site retreats.

Third, it is an expectation that the potential leaders of the parents’ circle attend the small group leader preparations that will take place at first bi-weekly and later monthly. In the weeks between the leaders’ circle meetings, the leaders will be expected to participate in the asynchronous communication with the rest of the group. Forth, beginning in May 2017, the leadership group will be counted upon to lead the monthly parents’ circle discipleship meetings and help to facilitate the online elements with the group members in the off weeks. When the parents’ circle meetings begins, the expected participation in continuing leadership preparation will move from every two weeks to every month.

Fifth, the leadership group will be called on to regularly pray for those partaking in the parents’ circle small group, maintaining a list of prayer concerns and answered prayers. In addition to leading through prayer, there will be an expectation that the leaders will be disposed to being willing and honest participants of the parents’ circle as well as in the facilitators’ circle meetings; this includes being known, giving and receiving feedback, practicing obedience, discovering and developing gifts, taking risks,

¹¹ I hope to develop a team of leaders who are willing to continue to critique the proposal while remaining committed to its overall goals.

and confessing and repenting—just as they would expect from the members of the small group.¹²

Finally, the leadership group will take a share in the responsibility to constantly look for means to expand the group of families participating in parents' circles, be that increasing the size of the original group or, preferably, multiplying the number of small groups in addition to consistently looking for new leaders and being willing to mentor.

The group of leaders tentatively identified to pilot this ministry project includes a couple who are parents of three elementary aged boys. Both of these parents have experience in facilitating small groups. Another couple, relatively new to our ministry, also has three young children, ages three, six, and seven. Another couple, parents of a one year old baby, has showed great enthusiasm for the vision of this ministry project and communicated considerable desire to be involved, in spite of having a less developed faith life. The search continues for a single parent household and a family with older children.

The Beginning Nuts and Bolts of Curricula

With the beginning bi-weekly meetings of the pilot group/leadership team, there will be two primary tasks. The first is to begin the process of building the set of skills that Cloud and Townsend speak of in their book, *Making Small Groups Work*. Using this book and the corresponding training session entitled *Making Your Small Group Work Participant's Guide* (which comes as a workbook with supplemental teaching in video format), the majority of the first two months will be spent in preparing the pilot group to

¹² Cloud, *Making Small Groups Work*, 193-240.

be the best small group leaders possible. The particular format of the participant's guide lends itself to one of the key features of this ministry project: a recognition that the operations of a church community can be part of the problem regarding a family's overcommitted schedule. The educational material included in the guide and DVD can be presented in both a traditional face-to-face setting and in the more flexible online format through the congregation's restricted *Google Plus* account.

The second task involves becoming familiar with the first topical theme of the eventual parents' circle meetings, *Holding Your Family Together: 5 Simple Steps to Help Bring Your Family Closer to God and Each Other* by Richard Melheim. Melheim's material also includes video resources that can be adapted for home access between normal monthly meetings. Potential future materials are MaryAnn McKibben's *Sabbath in the Suburbs*, Richard Peace's *Noticing God*, Robert Schmalzle's *The 7 Habits of Jesus*, and Michael Rinehart's *Learning to Pray Again*.

The face-to-face meetings of the pilot/leadership group will be led by the author of this ministry proposal. After the first meeting, each member of the group will take a turn facilitating the discussion and gathering prayer requests for prayer time. At the end of each session, a time of feedback will be invited from the other participants. The facilitator for that week will be responsible for sending a reminder to the group for the next meeting as well as collecting information on how God is answering the previous prayer requests.

Resources Needed

One of the advantages of this ministry proposal is the efficient use of SOTH's resources. Time, desire, and the gifts of the people involved are the most extensively used resources for this project. Not including the off-site two day retreats, the additional time requirement for the coordinator of this proposal is estimated at seven to ten hours per week. This block of time includes the search and development of new curricula for circle meetings and retreats, convening and facilitating pilot project/leaders meetings, evaluation of on-line responses, and facilitation of off-site retreats. Human resource hours for volunteer leader's group/pilot group are estimated at approximately 8-10 hours per month, not including off-site retreats.

Non-human resource costs include the cost of retreat facilities and subsequent meals. The retreat facilities at our nearby Lutheran camps run at \$55-\$67 per person. This includes the cost of breakfast. The simple Sabbath meal before each "Deep Breath" at-home retreat will be subsidized by suggested donations as well as a majority of the costs for circle curricular materials. Another potential expense may be the use of pulpit supply if needed during the two day off-site retreat as well as honorariums of guest speakers, e.g. local Christian college admissions representatives, Christian coaches of local sports teams, a local school counselor, or a Christian child psychologist.

The Beginnings of a Plan for Assessment

A commonly spoken truism in business management is "without measurement there is no way to manage." One year ago, we began an important aspect of this doctoral project: the implementation of Faith5[©] in our children's ministries. As important of a

step as this may be, we, as a leadership team, have yet to do a planned assessment. We have not asked the families of our ministries whether they are actually using the material that we are sending home on a weekly basis.

A major tool for the assessment of this project will be a questionnaire that will be distributed to all of its participants (See Appendix C). One of the purposes of the questionnaire is to assess two different aspects of the faith life of our parishioners: participation in our regular worship services and participation in the Faith5[®] “home altar” initiative. The goal behind this assessment tool is two-fold: give a baseline for the participation in these important faith-building components and seek to discover the chief obstacles to their fulfillment. The other purpose of the assessment is to begin a conversation about the current level of satisfaction with the present arrangement of the family’s commitment.

As this survey is utilized to create a base-line at a participant family’s entrance into the program, it will then be repeated in nearly identical form in one year’s time. It is the hope of this author, that the subsequent year will show an increase in the number of nights per week that the family is participating in Faith5[®] activities as well as a noticeably lower level of anxiety regarding the number of commitments in which the family is participating. Following the second distribution, an analysis of the “before” and “in-road” surveys will be made and the results shared with the leadership team.

An Assessment of Joy

Perhaps the most significant assessment to be done in the midst of this ministry proposal is the assessment of joy done at the conclusion of the off-site two day retreat.

(See Appendix B) The skeleton of this survey is borrowed from Pastor Kara Root from Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church. In her work to resurrect the healthy practice of Sabbath-keeping within her congregation, she realized that joy was at stake regarding the relationship that one has with the congregation. If the work of a church congregation is seen as only a maintenance of the system and not part of the life giving work of God, then the joy has gone.

The fundamental questions of the post retreat assessment involve the perceived presence of God and the joy that God brings. As one looks at the previous twelve months of participation in the church and other outside activities, the first two questions presented are, “Which activities were life-giving for you? What about them gave you joy and/or satisfaction?” The logical following question is, “Which activities were a challenge for you? What about them frustrated you? What about them seemed to rob life from you and/or were a chore?”

The remaining questions serve to remind the partaker that, regardless of what society proclaims, one does have the option to change: “Which of the activities in which you participated would you like to continue to do? Which activities in which you participated would you prefer to leave behind either permanently or for a defined period of time? Would it be possible to change something about the activity that could create joy again? If so, what?”

While the results of the joy assessment may not be as scientifically measurable as one would like, the very asking of the questions communicates that one has the potential to begin to take control of one’s calendar and thus one’s life. The assessment of joy assumes that one has permission to say “no” to those things that draw a family away from

God and thus be able to say “yes” to that which is needed to build a deeper, more all-encompassing faith in God.

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit used two very memorable conversations with two different members of Shepherd of the Hill Lutheran Church to begin the thought process that led to work on this doctoral project. The first was an email conversation with a man I will call Bill. Bill and his wife, both professionals, began their family in their mid-thirties and had their three children in four years. They have been one of the most faithful families of SOTH, consistently making themselves available for the variety of leadership positions needed for a ministry of SOTH's size. By email, I approached Bill with a proposal to help head a stewardship team we needed in order to begin to work on some long-term stewardship projects. I laid out the goals of the team and what I thought would be its responsibilities and time commitments. Within twenty-four hours, Bill replied. He expressed his interest in the plan and then told me that his participation would have to fit in and around the other commitments he presently had in his life. He then proceeded to list those commitments which both impressed and discouraged me. Bill listed eleven high-powered obligations that included on-going projects with his company (he is the vice-president of a large business firm), community (he serves on the local community development agency), school district, church, coaching, fraternity, and the normal obligations of father, husband, and son of aging parents. In none of this, did he say "no" to my request. He just asked for prayers for maintaining perspective in the midst of it all. Within the day, I responded by rescinding my request and thanking him for his willingness to use the gifts that God had given him in such productive ways. However, I added, "Please move your wife to the top of that list and continue to ask yourself, 'Can I

do it all?”” Later that day, Bill responded, “Wow! I had never written that list down before . . . I just want to do as God calls, which is sometimes easier said than done.”

The second conversation was with a single mom whom I will call Carrie. Carrie has three children, the youngest of which had recently affirmed his baptismal faith in our Confirmation service. In spite of a painful divorce and working a demanding full-time job, Carrie had always been an incredibly devoted mother and church volunteer. In the midst of running her children to drama classes, dance, and baseball, she had very capably run SOTH’s Sunday school program for nearly the entire time her children had participated. She was an aid in her children’s confirmation classes and helped to organize the yearly Vacation Bible School. Early in the spring of 2015, Carrie met with me regarding her participation in Sunday school. She and her team that had taught Sunday school for the previous ten years were tired. Their children had transitioned out and they were ready for something different. I shared with her that I understood and supported her decision. I also thanked her for telling me early enough in order to begin to vision something new for the following year’s Sunday school. I then took advantage of our meeting to explain another youth initiative that our leadership staff was starting to discuss. Within a few sentences, I began to notice a change in Carrie’s normally bubbly demeanor; she became very quiet. At the end of the explanation I was giving, I told her that I was not going to ask her to be part of the new initiative, but just wanted her opinion. She looked at me with huge relief in her eyes and said, “That is good. If you had asked me I would have broken down and cried.” Such was the weight of the obligations placed upon her. I did not ask her outright, but I suspect if I had asked her to participate in the new initiative, she would have had a very difficult time saying no.

We live in a different age than did our parents and grandparents. Within ethnic Lutheran communities, the church was near the center of family life. It represented not only the faith formation of the family but also was a primary generator of social and community activities. In SOTH's case, youth swing choirs, softball leagues, and traveling puppet ministries were major vehicles for family activities up until the late 1990s. This has changed in the last generation. Rising mortgages and college costs together with the stagnation of wages have created an economic-based anxiety within families that is all too easily exploited by the cottage industries of youth club activities. Parents are being convinced that a long list of items for an eventual college application is the only path towards receiving help to pay for college. These club activities for youth do not crave just money but time.

The demands of school homework have also changed. Anxious school systems, forced into patterns of proving their worth through endless standardized testing, have also added hours and hours of after school occupation. More and more of a family's 168 hours per week is devoured in homework and the shuttling of children from one activity to the next. Because time is a zero-sum commodity, precious little of it is left for either a practice of home altar or just plain rest, both of which are needed for faith formation. Faith formation has become just another competitor for the time of the average family. A quick look at the demographics of those who remain as worshipping families after the confirmation requirements have been fulfilled suggest that the church is losing that competition.

Stories like those of Bill and Carrie remind us that it is not a question of faithfulness. Both Bill and Carrie want to please God and do what is best for their

families. What is lacking is a vision of faith-formation that takes seriously the competing calls of time. In an age that offers more and more options for youth activities, a return to a form of the ancient practice Sabbath-keeping is needed not only to offer rest for a weary creation but to build in an intentional time of remembering. God knew full well the challenges in front of the Israelites as they proceeded to take possession of the Promised Land. The chief challenge would be “to remember.” That was why so much of the Law that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai (and reiterated on Mt. Pisgah) had to do with remembering. The daily Shema, the weekly keeping of Sabbath, the yearly reenacting of the Passover and Succoth all have one goal in mind: remember who you are, whose you are, and what God has done for you. In the Lutheran Christian context, daily prayers and devotions, weekly worship, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the yearly liturgical calendar also serve to help us remember who we are, whose we are, and what God has done for us.

The consequences for not remembering were disastrous for the Israelites of the Old Testament; the whole cyclical saga of the Judges proves the point. It would take the near destruction of the Jewish people during the Babylonian Exile to resurrect the importance of the need to keep the Sabbath and the other mnemonic devices from the Law of Moses. Is it an exaggeration to think that the Lutheran expression of the Christian faith is heading down that same path? Instead of the siege of Jerusalem by Babylonian armies, is it now the siege of “holy time” by club sports and homework? Instead of generations of forced labor as exiles in a foreign land, is it now the captivity of an over commitment to the multitude of extracurricular activities five nights a week and both weekend days? We have entered into a path which ultimately leads to forgetting who we are and whose we are. In a Lutheran theological context, remembering is

critical. In large part, faith is the trust in a God-given identity granted by grace at baptism and lived in and through the community of saints. If we forget who we are and whose we are, how long will it be before pharaoh-like false gods creep into the void, demanding more and more bricks from less and less straw?

Prayer, worship, Scripture, service, fellowship, and generosity are the tools that God gives to help us remember. Through these tools, faith in this restful God, in whose image we are created, can grow. But these things do not happen on their own; they rely on the intention of the participants. Like all created things, the practices of faith need space and time. A reclamation of that space and time can be found in a nightly Faith5[©] ritual, a time where God's grace and love can intersect with a parent's grace and love. This is only part of the fight, however. The family also needs a periodic reminder that we are not just created to "do" but we are created to "be." We need the regularly scheduled permission to "cease" and remember as we seek to recover Sabbath. This distinctly counter-cultural thing that we pursue will not be easy. For that we need a community of faith around us. It is my hope and prayer that this ministry initiative puts us on a path towards doing these very things. The future of Shepherd of the Hill depends upon it.

APPENDIX A

Frequently Asked Questions about Baptism

What is Baptism?

The origin of the word “baptism” literally means to take a bath. Before Jesus began His earthly ministry, John the Baptist used baptism as a sort of cleansing bath, symbolically washing away the sins of people who had confessed their sins and returned to God.

(Read about this in Mark 1:1-8)

Though Jesus had never committed any sins, Jesus was baptized at the beginning of His ministry. In this act we learn that baptism is more than just “symbolically washing away sins.” In Jesus’ baptism, He is proclaimed to be the Son of God, received the Holy Spirit, and is sent forth on His mission. *(Read Matthew 3:13-17)*

John said that there would be yet another kind of baptism to come. He told those who had come to be baptized, “*I have baptized you with water; but [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” *(Mark 1:8)* We see in the Bible many occasions where individuals, upon receiving this baptism of the Holy Spirit, are given special gifts for the benefit of the whole church community. *(Acts 19:1-10)*

Later in the Bible, we also see baptism as a means by which God brings us into His body and joins us to His mission. *(Read Romans 6:3-4)*

Why do Christians baptize?

First and foremost, we baptize because Jesus commands us to baptize. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus left His disciples (His students) with these instructions, “*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” Baptizing in the name of God and teaching those things that Jesus taught are the primary ways that disciples are made and trained.

How did the first Christians respond to Jesus’ command?

The book of Acts tells us the story of the first 30 years or so of the church. In that book we find nine stories where baptism is used by Christ’s followers. *(Acts 2:14-42; 8:12-13; 8:35-40; 9:1-19; 10:44-48; 16:11-15; 16:31-34; 18:5-11; 19:1-10 and 22:6-16)*. In

these stories we see men and women, insiders and outsiders, Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free people being baptized. We also see in three instances (*16:11-15; 16:31-34 and 18:5-11*) entire households (meaning entire families and their servants) being baptized.

Is that why Lutheran Christians also baptize infants?

Nowhere does it say that we must be baptized as children. But because the book of Acts gave no restrictions about age and because Jesus explicitly invited children into His presence (*Matthew 19:14*), the ancient church began the practice of baptizing the children of believing parents. The parts of the Bible written before Jesus set the precedent.

Many years before, in obedience to God, the Old Testament people of God (the Jews) circumcised their male babies at the age of only eight days. Circumcision for them was a physical sign of being incorporated into the “family of God” (*Genesis 17*). Obviously an 8-day-old infant cannot make the decision to believe in God. It is God who reaches down and begins that relationship. This is a common theme in the Bible. Almost always, the Bible shows us that it is God who first comes to humans in order to create a relationship with Him. Read for yourself the Bible’s stories of Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samuel, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul and many others.

Doesn’t faith need to be present for baptism to be “real”?

With the exception of the families/households of Lydia (*Acts 16:11-15*), the Philippian jailer (*Acts 16:31-43*), and Crispin (*Acts 18:5-11*), the people who were baptized in the book of Acts confessed their faith in Jesus first and then were baptized. When adults are baptized in this church, they too must confess their faith before baptism.

When children are baptized, it is the parents and sponsors who confess their faith and promise to raise that child in a “home” filled with faith in Jesus. If faith is not present in the parents (if baptism is just a family tradition), then baptism loses its significance. Baptism is the beginning of a relationship with God through Jesus. However, it is the relationship that is of greatest importance. In baptism, God plants the seed of that relationship in the child. Later on, when faith in God has taken root and they are able, they too must respond in faith to God. During our baptismal service, we ask the parents to agree to the following things:

- to live with their children among God’s faithful people,
- bring *them* to the word of God and the holy supper,
- teach *them* the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,

- place in *their* hands the holy scriptures,
- and nurture *them* in faith and prayer,

so that *their children* may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.

Is there a ceremony that recognizes when a child has acquired their own faith in Jesus?

Yes, that ceremony is called *Confirmation* (or *Affirmation of Baptism*). As that child grows in a faith-filled home and hears God’s word taught, the seed of faith will grow. Our Confirmation ministry is for 12-16 year-olds and lasts 3 years, at the end of which they are asked to make a public profession of their faith.

If I’m an adult and have not been baptized, is it too late for me?

No, it is never too late. Remember, that in Jesus, there are no restrictions on age, race or gender. If you feel the desire to be baptized, come in and let’s talk about it. All that is necessary is that you are ready to profess your faith in Jesus and follow Him.

What if I were baptized as a child then left the church and did bad things? Must I be re-baptized?

No. It is not necessary. When we repent (return to God) and ask His forgiveness, we symbolically return to the waters of baptism and our sins are washed away. Confession, repentance and forgiveness can and should be a daily process.

The Bible tells us many stories of adults coming to have faith in Jesus and being baptized. However, never once does it mention someone being re-baptized with water in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Doesn’t baptism by itself give us eternal life?

Baptism is not a magic pill or some sort of “fire insurance”. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say that baptism by itself saves us. Mark 16:16 tells us, “*those who believe [have faith in Jesus] and are baptized will be saved*”. Baptism is an unused treasure until we have faith in the God in whose name we are baptized.

APPENDIX B

Survey of Joy

As you reflect back upon the previous twelve months of activities for you and your family:

1. Which activities were life-giving for you, personally? (In other words – activities that were not a chore but a joy.) What about them gave you joy and/or satisfaction?

2. Which activities were life-giving for your children? What about those activities gave them joy and satisfaction?

3. Which of your personal activities were a challenge for you? What about them frustrated you? What about them seemed to rob life from you and/or were a chore?

4. Which of your children's activities seemed frustrating for them? What about them seemed to rob life?

5. (If applicable) Which of your personal activities were a challenge for your spouse? What about them frustrated him or her? What about them seemed to rob life for him/her and were a chore?

As you look at your calendar of events for the next twelve months:

6. How would you respond to the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel excited at the thought of participating in the events of the next twelve months.				
My children are excited at participating in the events of the next twelve months.				
I feel a sense of fear or dread at the thought of participating in the events of the next twelve months.				
I feel confident that our family can handle all of the events of this upcoming year.				
The events of the next twelve months allow enough time for evening prayers and devotions with my family on a regular basis.				
I regularly feel pressured to enroll my children in more activities.				
The events of the next twelve months allow enough time for Sunday/Saturday worship on a regular basis.				
The events of the next twelve months allow enough time healthy amounts of sleep for both me and my children.				
The events of the next twelve months allow enough time to tend to my marriage in a healthy way.				
The events of the next twelve months allow enough time to tend to the other relationships in my life (i.e. with parents, friends, etc.) in a healthy way.				
If I felt I could (without feeling guilty) simplify my family's schedule, I would.				

6. As you look at the calendar for the next twelve months, which activities would you like to continue to do?

7. Which activities in which your children have participated, would you like to have them continue?

8. If you could, without guilt, leave behind an activity (personal or for your children) either permanently or for a defined period of time, which would it be?

9. Of the activities you mentioned in Question 8, would it be possible to change something about the activity that could create joy again? If so, what?

10. What different activity would you like to try but haven't yet?

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for the Families of SOTH

When your child was baptized, the pastor began the liturgy of baptism with these words, “As you bring your child to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

- to live with him among God’s faithful people,
- bring her to the word of God and the holy supper,
- teach him the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
- place in her hands the holy scriptures,
and nurture him in faith and prayer,

so that your child may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.”

The pastor then turned to you and asked a very important question, “Do you promise to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?”

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help the leadership team of Shepherd of the Hill understand what more we can do to help you fulfill the promise that you gave at the baptism of your child. Thank you for taking a few moments to fill out the following. Please mark all that apply.

1. If your children were baptized, did you receive any kind of pre-baptismal instruction?

- No, we just showed up on the day of the baptism.
- Yes, we attended a single class about baptism.
- Yes, we attended a series of classes about baptism and other church practices.
- Yes, we were given educational material (such as a book or pamphlet) to read ahead of time.
- My children are not baptized.

2. During the school year (September through May), how many times per month does your family regularly attend worship?

- Rarely
- Once per month
- Twice per month
- Three times per month
- Nearly always.

3. During the summer months (June – August), how many times per month does your family regularly attend worship?

- Rarely
- Once per month
- Twice per month
- Three times per month
- Nearly always.

4. Last year the Sunday school and Confirmation programs introduced Faith5[©] into their curriculum. Faith5[©] encourages the family to gather and share highs and lows, read Scripture, pray for, and bless each other every night of the week. During an average week, how many nights per week do you do all or part of Faith5[©] (or something similar) with your family?

- Rarely
- 1-2 times per week.
- 3-4 times per week.
- 5 or more times per week.

5. What is the greatest obstacle in fulfilling the Faith5[©] (or something similar) with your children on a regular basis?

- I am not comfortable praying out loud with my children.
- I do not own a Bible or know how to find a particular verse.
- There is not enough time to do Faith5[©], given all of our family’s other activities.
- I do not believe that Faith5[©] is necessary or helpful.
- My child (children) do not want to participate in Faith5[©].

6. During an average week of the school year, how many afternoons or evenings are there regularly scheduled activities for my family (sports practices, games, dance, Scouts, church, etc.)?

- Rarely
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5 or more.

7. How would you respond to each of the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am exhausted at some point in most every day.				
My children are exhausted at some point in most every week.				

I regularly get as much sleep as I need.				
My children regularly get as much sleep as they need.				
On a regular basis, I take time each day to pray and reflect on God's presence in my life.				
I regularly feel pressured to enroll my children in more activities.				
I am worried how we are going to pay for our children's college.				
I have too much free time.				

Thank you for taking time to answer these questions.

Pastor Jon

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alhaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.
- American Lutheran Church. *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.
- Ammerman, Nancy T., Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, editors. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Benedict. *The Rule of St. Benedict*. New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1975.
- Bliese, Richard and Craig Van Gelder, editors. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- Brown Taylor, Barbara. *The Practice of Saying No*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2009. Kindle.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. Kindle.
- Burden, Tanya. "Homework Anxiety: Survey Reveals How Much Homework K-12 Students Are Assigned and Why Teachers Deem It Beneficial." *U of Phoenix News* (February 25, 2014). Accessed January 25, 2016. <http://www.phoenix.edu/news/releases/2014/02/survey-reveals-how-much-homework-k-12-students-are-assigned-why-teachers-deem-it-beneficial.html>.
- George Buttrick, ed. *The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 1*. Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952.
- Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- College Board. "Tuition and Fees, Room and Board over Time of 1975-76 to 2015-16, Selected Years." *Trends in Higher Education*. Accessed January 8, 2016. www.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/tuition-and-fees-and-room-and-board-over-time-1975-76-2015-16.
- Cook Everist, Norma, editor. *The Difficult but Indispensable Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.
- Cook Everist, Norma and Craig Nesson. *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009.

- Conzen, Michael and Kay Carr, editors. *The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor: A Guide to Its History and Sources*. Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988.
- Daubert, Dave. *Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2007.
- _____. *Luther's Priesthood of All Believers: A Simple Model for 21st Century Christians*. Elgin, IL: Day 8 Resources, 2014.
- Dawn, Marva. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.
- de Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. *Goodreads.com*, accessed August 11, 2016. <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/384067-if-you-want-to-build-a-ship-don-t-drum-up>.
- ELCA. "ELCA Facts." Accessed February 2, 2016. <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/ELCA-Facts>.
- _____. "ELCA Family Tree." Accessed February 2, 2016. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_Family_Tree.pdf?_ga=1.23510394.1584882318.1370897192.
- _____. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress Press, 2006.
- Evans, C.F. "Sabbath." In *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, edited by Alan Richardson, 205-206. New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1950.
- Foss, Michael. *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989.
- Granquist, Mark. "Christian Youth Ministries and Youth Sports: A View from the Trenches." *Word & World: Theology for Christian Ministry* 35 (Fall 2015): 341-348.
- Hargrave, Terry D. *Boomers on the Edge: Three Realities That Will Change Your Life Forever*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- _____. *The Essential Humility of Marriage: Honoring the Third Identity in Couple Therapy*. Phoenix: Zeig, Tucker & Theisen, 2000.

- Harline, Craig. *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl*. New York: Doubleday, 2007.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
- Hunter, Elizabeth. "We All Need Sabbath." *Gather for Faith and Action*, Vol. 25, No. 7 (September, 2015): 4.
- Jacobson, Rolf. "Sports Fandom: Worthless Idol and Wonderful Thing." *Word & World: Theology for Christian Ministry* 35 (Fall 2015): 317-325.
- Kolb, Robert. "Discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition." lecture given at the Fourth Annual Crossing Conference, January 23, 2012. Accessed June 21, 2016. <http://concordiatheology.org/2012/03/discipleship-in-the-lutheran-tradition>.
- Lamb, John. *Images of America- Lockport, Illinois: The Old Canal Town*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999.
- Luther, Martin. "Large Catechism." In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Theodore Tappert, 357-462. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- _____. "The Estate of Marriage." In *Luther's Works, Vol. 45*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962.
- Lull, Timothy, editor. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989.
- Martin, Kevin. *The Myth of the 200 Barrier: How to Lead Through Transitional Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Matheny, Mike. *The Matheny Manifesto: A Young Manager's Old-School Views on Success in Sports and Life*. New York: Crown Archetype, 2015.
- Mattis, Mark. "Discipleship in Lutheran Perspective." *Lutheran Quarterly* XXVI (2012): 142-163.
- McKibben Dana, MaryAnn. *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2012. Kindle.
- Melanchthon, Philip. "Augsburg Confession." In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Theodore Tappert, 23-96. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

- Melheim, Rich. *Holding Your Family Together: 5 Simple Steps to Help Bring Your Family Closer to God and Each Other*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2013. Kindle.
- _____, editor. *Let's Kill Sunday School Before It Kills the Church*. Stillwater, MN: Faith Inkubators, 2015.
- Nelson, E. Clifford, editor. *The Lutherans in North America*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Nessan, Craig L. *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999.
- Roberto, John. *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages and Generations*. Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Publications, 2015. Kindle.
- Robinson, David. *The Busy Family's Guide to Spirituality: Practical Lessons for Modern Living from the Monastic Tradition*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009.
- Roloff, Marvin, editor. *Education for Christian Living: Strategies for Nurture Based on Biblical and Historical Foundations*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1987.
- Root, Kara. "Making Space for Sabbath." In *Renew 52, Ideas to Change the Church: 50+ Ideas to Revitalize Your Congregation from Leaders under 50*, edited by David Lose, 93-94. St. Paul: Luther Seminary Press, 2012.
- Rueff, Ashley. "I-355 Extension Fails to Push Development into the Fast Lane." *Chicago Tribune* (November 26, 2012). Accessed January 25, 2016. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-11-26/news/ct-met-355-broken-dreams-20121126_1_extension-interstate-highway-economic-development.
- Shulevitz, Judith. "Bring Back the Sabbath." *New York Times Magazine* (March 2, 2003). Accessed December 27, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/02/magazine/bring-back-the-sabbath.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Stevens, Heidi. "More Me-Time in Five Easy Steps." *Chicago Tribune* (January 4, 2016). Accessed January 17, 2016. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/stevens/ct-seizing-me-time-fringe-hours-balancing-20160104-column.html>.
- Suburban Stats. "Current Lockport, Illinois Population, Demographics and Stats, 2016." Accessed May 27, 2016. <https://suburbanstats.org/population/illinois/how-many-people-live-in-lockportwhite>.

- Tappert, Theodore ed. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.
- U.S. Census Bureau. "Median and Average Square Feet of Floor Area in New Single-Family Houses Completed by Location." Accessed February 2, 2016. www.census.gov/const/C25Ann/_sfttotalmedavgsqft.pdf.
- _____. "Median Sales Prices of New Homes Sold in U.S." Accessed January 9, 2016. www.census.gov/const/uspricemon.pdf.
- _____. "Population of Chicago, Illinois by Decade." Accessed January 25, 2016. <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tablo.txt>.
- Wallace, Kelly. "Kids Have Three Times Too Much Homework, Study Finds: What's the Cost?" *CNN News* (August 12, 2015). Accessed February 1, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/12/health/homework-elementary-school-study/index.html?sr=tw081215toomuchhomework1030AVOPtopPhoto>.
- Ward, Gary. "A History of Texaco in Lockport." Lecture of the Lockport Area Genealogical and Historical Society, Lockport Public Library, Lockport, Illinois, July 18, 2015.
- Willard, Dallas, "Spirituality and Ministry." Lecture, Fuller Seminary, Sierra Madre, CA, June 5, 2012.
- _____. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: Harper, 1997.
- _____. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: Harper, 1988.
- Wright, Christopher. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.