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Advancing the Cause of the Gospel Pastoral Blogging by Luther's Heirs

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Soli Deo Gloria

“What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent.”

C.S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics”

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could, and probably should, thank my wife Delores for her unfailing support and encouragement. I could, and probably should, thank my children Aaron, Kristen, Lucas, Randy and Katie. Their faithfulness to our Lord is so constant I need never be distracted from my goals by concern over their wellbeing. I could, and probably should, thank my wonderful grandchildren Andrew, Ariana, Dominic, Arabelle, Rachel, Rebecca, Kaelyn, and Asher, whose exuberant examples continue to inspire me to gaze at God's handiwork with awe.

I could, and probably should, thank the many devout professors at Luther Seminary and Concordia Seminary who were patient with my eccentricities and walked beside me as I have continued to embrace the mysteries of God in greater depth . . . especially during those years when I was privileged to be able to discuss with them matters of eternity over a cup of coffee or pint of ale.

I am grateful to all of those listed above for their roles in my life. However, I have no doubt that they would all wholeheartedly concur with my decision to simply say: *Soli Deo Gloria*.

ABSTRACT

Stroud, Robert C. "Advancing the Cause of the Gospel: Pastoral Blogging by Luther's Heirs." D.Min. diss., Concordia Seminary—St. Louis, [2016]. [353] pp.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether provision of a digital Handbook for Pastoral Blogging would be of value to pastors who had never before blogged. A draft Handbook was provided to thirteen LCMS clergy from across the United States who were serving in parish ministries. They proceeded to begin blogs and maintain them over a period of three months.

Data was collected from the participants at three points. The first was an online survey prior to receiving the Handbook. A second survey was completed after the conclusion of the three-month exercise. All thirteen subjects volunteered to also take part in a final one-on-one interview which was conducted via internet or telephonic media.

The data supported the hypothesis that some pastors would find this type of resource helpful. As a result of their comments and suggestions, the Handbook was expanded to include additional information. In addition, a website has been prepared to provide supplemental support to blogging LCMS pastors, as well as other rostered workers in the Synod. This website had not been envisaged in the initial plan for the Major Applied Project. Both the expanded Handbook and the website will be offered for use by all rostered members of the LCMS upon final approval of this research project.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30–31).¹

Nothing in the cosmos is more important and powerful than the Word of God. Were it not for the Logos, nothing apart from God himself would exist; “. . . without him was not anything made that was made.” This divine Word is infinitely more than some poetic allusion or human imagining.² The universe was birthed by the Word. And the act of speaking all things into existence is no accident. This is part of the wondrous and perfect design of the Alpha and Omega. As a preeminent scholar of the Reformation writes: “God’s Word formed reality, as the Creator’s agent and instrument for creating—and re-creating sinners into his children. . . . Luther asserted that God has the whole world on his lips.”³

The import of words did not pass with the end of the creation account. Words have remained God’s preferred means of communicating with his creation ever since. Certainly it would be within his majesty to use some other channel, such as images. Yet he primarily chooses to communicate with his people in words. In his biography of Martin Luther, Robert Kolb writes:

His Word in all its forms actually conveys and performs his saving will. God designed his Word in these forms as instruments of his re-creating power which

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

² Gifted writers have reflected on this miracle with their own finite words. In the ninth chapter of *The Magician’s Nephew*, C.S. Lewis takes the liberty of having the lion Aslan sing Narnia into existence. “The lion was pacing to and fro about that empty land and singing his new song. It was softer and more lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars and the sun; a gentle, rippling music. And as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass.” C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 123.

³ Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63.

accomplish what they announce. More than performative speech, they are creative speech, parallel to God's speaking in Genesis 1. . . . Luther believed that God approaches sinners through conversation expressed in human means of communication, words but also sacramental expressions in material forms as well.⁴

It is natural for God's children to grow in their understanding of the Gospel. However, in our fallen nature, it would be unfathomable to pretend to possess full and unblemished doctrine. In his Preface to the *Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings*, published in Wittenberg in 1545, Martin Luther describes his personal faith journey. In explaining the chronology of his spiritual enlightenment, Luther provides insights into potential inconsistencies in his writings. It is commonsense, of course, to attribute them to the growth in his understanding of the gospel.

I relate these things, good reader, so that, if you are a reader of my puny works, you may keep in mind, that, as I said above, I was all alone and one of those who, as Augustine says of himself, have become proficient by writing and teaching. I was not one of those who from nothing suddenly become the topmost, though they are nothing, neither have labored, nor been tempted, nor become experienced, but have with one look at the Scriptures exhausted their entire spirit.⁵

A Modern Spiritual Pilgrimage

Since it is the nature of the Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project to invite a candid first person reflection by the researcher, I will begin with thoughts about how I came to this particular study, which conforms so well to my life story.⁶ I was not raised in a literary family. Both of my parents read the newspaper, and my mother read her Bible, but I don't recall ever seeing them with another book in their hands. My mother earned a high school

⁴ Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith*, 132.

⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Lewis W. Spitz & Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), 338.

⁶ I will approach this potentially uncomfortable first person literary voice with confidence, following the example of the eminent Victor Raj, who introduced a recent essay of his own saying, "All my life I have never begun an essay with a personal story line such as this one." Victor Raj, "These Post-Missionary Times," *Missio Apostolica* 19, no. 2 (2011): 101.

diploma, and my father received his General Educational Development Certificate of High School Equivalency as a young Marine Corps recruit. My own literary abilities were sadly lacking, and it was not until I was a freshman in college that I experienced the wonderful epiphany of comprehending a metaphor. I had read many of them, but I recall vividly the moment when it “clicked.” And what power and mental dynamism it released! It is likely no coincidence that this verbal enlightenment paralleled a simultaneous spiritual renewal in my own life. I was amazed at the depth of metaphorical language about God that I had previously experienced as mere words. As Jacob Preus writes, “The biblical metaphors for the Gospel are rich. God has given us a tremendous depth of language through His inspired writers to know the wonders of what He has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ.”⁷

Like Luther, I became the recipient of God’s wisdom as I seriously contemplated the implications of Jesus’ challenge, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”⁸ I embraced this invitation not as a demand or burden, but as a gift. Much in the same way Luther did. In the words of German Lutheran theologian Oswald Bayer:

When Luther refers to ‘experience,’ he does not refer primarily to an action but to a *passio*, not primarily to the experience that I am in charge of, but in connection to that which I suffer. It is—to take it to the highest level—the experience that is mine in the agonizing struggle with the Word of God. This is the real point of Luther’s famous statement: “*sola experiential facit theologum*” [only experience makes a theologian], which is admittedly most generally applied incorrectly, since it is not experience as such that makes one a theologian, but experience with the Holy Scripture. The characteristic “experience” is thus not to be understood in some diffuse, general sense. Instead, experience is constituted by means of a

⁷ Jacob A.O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 209.

⁸ Matt. 16:24, see also Mark 8 and Luke 9. This was not an encounter with the Law, for I had no concerns about my security in God’s grace. Rather, Jesus’ words were to me an *invitation*. An invitation to adventure that could quite possibly traverse the Valley of Death, but would—without the slightest doubt—culminate before the “throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:3).

definite text-based world, which might appear to be narrow because it is based on definitive written material but is wide-ranging in every sense of the word.⁹

Bayer's analysis of Luther's appeal to "experience with the Holy Scripture," is pertinent not only to my own pilgrimage, but also to the essence of the ministry experiment described herein. Far from narrow, the "experience is constituted by means of a definite text-based world" encompassing all that is. This Word, the Scriptures—breathed into the writers of the numerous canonical texts by none other than God—is the Lord's chosen means of preserving the Gospel for his Church and the world. Yes, pastors *preach* God's Word orally as well, in faithful proclamation of Law and Gospel, but the written Word is our sure and trustworthy foundation to which Luther famously said one can confidently entrust their very soul.

God had doubly blessed me. First and foremost, with a renewal of my hungering and thirsting after the righteousness whose source is Christ. Second, with a growing passion for words and the power of communication. During my college years I determined to combine those loves, and decided to major in Communications (Editorial Journalism) with the plan of working for some Christian ministry. God "adjusted" those notions by placing on my heart a desire for ordained ministry my senior year at a state university.

While I am fully capable of savoring words on their own merit, I have long been committed to the truth that they reach their highest good in communicating the Gospel. When devoted to that purpose, well-chosen words¹⁰ are imbued with an extraordinary nature. They take on a life, so to speak, in reflection of Him who *is* the Life of the World (John 14:6). This

⁹ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 21–22.

¹⁰ I consciously use the phrase "well chosen" in contrast to the horribly misused word "inspired" which is far too commonly claimed by Christian writers disappointed by editors who fail to recognize their personal anointing. While we cannot presume to write or preach truly inspired (i.e. infallible) messages, we can commit ourselves to striving to offer the Lord our best in those pursuits and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to the best of our fallen ability.

is the rewarding, and “creative” work of the Christian writer. Returning to Preus’ metaphorical study, “After examining the metaphors themselves, we explore the fact that the Gospel’s universality is demonstrated in its *words*. We examine the nature of words, especially the Words of God, as a way of reaching beyond ourselves.”¹¹ Even as we celebrate the intrinsic dynamism of metaphors, we must remain conscious—especially as servants of the Word—that they too have their limitations.

The very incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the supreme example of His will to speak to the human race in human terms. The Bible makes use of a variety of metaphors to speak the good and gracious will of God, the Gospel. The makeup of metaphors depends on the life situation of the people among whom they are put to use. In other words, metaphors are culture sensitive. No metaphor relates equally well to all peoples and cultures. Fortunately, the Gospel has been described in a variety of ways so that the people of all cultures are able to understand it, in one way or another.¹²

As an American Lutheran Church member, I elected to attend Luther Seminary. Studies there reinforced my commitment to use my modest writing skills to proclaim God’s truth. Possessing an inquiring mind and believing in lifelong learning, I enrolled in a Master of Theology (MTh) program while serving my initial parish. I completed my MTh in Patristics.¹³ Prior to accepting an unsolicited call from the American Lutheran Church to transition from serving as a chaplain in the United States Air Force (USAF) Reserve, to active duty I derived great satisfaction serving more than five years as a parish pastor. During the lengthy Chaplain Orientation Course at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, we were assigned material to read in advance of classroom sessions. My classmates were no more surprised than I was to discover one of my own magazine articles amidst those supplemental

¹¹ Preus, *Just Words*, 209.

¹² A.R. Victor Raj, “Eastern Metaphors for the Gospel,” ed. Angus J.L. Menuge et al, *Christ and Culture in Dialogue: Constructive Themes and Practical Applications* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), Kindle.

¹³ The degree was awarded by the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley in 1984, following coursework under the direction of Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians.

materials.¹⁴

One of my strongest memories from that course was the way that a “seasoned” Episcopalian instructor evaluated a sample editorial I had written for my base newspaper as a class assignment. He smiled broadly, and used a hackneyed comment you could tell was a standard in his training repertoire. “Don’t should on me.” He laughed as we all processed the meaning. “Never tell people what they should do, that’s not your job, and it turns them off.” What followed was a debate in which I was utterly unable to explain to him the proper uses of Law and Gospel. Nor could I persuade him to simply turn to the Scriptures themselves to see whether or not they ever used any “shoulds,” or perhaps, “shalls.”

The following twenty-two years (spanning eleven different assignments) were extremely rewarding. Following two overseas tours I was diverted from a regular stateside assignment to the staff of the USAF Chaplain School.¹⁵ While there my primary duty was writing. In addition to editing *The Leading Edge*,¹⁶ I had the responsibility of serving as a ghost writer for two USAF Chiefs of Chaplains. The Commandant¹⁷ of the USAF Chaplain School, who would later become a Chief of Chaplains in turn, summarized the honor (burden) by saying, “Rob, the entire Air Force is your pulpit!”

Prior to retiring from active duty, I went through the colloquy process to join the Missouri Synod. The church of my youth and early pastoral life, after a disastrous merger, was no longer confessional. After retiring from the chaplaincy in order to be nearer our ailing parents and our children’s young families, I served two interim pastorates. I also served on

¹⁴ Robert Stroud, “The Lectionary Discipline,” *Christian Ministry* 13 (March 1982): 20–21.

¹⁵ It was called the USAF Chaplain Service Institute at that time, and I was assigned to the Resource Directorate, where in addition to limited instructional duties, we focused our energies on taskings forwarded from Headquarters Air Force.

¹⁶ Air Force Recurring Periodical 52–1, the official publication of the USAF Chaplain Corps.

¹⁷ Chaplain, Major General, Charles C. Baldwin.

the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces Committee and the Northwest District Ministry to the Military Task Force. I have also published a small number of articles about the chaplaincy,¹⁸ with a growing focus on the chaplaincy during the American Civil War period. Despite my continuing chaplaincy interests, and the corresponding area of emphasis for my DMin studies being the military chaplaincy, I have undertaken a project with no express connection to the armed forces. On the contrary, the encouragement of quality pastoral blogging theoretically extends to the ministry of every pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) . . . and even beyond our faith community. This is certainly a commitment of the Synod. Accordingly, President Matthew Harrison announced the creation of a new, digital *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, with the words, “It is our desire to follow the tradition of mission that led to the founding of the Missouri Synod, to highlight and expound good examples of Lutheran missiology and to raise the height and breadth of discussion on mission so that every member of the Missouri Synod prays for the mission of the church, engages in it him/herself and supports it each according to their vocation.”¹⁹

The Issue Addressed by this Project

The Church of today is not the Church of our youth. Among the innumerable changes is the influence of the omnipresent web.²⁰ While the youngest of our pastors have indeed grown up in the current digital age, the majority of our clergy are rather older.²¹ Chronological age is

¹⁸ One such article was “On the Distinctives of Ministry in the Military,” *Missio Apostolica* 19, no. 1 (2011): 56–65.

¹⁹ Matthew Harrison, “Why a Lutheran Journal of Mission?” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (2014): 3.

²⁰ Plans are presently under development by Facebook to deploy high altitude, long flying unmanned aerial vehicles to stream wireless internet to the remaining areas where population density or poverty have inhibited expansion. Their first version of the Aquila, as they have named the drone, has a wing span of equal to that of a Boeing 737, but looks like a flying wing and weighs only a fraction of the passenger plane.

²¹ Individuals who have grown up intimately acquainted with computers, the internet, and related

not the determinant as to whether a given pastor successfully embraces new opportunities. Some senior ministers are quite tech savvy. At the same time, some of our younger pastors are too disinterested, or more likely, distracted by the primary responsibilities, to take advantage of this watershed opportunity. The rise of the internet has been likened to Gutenberg’s introduction of movable type. Both events transformed the world, and in so doing, dramatically altered the Church. While this is a momentous fact, it is not a novel insight. Nearly a decade ago, one blogger wrote “It seems that every five minutes a blogger posts a comparison of the ‘blogging revolution’ to Gutenberg and the onset of the Reformation.”²²



Figure 1. Johann Gutenberg and the greatest production of his wondrous invention.²³

As we begin, it is worth noting a limitation of all studies, particularly those involving

technologies are commonly referred to today by the term “digital natives.” The majority of LCMS pastors are foreigners rather than natives, when it comes to our familiarity with the digital universe. “Those of us who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology are, and always will be compared to them, *Digital Immigrants*.” Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives Digital Immigrants,” *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 1–2.

²² Russell D. Moore, “Netroots?” *MereComments: The Touchstone Blog*, August 29, 2006, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://touchstonemag.com/merecomments/2006/08/netroots/>.

²³ The famous Gutenberg Bible was printed in 1455 in Mainz. Of the 48 surviving copies, 36 are on paper, and 12 on vellum. This figure is a composite of a seventeenth century painting, a modern mockup replicating the original type as Gutenberg would have arranged them, and a page from the Bible in the possession of the British Museum, which is in the public domain.

novel technologies. Although he died in 1980, prior to the birth of the internet, Marshall MacLuhan's media theories remain influential and in many ways prescient. We must approach this study in humility, precisely because: "Nobody yet knows the languages inherent in the new technological culture; we are all technological idiots in terms of the new situation. Our most impressive words and thoughts betray us by referring to the previously existent, not the present."²⁴

Just as the significance of the printing press on the Reformation cannot be overstated, the ability to write something now and have it read by a person on the other side of the globe in less than a minute is staggering. In fact, the ease with which a pastor can pursue an online writing ministry today eclipses in every way the effort that a theologian needed to undertake in the sixteenth century to see their work faithfully reproduced. It is the very accessibility of blogging that begs the question as to why more pastors do not engage in it. It may be surprising, but there has never previously been a formal study of this subject.²⁵

The advent of the internet has resulted in the rapid development of social networking and digital publishing that has been unrivaled in human history. Although rarely on the leading edge, the Christian Church has not failed to take advantage of the access new technologies offer to encourage faith. Whether the efforts are focused on building stronger faith communities or reaching out to those who have not yet been touched by the gospel, they have often been pursued with zeal. The success of these efforts—something very challenging to measure—has varied and does not always correspond to the passion with which the efforts have been made.

²⁴ Marshall MacLuhan, *Counterblast*, ill. Harley Parker (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 16.

²⁵ There have been a handful of books marketed with anecdotal accounts, or even brief interviews with one or two prominent pastors, but no genuine quantitative or qualitative research.

One reason for the substantial variation in effectiveness is, of course, the inconsistent quality of the writing itself. Another major consideration, however, is the fact that pastors who have ventured into this new field of harvest have had little to guide them. Those who have researched the lay of the land before venturing out have had to content themselves with secular or generic Christian sources for advice. While these may have proven helpful to some degree, it seems logical that resources targeted to the unique concerns of clergy—especially those within a particular theological tradition—may significantly aid pastors considering such a ministry.

The Purpose of this Project

I set out on this research journey in the hopes of understanding the nature of pastoral blogging, with an eye towards discerning ways in which to encourage LCMS pastors to experiment with this digital ministry. I approached it seeking a method that might increase the likelihood of “success,”²⁶ and encourage pastors to reconsider the practice even if they have chosen to leave it for a season. In order to accomplish these purposes, with an emphasis on the second outcome, promoting success, in consultation with my advisor and various other faculty members, I determined to create a pastoral blogging handbook, or enchiridion. The project would revolve around the availability of this digital (ebook) enchiridion and the effect, if any, it had on the experience of novice bloggers.

Much has changed since the Ascension of our Lord, but the Great Commission remains the same. Likewise, the vocation of the pastor, who cares for the flock in the stead of the Good Shepherd remains unchanged. Today’s pastor, whether he serves in congregational

²⁶ Success being determined subjectively by the individual pastor, rather than by arbitrary metrics. In other words, their sense of accomplishment that validates the time expended trumps a measure based on how frequently they post new columns.

ministry or in a specialized setting such as academia or a chaplaincy, finds himself in a world that seems increasingly more hostile to the Christian witness. Yet, even as opportunities to witness in the public forum may be decreasing, the internet has offered unparalleled ways to lift up Jesus, so that all people might be drawn to him and receive life. Still, some are reluctant to begin blogging, and others have grown discouraged as they have attempted to blog.

My hope is that the culmination of this project will provide an expedient tool for Christian clergy seeking to effectively incorporate blogging into their ministry. This applies foremost to the uninitiated. I also wish to assist current bloggers to better understand this dimension of their ministry, as they perhaps redirect or refine their online discourse to make it more efficacious and personally rewarding. My purpose is to help equip our pastoral leaders to capitalize on the privilege we have of being appointed by God to live at this unique moment in history.

The Process

The project involved the solicitation of volunteers who met the following criteria: (1) they were serving in pastoral contexts, and (2) they had never blogged previously. The goal was ten participants, but after announcing the opportunity through several Synod channels, thirteen qualifying individuals volunteered for the research. Information was gathered from the participants in three ways. The first was an online survey completed at the outset of the study, prior to beginning the blog itself.

Once all of the volunteers had completed the initial survey, each was provided a portable document format (PDF) copy of the Pastoral Blogging Handbook (see appendix). They received the Handbook in mid-May 2015, with the instructions (committed to when they originally volunteered) to set up a blogging account and post a minimum of two

columns each week for the next three months. During this time, I did not contact the participants with any additional material or encouragement, to simulate the likely context in which future users of the Handbook would find themselves.

During the fall of 2015, participants were invited to complete a second online survey. The questions there began with a set intended to measure how well their expectations coincided with actual experience. Half of the questions were devoted specifically to the Handbook, soliciting the thirteen pastors' perceptions of its value and potential shortcomings. The final question on the survey asked if the individual was willing to participate in a personal interview related to the experience. All but one of the participants agreed. I decided to contact the pastor who had declined with an email saying that I would value his participation, since his evaluation of the blogging resource was one of the least positive. He graciously accepted the invitation, and 100% of the participants provided data through all three means. All of the personal interviews were completed by mid-January 2016.

Project Parameters

As mentioned above, there has never been a formal study of pastoral blogging. In my original Major Applied Project (MAP) proposal, I expressed a desire to conduct a comprehensive study of existing blogs that could be attributed to LCMS clergy. A two-day internet search engine review had revealed a large number, 264,²⁷ and I proposed analyzing various elements such as the topics they addressed, identification with the LCMS as a Synod, etc. Almost as an afterthought, I proposed developing a small blogging resource which could be made available in the future to interested members of the Church. The committee wisely recognized the scope of my multi-faceted Descriptive Survey was massive, and they

²⁷ The search was conducted November 13–14, 2014, and uncovered an additional 73 LCMS clergy blog sites that I deemed defunct because their most recent activity was more than six months old.

suggested shifting gears to focus on development and testing of the blogging resource itself.

The parameters of the study thus shifted from the study of a vast swath of online artifacts to a more intimate consideration of the potential value of a Pastoral Blogging Handbook created intentionally for LCMS pastors. The minimum threshold for participants was exceeded by eligible volunteers within two weeks of the initial advertising. All the participants were anchored in pastoral contexts, and none had ever maintained a blog in the past.²⁸ Aside from these required similarities, there was significant differentiation in the participant demographics. The thirteen pastors came from eleven different states, with the two states having two representatives being among the Synod's most densely served.²⁹ More surprising were the ages of the respondents. They covered a wide spectrum, but were grouped at both poles, young pastors and seasoned shepherds. Participants had been ordained between two and thirty-five years, with eight ordained seven or fewer years and five twenty or more years.

The dearth of participants in what might be regarded as the "prime" of their ministry may be due to simple accident. However, it is quite possible that these are the clergy most likely to already be blogging if they are inclined to do so. If that notion is accurate, it could suggest that young, digitally literate pastors have postponed initiating a blog due to adjustments to their new life as ministers of Word and Sacrament.³⁰ On the other end, the five

²⁸ For purposes of this study, previous blogging was defined as having posted a second column to an attempted blogging effort. The rationale for this was that two volunteers who had years earlier attempted to set up blogging accounts but never pursued the process by making tangible posts should not be disqualified from participating. These aborted attempts were reported by both individuals as inconsequential to the current study, although it is possible of course that they may have exerted some minimal influence. For example, someone who considered blogging at one time but was immediately discouraged due to the effort required *might* be more receptive to the potential benefits of a manual or handbook on the subject.

²⁹ The states represented by two pastors were Missouri and Texas, which host the seventh and sixth most congregations respectively. These states have 304 and 391 "stations," and 311 and 362 pastors, according to the current Synodical handbook. *The Lutheran Annual 2016* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 792.

³⁰ The transition to ordained ministry is not just theoretical, since as Walther states in his first thesis on

pastors ordained twenty to thirty-five years ago may have regarded the concept of blogging as unfamiliar terrain. It is not uncommon for those who were raised prior to the explosion of the internet to regard the internet as alien territory and to mistakenly think that the learning curve for an activity such as this would be insurmountable. Ultimately, the reason for this gap in ages is irrelevant to the study, since the research participants represent a broad range. To preserve anonymity, each of the participants was assigned a consecutive roman numeral as a consistent identifier in analyzing data. The following table illustrates their demographic diversity.

<i>Individual Identifier</i>	<i>Location (State)</i>	<i>Experience (Years)</i>	<i>Individual Identifier</i>	<i>Location (State)</i>	<i>Experience (Years)</i>
°I°	New York	≤7	°II°	Texas	≥20
°III°	California	≤7	°IV°	Texas	≥20
°V°	New Jersey	≤7	°X°	Oklahoma	≥20
°VI°	Michigan	≤7	°XII°	Minnesota	≥20
°VII°	Illinois	≤7	°XIII°	Missouri	≥20
°VIII°	Wisconsin	≤7	A Comparison of the Locations and Ministry Experience Levels of the Research Participants		
°IX°	Washington	≤7			
°XI°	Missouri	≤7			

Figure 2. Demographics of Research Participants.

As previously stated, the researcher elicited from the participants a commitment to blog twice weekly for three months. As neither the literal completion of this pledge nor the content of the individual blog posts were integral to the focus of the study—i.e. the utility of the Blogging Handbook—they were not documented.³¹ This bears repeating, since it may

the subject, “The holy ministry or pastoral office is an office distinct from the priesthood of all believers.” C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 161. Thus, one moment you are a member of the holy flock, and after the ordination, you have become a shepherd. This is a profound transformation. This is true despite the fact that it is no sacrament. As we read in Thesis VI: “The ordination of the called [persons] with the laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call.” C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 219.

³¹ Naturally, the relative success of the participants in meeting, or failing to meet, their expressed goals

appear confusing to readers. The blog sites and accumulated posts *were not* analyzed. The focus of the research effort was to assess the utility of a Blogging Handbook, and investigating the content of the blogs themselves would have potentially distracted from that effort.

Several assumptions were made at the outset of the study. These included the conviction that:

1. As LCMS pastors, all participants possess a high view of the written Word of God and a commitment to the Lutheran Confessions as a faithful expression of biblical doctrine.
2. As LCMS pastors, all participants possess a deep commitment to spreading the Gospel and the name of Jesus, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
3. As survivors of a rigorous seminary education, all participants possess above average skill in communicating through the written word.
4. Although all LCMS pastors are capable of blogging, due to their unique, God-given aptitudes and interests,³² writing online will not be a good ministry fit for all clergy.
5. By the same token of human diversity in personality, skill, prior experience and preferences, not all pastors will find a given resource, such as a manual or handbook to be of equal utility.³³

played a role in the level of their self-satisfaction and their assessment of the blogging experience in whole.

³² “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4). Paraphrasing Paul’s argument, “If the whole body were institutional chaplains, where would the congregations be . . . ? And the theologians cannot say to the counselors, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor the administrators to the writers, ‘I have no need of you.’”

³³ This is amply illustrated by the different ways people approach “assembly instructions” when they make a purchase with “some assembly required.” Some read the directions thoroughly before beginning. Others read them step by step as they assemble the item. Others refer to them only when they encounter a problem such as finding a piece for which they cannot intuitively find the right spot. (Poorly written directions, or those ill-translated from another language, are a separate matter.)

I realize it is not common for pastors to pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree a full thirty-five years after they began their ordained service. Yet, as I look back on a diverse and rewarding ministry, I see clearly how the Lord has prepared me for this moment. The combination of a passion for writing, comfort with technology, and my devotion to the Great Commission have compelled me to undertake this research. I am eager to witness the ways, both expected and unanticipated, that God will use these findings and the ministry resources they have produced.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with [Paul]. . . . And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean” (Acts 17:18–20).

It has become familiar in our rapidly de-Christianized culture to acknowledge that the ministry context of modern Christians in the West bears clearer resemblance to the world of the apostles than to that of our grandparents. One over worn phrase is to describe it as post-Constantinian, which incorrectly implies that the first Christian emperor enforced his faith on the empire.³⁴ Although mislabeled, the Constantinian era was one in which the Christian Church enjoyed the favor of most Western rulers. This intimate relationship included dangers as well as boons, and it is not within the scope of this study to discuss these. Suffice it to say that whereas for over a millennium and a half Christianity was generally viewed by rulers and society in a favorable manner, in the relatively recent past this benevolence has shifted to suspicion and the number of voices calling for the expulsion of Christians from the public forum has spread like a virus.³⁵

The world transformed on the eve of All Saint’s Day in *anno Domini* 1517. With the

³⁴ Constantine did, of course, actively favor the Christian faith. But Constantine’s official policy was one of toleration, and Christianity would not become the state religion until the reign of Theodosius I (347–95) who bestowed that questionable honor on Nicene Christianity in 380.

³⁵ In the United States, the agreement to disestablish various colonial denominations was never intended to suggest that Christian voices should be silenced. Yet that is a not uncommon position in our day for those who have elevated Deist Thomas Jefferson’s epistolary aside about the “hedge or wall” between Church and state to faux Constitutional status.

posting of his challenge to a theological debate, a German monk opened the floodgates of the Gospel, which had long been constrained by the established church's focus on the supposed merit of good works. Most Christians—Lutherans especially—are aware that the *Ninety-Five Theses* heralded the beginning of momentous events. Some Christians are even aware of the fact that Johannes Gutenberg's 1450 development of movable type played a major role in the success of the incipient Reformation. Few believers, though, comprehend just how fortuitous³⁶ this apparent coincidence truly was. Earlier reformers, notably John Wycliffe who also understood the necessity of translating the Scriptures into the vernacular, may have been far more successful in their efforts if they had access to the sixteenth century's advanced technological methods for disseminating information. Luther's vernacular translation made a monumental impact, and not only on the Church in Germany. British theologian Andrew Walls offers a keen insight into the necessity of using the vernacular when the goal is to communicate clearly. Because of the Great Commission and the missionary impulse it fuels, the "Christian faith is repeatedly coming into creative interaction with new cultures, with different systems of thought and different patterns of tradition . . .³⁷ And that involves a translation effort with which every missionary (and, frankly, every effective pastor who seeks to reach people in their unique cultural and historical moment) is familiar. Walls, however, traces that process back to its divine origin.

I have argued elsewhere that this vulnerability [to personal and cultural apostasy] is also linked with the essentially vernacular nature of Christian faith, which rests on a massive act of translation, the Word made flesh, God translated into a specific segment of social reality as Christ is received there. Christian faith must go on being

³⁶ What the world regards as "fortuitous" can, of course, be recognized as Divine Providence by those who have "eyes to see" (Matt. 13:16).

³⁷ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 30.

translated, must continuously enter into vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades.³⁸

We stand at a similar moment in history. Modern competition to the Gospel seldom assumes the form of a repressive religious institution. Today the spirit of antichrist manifests as an increasingly aggressive secular culture that seeks to compartmentalize religious convictions and suppress the right of citizens to express their deeply held beliefs in the public forum. Ironically, in this war against militant secularism, the Roman Catholic Church becomes an ally of the Lutheran Confessional movement, in seeking to defend the First Amendment right of Americans to freely (i.e. publically) practice their faith. This ongoing tension is a major focus of a variety of Christian publications, such as *First Things*, which presents as the magazine's opening section a feature entitled "The Public Square."³⁹ Richard John Neuhaus, founder of the journal, left a legacy of boldness in claiming a place for the Christian voice in the public forum.

The Church does not require a healthy national context to be vigorous and effective. On the contrary, it is frequently argued that during times of secular trial, the Church is energized. During crises, in contrast to periods of complacency, it resembles more precisely what it was created to be. Nations come and nations go. Civilizations rise and civilizations crumble. But the Church of God remains. *Verbum Domini manet in aeternum* (The Word of the Lord endures forever)!⁴⁰ This

³⁸ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 29.

³⁹ *First Things* is an ecumenical journal founded in 1990 by Lutheran (later Roman Catholic) minister Richard John Neuhaus. Neuhaus' seminal 1988 work, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, included many prophetic elements which continue to be promoted today via the Institute on Religion and Public Life. He brilliantly analyzed modern America. "The notion that this is a secular society is relatively new. . . . In a democratic society, state and society must draw from the same moral well. In addition, because transcendence abhors a vacuum, the state that styles itself as secular will almost certainly succumb to secularism. Because government cannot help but make moral judgments of an ultimate nature, it must, if it has in principle excluded identifiable religion, make those judgments by 'secular' reasoning that is given the force of religion." Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 82.

⁴⁰ "The motto of the Lutheran Reformation: VDMA," *Reformation 2017*, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://lutheranreformation.org/history/the-motto-of-the-reformation/>.

is because the Church is not synonymous with *any* human creation. The Church of Christ need not fear the passing of Constantinianism or the incipient persecution we see on the horizon. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the *missio Dei*. The fact that the church increasingly feels as though it is on the defensive against encroachments of the civil government does not mean that the membrane between the two is impermeable. As Robert Kolb writes, “Believers acknowledge that Caesar’s sphere of competence also lies within God’s sphere of lordship. What happens in society and culture is not a matter of indifference to the Christian. What happens in the public square is of concern to God and His people, for it concerns His favorite creatures, the human ones.”⁴¹

Faced with increasingly outspoken and virulent anti-religionists, the church in our post-Constantinian (indeed, post-Christian) world must pause to regain its bearings. This position and course are found not in a philosophy or tradition. Neither are they to be discovered in musty catacombs of the past or naively utopian dreams about the future. Our reorientation is found nowhere other than in the Man Jesus, who is called the Christ. His sacrifice at Calvary was a once and for all eternity event which resounds in the “now” of every moment of human history. It is this Jesus, and him alone, known to us by the testimony of the prophets and apostles in the Holy Scriptures, who gives life and makes sense of this fallen world. He is the Redeemer whose blood atones for the sins of the world. And it is the mandate of the Christian church, which Paul calls the very “Body of Christ,” to proclaim that joyous news to all people so none should perish.⁴²

⁴¹ Robert Kolb, “Niebuhr’s ‘Christ and Culture in Paradox’ Revisited,” *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. Angus Menuge (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), Kindle.

⁴² See 2 Pet. 3:9, where the apostle reveals that the reason for the delay of the Parousia is God’s great love and patience. Nevertheless, Christians are directed to actively prepare for “the day of the Lord . . . [when] the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the

The Unchanging Tension

Just as our Lord remains the same yesterday, today and forever, humanity today has not changed during the intervening centuries. We are no more intrinsically “enlightened” than our forebears. We are no better than they were. We share the same fallen nature as our first parents. However, all is not bad news. Like those who have gone before us, we share the same loving Creator. And, according to God’s wondrous design, our nature includes a curious dimension referred to as our *conscience*.⁴³ God created humanity, intending for us to live in fellowship with him. Since he desires the restoration of this unity with all people he created in his image, he continues to woo his spiritual Bride. Though marred by the Fall, through the universal constants of natural law and conscience, and graced by the divine gift of faith, God redeems his betrothed. Cleansed by the atoning blood of Christ, his Bride becomes fit for her holy purpose. Believers can—and must—appeal with integrity to the human conscience, reminding people of the reason for which they were created.

Given our contemporary context, the age into which God deigned that we be born, how must we—as his disciples, and especially as his clergy—respond? Fortunately, we have an outstanding model in the professor Martin Luther. He provides a powerful template for our modern ministries not because he was perfect; far from it.⁴⁴ Luther’s applicability to our day comes from the fact that he was a stumbling pilgrim, just like us. He was prone to sin and

works that are done on it will be exposed” (verse 10).

⁴³ συνειδήσις. As Paul reveals in 1 Tim. 1:5, God desires our very being to enjoy a blessed unity and harmony. “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

⁴⁴ It is an unfortunate misinterpretation when other Christians think we view Luther almost as a surrogate pope. This is why it remains important that we continue to explain how we regard this champion of the Gospel as a miserable sinner. “It’s a miracle that there is a Lutheran Church today. In many ways, Lutheranism as a movement is an unlikely success story. It was born in an out of the way place, in a university that was still in its youth, led by an unlikely monk. But God uses out of the way places, youthfulness and unlikely, earthen vessels to accomplish His purposes. If we learn nothing else from the Reformation, it should be just how remarkably gracious God really is.”

intemperate attitudes. Yet, at the same moment, he was captivated by the Gospel. He was a slave to the good news. It freed him from the yoke of guilt which weighed him down as he religiously (and vainly) trusted in his personal righteousness. Moreover, Luther lived during a turbulent era in which standing up for the truth made one an object of scorn, or worse. Although it is only beginning to dawn on many ill-informed Americans, we live in that same sort of world today. And Luther's example teaches countless lessons more timely than ever before. However, the scope of this paper is to only consider a single dimension of the Reformer's heritage—his skill in harnessing new technologies to further the Great Commission and restore the Gospel to God's people.

So, how does the disciple of Jesus chart his course through this turbulent world? More to our purpose here, how does a called and ordained shepherd shape the ministry to which the Lord has called them. In this chapter we consider that question theologically, and see the fundamental, indeed *essential*, role played by *words and communication* in whatever ministry the Lord has called us to. And this Gospel that we proclaim possesses a power of infinite magnitude. As such, it cannot be shared timidly, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (1 Tim. 1:7). Gerhard Forde, under whom I studied at Luther Seminary, described it this way:

God does not come hat in hand begging, "Won't somebody please believe in me?" God does not come in ways that pander to our so-called freedom of choice. God comes to invade the house of the "strong man armed" who aims to keep his goods in peace. God comes to challenge the adversary to battle for the life of the captive.⁴⁵

If the sharing of the Gospel is deemed a vital component of ministry,⁴⁶ it is evident

Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., "Reformation in New Lands and Tongues," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2, no. 4 (2015): 16.

⁴⁵ Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 56.

⁴⁶ For most Christians, and virtually all Lutherans, this would be an unquestioned contention. "The two-

indispensable activity can be pursued in various ways. The first was and remains through preaching. Great preachers have proclaimed the joyous news in innumerable sermons, only the tiniest fraction of which have been preserved⁴⁷ for the edification of those beyond their initial audience. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted, speech fosters community in a manner the written word does not.⁴⁸ Many of these preached sermons, envisioned by their authors purely as oral events were preserved only because hearers, such as students, regarded them as significant. Others survived in neglected manuscripts until years after their author passed when their contribution to the Church was more clearly recognized. Some, sadly, were preserved due to the vanity of their writers,⁴⁹ a practice the convenience of modern print on demand technology unfortunately encourages.

kingdoms doctrine also says: let the church be the church. If the church hankers to do what every other agency in the world is determined to do, thinking it can do it better, it may neglect doing the one thing altogether needful—preaching the Gospel to those who do not yet believe. We can be sure of one thing: if the church does not preach the Gospel of salvation in the name of Jesus, no one else will.” Carl E. Braaten, “Foreword,” *Christ and Culture in Dialogue: Constructive Themes and Practical Applications*, ed. Angus J. Menuge, et al. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), Kindle.

⁴⁷ Only the smallest fraction of which have been recorded and preserved for those not present during the original delivery of the message. In my research into the military chaplaincy in the Union and Confederate armies during America’s civil war, I have been particularly intrigued by how few sermons have survived. There are exceptions, however. Notably, memorial sermons in the wake of Lincoln’s assassination were often shared at major gatherings and preserved for publication.

⁴⁸ “Speech unites within itself the intention of objective meaning and subjective disposition, as well as empirical objectifying (acoustically and graphically), in which latter the mind simultaneously acknowledges and overcomes nature in speech. This affirmation of nature (that is, of the sense-world), by means of which communication between persons is made possible (cf. ‘the new body’), does not imply that nature is the constitutive element in the social character of our impulses to speak and write. . . . The phenomenon of language would be meaningless if the understanding of the hearer or reader were not potentially coordinated with every word.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry Into the Sociology of the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 46.

⁴⁹ I vividly recall reading an article in *Christianity Today* as a young pastor. It related how a retiring Church of Christ minister had used much of his retirement savings to self-publish thousands of copies of *20 of My Best Sermons: As Preached from the Pulpit*. He did so because he regretted never going to the foreign mission field, and determined this would be the next best option. He offered copies of the volume to anyone who wanted them for free, with two simple requirements. First, the requester needed to cover the postage, and second they were only available by the gross, so you needed to plan for how you intended to distribute the other 143 copies.

The Biblical Foundation: Gospel Proclaimed and Gospel Written

We began our discussion with the confession that nothing exists apart from the creative authority of the Word of God. From the moment God pronounced to a silent cosmos “Let there be light,” our Maker has continued to speak creation, renewal, resurrection and life. The Holy Scriptures provide rich witness to this fact. Throughout the texts we hear God speaking words of judgment and mercy, condemnation and deliverance.⁵⁰ We hear these words from the lips of God’s angels, his prophets, and ultimately from the very mouth of the only begotten Son of God. The majority of the biblical texts consist of spoken words that were written down. Even the narratives of the Old Testament themselves were originally transmitted orally.⁵¹ Only a handful of the words included in the Bible began as *written* texts. The New Testament epistles come quickly to mind, along with Old Covenant parallels such as Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles recorded in the twenty-ninth chapter of the book that bears his name. There are additional examples, of course, such as the profound inscription Pilate had prepared to adorn Jesus’ cross. It was written “in Aramaic, in Latin and in Greek” and proclaimed to all people whatever their dialect that here hung “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”⁵² The most important communication from God to exist in written form from its advent would be the Decalogue. God was not content to simply “speak” these unchangeable words, but at the same time provided his

⁵⁰ “According to Luther, because God is an active God—always creating, redeeming, and sustaining the whole cosmos—so also is God’s Word active in proclamation. Consequently, Luther regularly employs vigorous, active verbs to describe the effects of law and gospel . . . You recognize law and gospel in the sermon, that is, not from what is *said*, but by what is *done*.” David Lose, “Words that Do Things,” *Dialog* 39, no. 3 (2000): 194.

⁵¹ One noted scholar who was praised for his work interpreting the Dead Sea Scrolls went so far as to say, “I should find it surprising indeed if Israel’s old epic cycle in its oral presentations did not rival or even exceed in length the preserved Yahwistic source.” John Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 36.

⁵² Although kingship is not synonymous with being Israel’s messiah, the chief priests did not desire any potential confusion on the matter, and vainly sought to have the procurator alter the wording. Pilate’s pronouncement that “What I have written I have written” demonstrates the permanence of the written word in that the text of this small inscription has been preserved inviolate for two millennia.

people with a divine transcript. As attested by Moses, “These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me” (Deut. 5:22).

It is not surprising that in a world constrained by limited literacy, the spoken word would be dominant. Nor is it surprising the early disciples would follow the example of their Lord⁵³ and rely almost solely on the oral proclamation of the Good News. Except for the example of the cryptic occasion recorded in the eighth chapter of John’s Gospel, where Jesus rescued the adulterous woman, there is no record of his writing at all. Precisely what he “wrote with his finger on the ground” (twice) is unknown, but the verbs used there suggest *writing* rather than simply “drawing” some kind of symbols. “Jesus bent down and wrote (κατέγραφεν) with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once more he bent down and wrote (ἔγραφεν) on the ground” (Luke 8:6–8). What Jesus wrote remains uncertain, and in Luther’s sermon on this text,⁵⁴ he treats the content of the inscription as irrelevant. He describes it almost as if the Lord is consciously staging the scene, in order to heighten the malevolent anticipation of the scribes and Pharisees who were certain they had woven the perfect trap for him. “Christ now stoops over and silently writes on the ground for a moment, as though He did

⁵³ Jesus’ literacy as a rabbi who read in the synagogue and preached in the Temple is unquestioned. This does raise the question of why he left us with no writings of his own. That, however, will remain unanswered until the Parousia, and it extends far beyond the scope of the current study.

⁵⁴ The sermon was preached in Wittenberg during a series in either 1531 or 1532, and published in 1565 by “Johannes Aurifaber, [who] copied them from the manuscript books of several distinguished and pious men, Master Veit Dietrich of Nürnberg, Master George Rörer, Master Anthony Lauterbach, and Philipp Fabricius, who took down these sermons from Luther’s lips.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, vol. 23: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6–8*, ed. J.J. Pelikan, H.C. Oswald, and H.T. Lehmann, (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), x.

not hear them.”⁵⁵

It is only natural that when the Church shares the Gospel with others our default is to follow the example of our Lord himself. Jesus *preached* the Kingdom of God, he *proclaimed* the Gospel, he *spoke* words of life. Jesus did not write. The apostles followed that example. They witnessed to the Messiah “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,”⁵⁶ just as they had been bade by the Lord only moments before his Ascension. They preached in synagogues, open spaces, wherever the opportunity afforded itself. And, they also wrote letters. These missives were not intended to be replacements for their sermons, but as correspondence to coordinate traveling arrangements, offer advice or correction in their absence, or to commend individuals, such as a runaway slave returning to his Christian master. These letters were regarded as poor substitutes for their personal presence by their writers. Paul offers a particularly revealing insight in his letter to the believers in Colossae. He describes his spiritual struggle on behalf of those who have never met him, and reminds the Colossians that although he is unable to be present physically, in a true way he is indeed at their side. “I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged . . . For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ” (Col. 2:1-5).

One of the common attacks made on Christianity is the relatively late date of the canonical Gospels. Unbelievers allege from the fact they were written decades after Jesus’s Resurrection, that they are unreliable. They do not understand the dynamics at work here. The written accounts

⁵⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 23: *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6–8*, 311.

⁵⁶ Acts 1:8.

were not necessary when the world was filled with actual witnesses to Jesus' life. The story was told and retold by those who had known, and touched, the incarnate Jesus. And, with the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing freely, faith was inspired through these sermons and testimonies.⁵⁷ The pervasive understanding that the Parousia was imminent served to reduce the value of a written account (especially when literacy was not universal). Only later, did a sobered Church⁵⁸ recognize the urgent need for a faithful, eye-witness account of Jesus' life and teaching. Graciously, God blessed his people with four of these testimonies. Luke, not an eyewitness himself, provides the common rationale for the writing of the Gospels, in his dedication.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.⁵⁹

Thus we see that the community of faith—a people who gathered from the beginning around (proclaimed) Word and Sacrament—was almost “forced” into putting all of its essential history and doctrine into written form. Ironically, this process removed the words from their original context. Theologian Risto Uro writes, “It is the oral aspect of early Christian texts that is

⁵⁷ “Christ’s entire work leads to the justification of sinners. Luther’s gospel also embraced the work of the Holy Spirit which conveys the benefits of Christ through oral, written, and sacramental forms of this Word of forgiveness and new life based on his death and resurrection.” Robert Kolb, “Luther’s Hermeneutics of Distinctions: Law and Gospel, Two Kinds of Righteousness, Two Realms, Freedom and Bondage,” *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka, (December 2013), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.043>.

⁵⁸ The initial days of the Church were euphoric, and it is possible Peter needed to clarify on more than one occasion that “these people are not drunk, as you suppose” (Acts 2:15). Likewise, the Thessalonians were not the only Christians who required consolation about those who were “falling asleep” prior to the return of Jesus (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

⁵⁹ Luke 1:1–4. The identity of Theophilus is unknown, and it is possible, though not likely, that Luke was using the name in an inclusive sense for all “who love God.” Paul Maier has written a novel in which Theophilus is identified with Titus Flavius Sabinus, the brother of Emperor Vespasian. In his preface to the second edition he acknowledged the book’s success and said “I hope that the genre of documentary novel may serve to set higher standards for the ‘historical novel’ so-called, which has been debased by too many authors relying on imagination

so often lost for us when we work with our edited texts, synopses, written commentaries and computer programs.”⁶⁰ This chasm between oral and written proclamations also poses a challenge to some clergy, though digital natives rarely register any such discomfort.

The process of canonization is fascinating, though it is outside the scope of our research. Suffice it to say that the unhurried process, not reaching a finale until 367,⁶¹ suggests the *preached* Word remained preeminent in the Church’s thinking. Thus far our discussion has shown that while the oral Gospel was quite naturally first, and then remained for many the primary expression of the Gospel up to our own day, it was recognized even in the first century that it needed to be accompanied by (and, ultimately) measured according to the Rule of Faith and the biblical canon.

We will turn now to several theological concerns which relate directly to the subject of the current study.

The Theological Context: Vocation, Mission, Evangelism and Apologetics

It all begins with the Word. And it is vital that we maintain the proper distinction—frequently blurred in popular religion—between the Logos and the written Word of God. C.S.

rather than research. Paul L. Maier, *The Flames of Rome: A Novel*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 10.

⁶⁰ Risto Uro, “Ritual, memory and Writing in Early Christianity,” *Temenos* 47, no. 2 (2011): 170.

⁶¹ This date is commonly used since the New Testament as we know it was first referred to as “canonical” by Bishop Athanasius in his Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter. “It is also here that we find the term ‘apocrypha’ deployed in the categorical sense determinative for later canon lists.” Annette Yoshiko Reed, “The Afterlives of New Testament Apocrypha,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 2 (2015), 408. In an article written in 2002, Reed discussed the canon in the sense of Irenaeus who preceded Athanasius. It is worthy of note in this study, since it relates to the transition between oral and written authority. According to Reed, “it is especially important to note Irenaeus’ own use of the term *κανών*. Although this term would later come to denote a list of authoritative texts, he himself never uses it to refer to written works. Rather, he speaks of the *κανών τῆς ἀληθείας* (“Rule of Truth”), solely with reference to authoritative teachings. . . . For Irenaeus, the *κανών* functions as an extra-textual criterion for distinguishing true doctrine from heretical speculations, authentic texts from spurious compositions, and proper Scriptural interpretation from ‘evil exegesis.’” Annette Yoshiko Reed, “EUAGGELION: Orality, Textuality and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002): 13.

Lewis was not merely skilled in communicating—most writers possess that talent. Nor was it simply his brilliance in creating memorable images or witty yet profound turns of phrase which continue to impress. No, what set Lewis apart, and what will allow his works to exist for centuries to come, was his deep and trusting relationship with the Word of God. Although he did not adhere to a fundamentalist view of inerrancy, C.S. Lewis believed, truly and zealously believed, that there was salvation in no other name than Jesus . . . and that Jesus the Christ is made known to us through the testimony of the written Word. Yet, Lewis did not confuse the two. In a personal letter he wrote, “It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him.”⁶² The same year, he concisely expressed his trust in the written Word when he wrote, “Yes, Pascal does contradict several passages in Scripture and must be wrong.”⁶³

In order to make sense of the results of the data gathered during this study, there are several theological areas that merit special consideration. Blogging is the activity or phenomenon being studied. But it is *pastoral* blogging, in contrast to the myriads of forms of the practice that abound, which concerns us. For purposes of this study, “pastoral” describes the authorship of the blogs, rather than their intended focus per se. In other words, the fact that an online column or post is written by a pastor, makes it “pastoral” *de facto*. One might assume that most such pieces composed by LCMS pastors would possess some element of the second sense of the word “pastoral,” i.e. that they would include a religious or ministry dimension. Nevertheless, inclusion of such concerns is not necessary to constitute pastoral blogging for our purpose. The rationale for this is found in the truth that we are whole, non-compartmentalized human beings. Practically

⁶² C.S. Lewis, 8 November 1952, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 247.

speaking, even if pastors do not label themselves as clergy when blogging it is possible for their identity to be revealed at any time and their online comments would, for good or ill, be seen as expressing the views of an ordained servant of God.

Pastoral Vocation as a Multi-Faceted Identity

What this means is that our vocation as a minister of Word and Sacrament holds us accountable for all of our actions. This is an uncomfortable truth that has been assailed in recent generations, but it is based on the clear biblical mandate. Pastors must meet higher moral standards than those who do not exercise their theological priesthood in that role. Paul's litany for ministers is daunting. Several requirements are traits not always evident in those who find themselves in spiritual authority over others: gentle, self-controlled, and hospitable. "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive" (1 Tim. 3:4). Who among us can confidently live up to such standards? Only by the grace of God! James offers his counsel in a forthright way: "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

The purpose of this study is not to dissuade pastors from pursuing their calling. On the contrary, the aim is to discover new ways to expand and enhance the ministry of LCMS pastors. And blogging is a heaven sent means of accomplishing both of those goals. The following table reveals a sampling of the ways in which a pastor can approach the task of blogging with the purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God. (Before looking at the list, it should be noted that not all of these online writing approaches are equally edifying. The list does, however, reflect attitudes and drives that motivate various clergy to undertake the task of writing online.)

⁶³ C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 242.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Ministry Purpose or Topical Focus</i>
Apologist	Presenting the Gospel to the lost in the most persuasive way possible.
Cataloguer	Compiling edifying resources for international readers.
Catechist	Educating readers about various aspects of the Christian faith.
Counselor	Offering advice about how to avoid and handle life's challenges.
Critic	Challenging policies or actions of public organizations or individuals.
Debater	Advocating controversial positions in an effort to provoke discussion.
Ecumenist	Exploring ways different traditions can work together with integrity.
Ethicist	Bringing clarity to diverse issues clouded by our dark and fallen world.
Evangelist	Making a direct appeal to those who are unchurched or placating idols.
Exegete	Opening up the glories of the written Word of God itself.
Iconoclast	Casting verbal stones seeking to tear down perceived ecclesial idols.
Inquisitor	Striving to purge suspected impurities from the Church and its members.
Liturgist	Bringing worship resources and experiences to the internet community.
Mediator	Attempting to bring reconciliation between various ecclesial factions.
Pastor	Focusing on the needs of one's local congregation.
Philosopher	Seeking to engage the curious in conversations of genuine significance.
Poet	Sharing with others their lyrical musings.
Publicist	Disseminating information of potential interest to their readers.
Reviewer	Offering an analysis of new, or old, literature, cinema, music, etc.
Soldier	Taking the metaphorical torch to the enemies of Christ and the Church.
Statesman	Entering the civic arena with principles based on divine revelation.
Storyteller	Presenting the truth and especially the Gospel in engaging ways.
Translator	Using language skills to make writings available to a wider audience.
Witness	Approaching each topic with a dynamic, faith-based worldview.

Figure 3. A List of Potential Pastoral Approaches to Blogging I have compiled.

Before considering the next major theological concept, there is another timely facet of the ordained ministry that merits brief discussion. During some periods of history, the clergy were among the best educated members of society. Because of that, they frequently performed quasi-secular duties in support of the civil order. These often included educating the children of nobles or the general populace. On the American frontier, for example, the chaplain frequently served as a teacher to family members of garrison personnel. While “additional duties” still exist in the military, these added responsibilities have diminished over the years.

Though chaplains had served with American military personnel from the country's founding, the professional duties and expectations of chaplains were not constant.

George Washington and other Revolutionary era commanders valued chaplains for their morale-boosting function among troops; in the Civil War, chaplains on both sides assured men of the fundamental righteousness of their cause; on the Western frontier, chaplains also doubled as library officers, post teachers, bakery and commissary managers, and even medics.⁶⁴

Despite the way in which many of these expectations diverted the chaplains' attention from their more "spiritual" duties, the end result was not always a net loss. In addition to the intrinsic benefit provided to accomplishing the military mission, the chaplains' presence in these more mundane venues resulted in building bridges with people who may rarely have passed through the doors of the chapel. Only God knows the eternal impact of chaplains who faithfully discharged responsibilities of distributing body-nourishing bread while they simultaneously extended to the community an invitation to eat of the Bread of Life. Aside from this tacit recognition that clergy were educated resources whose contribution to their community should be maximized, there was a parallel respect for the pastor as a scholar. While Lutherans for the most part retained this mindset,⁶⁵ in many other denominations it was lost, or perhaps never existed.

It is good to see a conscious resurgence of affirming the model of Pastor/Scholar that was once so commonplace. This aspect of Christian ministry—being highly respected for the extensive academic accomplishments required for ordination in most historic theological traditions—has been eclipsed by two developments. First, simple undergraduate college coursework has become normative standard in many parts of the world. Second, the number of

⁶⁴ Jacqueline E. Whitt, *Bringing God to Men: American Chaplains and the Vietnam War*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 142.

⁶⁵ As one small example of how the LCMS is not a newcomer to the pastor scholar model, see: Paul G. Barth, "The Lutheran Pastor as Theologian," *Concordia Journal* 4, no. 5 (1978): 209–14. "The pastor must be a parish theologian. He must know Word and doctrine. . . . We are dealing with the Word, with divine truth. We hold great hope for the continuing theological contribution which pastors, young and old, are and will be making in the ministry of the Missouri Synod as convinced Lutheran pastor-theologians. With ordination, the pastor enters a new

people who are utterly ignorant about the advanced degree requirements for clergy is sizeable. I lost count of the people who spoke to me about transferring from their military specialties to the chaplaincy, only to be stunned to learn a bachelor's degree would be insufficient for that purpose.⁶⁶

In the influential book *Resident Aliens*, the authors provide a forthright assessment of the state of Christian academics and ministry, which invites us to reorient our priorities and reenvision our first love. This is useful as an ongoing practice, but especially valuable as one contemplates embarking on a new ministry such as writing online.

Contemporary pastors are chained because so much current thinking about the church and its ministry is meant to disempower rather than to empower people. What happens when people come to seminary? We teach them courses that disempower them rather than give them the skills to claim their ministries with joy and excitement. . . . The tools and the skills tend to be inappropriate to the way the church ought to go about its business of discerning the Word of its Lord. . . . The situation is aggravated as contemporary theologians and ethicists write for other theologians and ethicists rather than for those in ministry. Which helps explain why those in ministry read fewer and fewer books on theology and ethics. It also explains why we have the new discipline of "practical theology," which is supposed to translate academic theology into something usable. Theology, to be Christian, is by definition practical. Either it serves the formation of the church or it is trivial and inconsequential. Preachers are the acid test of theology that would be Christian. . . .

Pastors fail if they have not evoked an exciting sense of adventure among their parishioners. Seminary professors have failed if we have not helped to empower pastors to evoke the sense of adventure in the laity. . . . Clever new theologies may keep seminary professors from being bored, but they will also distract them from

era of lifelong study of the Word as a pastor among pastors in the ministerium of the Missouri Synod" (209).

⁶⁶ Until recent years, the Armed Forces used to accommodate non-academic religious bodies by allowing them to substitute a two year Master's degree in Counseling for the far more comprehensive three or four year Master of Divinity degree that was the standard. Sadly, the requirement that they possess a graduate degree does not guarantee that a given chaplain will possess an appreciation for education or learning. My first senior chaplain, a Southern Baptist, once bragged to me that he had not opened any theological book aside from the Bible since graduating from seminary. He genuinely considered this fact praiseworthy, even as he ridiculed the Roman Catholic priest and me for theological discussions we engaged in that extended beyond the biblical text itself.

their central mission as seminary professors and they will certainly not renew the church . . .⁶⁷

Without belaboring the restoration of the pastor/scholar model, it is worth affirming it repairs damage to the Church. As the authors of *The Pastor Theologian* say of the “bifurcation” of theologian and pastor: “In sum, this divorce has led to the theological anemia of the church and the ecclesial anemia of theology.”⁶⁸ This volume, and other voices in this renewal effort, highlight the example of Martin Luther and other Reformers who seamlessly knit the two roles together. Criticizing the detached and esoteric nature of what passes for much theology today, they write:

But even in such settings, the methodological agnosticism that reigns within the university and its disciplines and guilds has a formative (albeit usually subtle) effect on intellectual endeavors. To put it concretely, it is not hard to spot the difference between the pastorally engaged and theologically earnest tone of, say, a Luther or Calvin or Wesley, and the disinterested, measured, and scientific posture that has become the soup du jour for submissions in academic journals of theology today.⁶⁹

The significance of this dichotomy, in light of the current research, is that blogging provides a unique forum for reuniting these two identities. The blogging pastor can preach from his pulpit on Sunday. Then, on Monday, he can write with the authority of a well-educated pastoral theologian, to a far broader “congregation.” The reason why serving *pastors* are superbly suited to this twofold proclamation of the Gospel is because they are best attuned to the hearts of real people. In being conscientious theologians and erstwhile shepherds, we follow the example of Doctor Luther.

Luther’s work as a professor was the shaping theological influence of the Reformation. Yet Luther was no ivory-tower theologian. While not the pastor of the town church in Wittenberg (a position occupied by his friend Johannes Bugenhagen),

⁶⁷ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989). Kindle.

⁶⁸ Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson. *The Pastor Theologian*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), Kindle.

⁶⁹ Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson. *The Pastor Theologian*, Kindle.

Luther's involvement in ecclesial life was remarkable. He regularly participated in ecclesial disputes, pastoral training, and was a frequent preacher at the town church. Between 1510 and 1546, Luther preached approximately 3,000 sermons to the laity — a preaching schedule more rigorous than most contemporary pastors. As was common in Protestant pre-Enlightenment Europe, the worlds of the academy and the church merged together in ways that did not allow for easy separation. As such, Luther's writing demonstrates a deep acquaintance with the needs of average Christians.⁷⁰

Lutheran theologian Wayne Stumme describes the interplay between verbal discourse and the act of writing in the life of the pastor theologian.

The theologian-pastor must be committed to the task of theological integration. This may well be the typical, indeed, inevitable expression of the pastoral vocation. . . . How is theological integration achieved, consciously and with direct application? The disciplined study and critical assessment of the minister have obvious significance for the essential pastoral obligations of preaching and teaching. These primary activities provide unparalleled opportunities for the pastor to bring the insights of the Christian tradition into lively engagement with the problems and questions and hopes of the present. Sometimes this will occur in the course of verbal exchange, and such dialogic interaction with laypersons, colleagues, and non-Christians is essential if theological reflection is to result in forms of expression which are authentically Christian and genuinely human. This does not relieve the pastor of the necessity for putting thought into writing, a discipline which not only encourages greater clarity and comprehensiveness but makes possible the later correction of one's formulations.⁷¹

The complementary nature of parish and academy can be restored, though it requires effort. This is one vital purpose of the DMin program in my personal opinion. Obviously I am not alone in my desire to refine my ministry skills through this course of study. The same impulse drove my pursuit of my MTh early in my ministry. Both of these post-MDiv paths share a commitment

⁷⁰ Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson. *The Pastor Theologian*, Kindle.

⁷¹ Wayne C. Stumme, "The Pastor as Theologian," *Word & World* 1, no. 4 (1981), 352–53. Another theologian describes the importance of writing for the visionary pastor in this way: "Writing also forces him to be specific. I describe this as 'blowing the lint off the brain.' The point is this: If an idea cannot be written down, then it is far too general and vague and needs to be refined to the point where it can be written. Even then, what is first put on paper will necessarily be broad and general but it may contain some specifics as well. The writing process captures a necessary broadness that works in tandem with a certain narrowness, both of which are necessary to arrive at a clear vision." Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 68–69.

to growth in knowledge and a desire to apply these enhanced skills to the *missio Dei*.⁷² And both are efforts best anchored in the context of the parish. For it is in the local community of faith, more than any other setting, where we are most fully the people of God. As we confess in Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession, “the Christian church is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints . . .”⁷³ And it is this ecclesiological dimension of our existence and work that raises our next theological consideration.

Mission as a Primary Purpose of the Church

In living out the *missio Dei*, the vast majority of ministries and works of the church go unnoticed by society. In contrast, public expressions of our trust in Jesus (be they verbal or written) demand a response of some kind; they may be ignored, but even that turning away must follow a conscious decision on the part of the person who has heard, or read, the words. The church is, by nature, is a body which joyfully proclaims the truly good news that has created it. As Robert Kolb and Theodore Hopkins write, “The church is also a *Mundhaus*, God’s mouth house, which reflects a two-fold reality. Not only does the church receive the Word of God in faith, but the church also proclaims God’s Word, witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ Because God has instilled within my breast a hungry fascination with the power of words, it is the *proclamation* of the gospel that captures my imagination. The question of how we most effectively communicate God’s word of love and salvation⁷⁵—lies at the root of the current

⁷² Victor Raj encapsulated this *missio* perfectly, writing, “Christian mission is the heart of God who desires all people everywhere to be saved.” Victor Raj, “These Post-Missionary Times,” *Missio Apostolica* 19, no. 2 (2011), 102.

⁷³ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. *The Book of Concord*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 42.

⁷⁴ Robert Kolb and Theodore Hopkins, *Inviting Community* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 12.

⁷⁵ “No one questions whether Scripture should be a primary source for the development of a missional imagination.” Mark Love, “Missional Interpretation: The Encounter of a Holy God through a Living Text,” *Missio*

study. Few have focused in on the Christian vocation more clearly than C.S. Lewis.

It is so easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. . . . The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.⁷⁶

The uncertain days in which we live have dramatically altered the long-stable shape of the Church’s mission. Not its purpose, but its methods. And technological advances play at least a supporting role in this “revision.”

The context of the *missio Dei* is the world, a world shrinking because of the media. The foreign/home mission distinction is less and less significant. For instance, we are seeing openness to confessional Lutheran theology by theologically adept national church leaders in the developing world and a willingness to confess over against Western church bodies. Old ties, perhaps long taken for granted, are being sundered. Therefore, the Lutheran question of “How is this done?” demands an answer in a radically changed context in which Westerners are now becoming the mission targets of their former mission children.⁷⁷

Although he was not writing about ministry via the internet, missiologist Christopher Wright describes one impulse that will inspire clergy to become potential bloggers.

The underlying assumption of a missional hermeneutic resonates in the evangelical spirit (because of the Spirit, no doubt). It “proceeds from the assumption that the whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of God’s creation.” Knowing this, we cannot be content with having God “in our hearts,” or being comfortable in our cozy little congregations. The mission of the Church—the mission of every member of Christ’s Body—is to reach out to every

Dei: A Journal of Missional Theology and Praxis 5, no. 1 (2014), 9.

⁷⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: HarperCollins ebooks, 2009), Kindle. The MAP enchiridion includes a chapter proposing C.S. Lewis as a helpful exemplar for sharing the Gospel online. Focusing on “mere Christianity” is not syncretistic. On the contrary, it avoids doctrinaire debates and polemics. This is one reason Lewis is cited so commonly by LCMS authors. For example, in the most recent publication of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, there are ten references to Lewis and his writings. *In Christ All Things Hold Together*, (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2015).

⁷⁷ Scott R. Murray, “Missio Dei,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (2014): 6.

jungle, island and alleyway with the Gospel.⁷⁸

One challenge for blogging pastors is the fact that the vast majority of their readers remain anonymous. While some may be members of their own congregation, typically the greatest number are not. Some of these individuals will be active members of their own Christian churches, of various denominations. Others will be believers who are unaffiliated with any local congregation, or perhaps even any identifiable theological tradition. Others will be adherents, active and inactive, of other faiths. Still others will espouse no religious beliefs, or adhere to the amorphous notion of “spirituality” that has become epidemic in the modern age. This diversity of belief and allegiance poses a significant challenge, and opportunity for the pastoral blogger. Each pastor will consciously need to determine personally how to approach the subject. The care of souls suggests that each situation needs to be handled individually, but I would commend the following guidelines as biblically sound and (with the Holy Spirit’s anointing) sometimes effective.

1. Avoid condemnatory language about other faith groups, even as we positively state truths such as there being salvation in no other name than Jesus.
2. Consistently affirm and celebrate the value of being part of a congregation.
3. Explain the nature of liturgical worship, since it will be unfamiliar to most unchurched individuals, and a good many of those who have only been exposed to Protestant denominations. Emphasizing the biblical sources of various elements of the Divine Service often dispels some of the nescient prejudices against the

⁷⁸ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), Kindle.

liturgy.⁷⁹

4. Extend “invitations” to your readers to visit LCMS congregations. For example, as Christmas approaches, suggest that those without a church home (including those who are simply exploring the claims of Christ) either renew or establish the joyous tradition of attending Christmas Eve services.
5. Make personal introductions to their “local” pastor for people with whom you have established a quasi-pastoral relationship.⁸⁰

It is assumed here that the congregation to which a blogging pastor refers an inquirer will be counted among those faithful to God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions.⁸¹ Fortunately, we are not limited to our own Synod’s parishes,⁸² since we are in fellowship with other bodies and in conversation with still others. Through the International Lutheran Council, we experience an

⁷⁹ As Jeff Thormodson correctly states, “Humanly speaking, an effective liturgy is a liturgy that contains powerful cultural symbolism and language that is able to communicate the Gospel without detailed explanation. While some liturgical catechesis is necessary for understanding liturgical worship, the best liturgical symbols and rites are those that have strong cultural connections and resonate with cultural meaning. On the other hand, an ineffective or weak liturgy is one that relies upon distant symbols or symbols that are foreign to the culture; the people cannot relate to it because its symbolism is divorced from their experience. Abstract symbolism that must be intellectually comprehended and retained in order to function properly in worship is ineffective; it is distant from the people and therefore loses its capacity to effectively communicate the message.” Jeff Thormodson, “Christian Worship in the Context of Culture,” *Missio Apostolica* 20, no.2 (2012), 126.

⁸⁰ By quasi-pastoral, I mean a bond where they have come to regard you as a trusted spiritual guide. In cases such as these, consistent with a biblical understanding of the ecclesia, we recognize they need to be connected to a local shepherd and community. I have had several occasions where I have carried on an email correspondence with individuals who were moved by something I had written, which eventually allowed me to arrange for their face to face visit with a Missouri Synod pastor in their own community.

⁸¹ These would be nurturing committees of faith, attuned to the needs of all. Lutheran theologian Walter Sundberg describes how they must be immersed in the Gospel. “When Baptism is not attended to in the church by prayer and faith, Satan rears his ugly head. Over time, his effect is destructive: [quoting Luther] ‘Though [Satan] could not quench the power of baptism in little children, nevertheless [he succeeds] in quenching it in all adults so that now there are scarcely any who call to mind their own baptism, and still fewer who glory in it.’” Walter Sundberg, “Evangelicalism: The Heartbeat of American Protestantism and the Awkward Companion of American Lutheranism,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no.1 (2014), 13.

⁸² This is not intended to be read as a slight. I am alluding here to the scarcity of LCMS congregations in some regions. For example, in the District of Columbia we only have two churches, which is only one less than we count in either Rhode Island or Vermont. *The Lutheran Annual 2016* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 792.

international fellowship with confessional bodies.⁸³ This is a precious thing, since there is no guarantee that any “denomination” will hold fast to the truth once delivered to it. In the correspondence of Hermann Sasse we see a sad proof of that fact. “It is a real tragedy of German Lutheranism, a development in which fate and fault flow together, that our territorial churches . . . no longer are able to take their confession seriously and label those who still do as ‘rabbinitists,’ ‘fanatics,’ and ‘legalists.’”⁸⁴ So it is that those faithful pastors who decide to place their own words on the internet best be prepared for labels such as these, and worse.

In terms of a blogging pastor’s ecclesiological (and ecclesiastical) concerns, most will be motivated by a genuine desire to see their readers joined in community with the children of God in their own locale. Only a fool or a mediavangelist⁸⁵ would pretend to be able to be a credible spiritual shepherd to people they will never see or touch. In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Melancthon elaborated on the Reformers’ statement about the Church. “However, the church is not only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations, but it is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people.”⁸⁶ This brings us to the next theological concern of the blogger, the place of evangelism in their blogging endeavor.

⁸³ “Those involved in Christian mission at the international level have become acutely aware of the paradigmatic shift that has taken place in world Christianity. . . . Martin Luther knew that the gospel was always on the move and that therefore it should never be taken for granted. He famously warned the German people: ‘O my beloved Germans, buy while the market is at your door; gather in the harvest while there is sunshine and fair weather; make use of God’s grace and word while it is there! For you should know that God’s word and grace is like a passing shower of rain [*Platzregen*] . . .’” Douglas L. Rutt, “Martin Luther’s *Platzregen* in Action: The Changing Face of Global Christianity,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 3 (2014), 226.

⁸⁴ Hermann Sasse, “Concerning the Freedom of the Church,” *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, vol. 1, ed. Matthew C. Harrison, trans. W. Gawrisch (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), Kindle.

⁸⁵ Mediavangelist (à la televangelist) is my own pejorative word for people who seek to build their own kingdom on the internet, where even their digital treasures will experience that “moth and rust destroy” (Matt. 6:19).

⁸⁶ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. *The Book of Concord*, 174.

Evangelism as a Natural Activity of the Church

An essential element of the Church is its devotion to sharing the Gospel. We, as clergy and congregations, do this through Word and sacrament ministry. The sacraments fall outside the scope of this research effort, since their very nature makes digital distribution an anachronism. Words, however, we have recognized as being the heart of blogging. Admittedly, evangelism is rarely considered a bastion of Lutheran expertise. Still, actively sharing the Gospel with those who are no longer exposed to it in churches or the media, should be a natural consideration in pastoral blogging. Indeed, the form of religion that people are invariably presented with in the world, and all too frequently in so-called “Christian” churches as well, could not be farther from the genuine article. As Francis Pieper contrasted the two:

Finally, can the homogeneity of the religions in the world be established on the basis of the philosophy of religion? Certainly not, for the religion espoused by the philosophers is the very opposite of the Christian religion; it is the religion of works. . . . In a word, the prerequisite of a “genuine,” “clean and objective” philosophy of religion is the repudiation of the divine authority of Holy Scripture. . . . Let us bear in mind that the Christian religion, the truth that mankind is reconciled to God through the *satisfactio vicaria* of Christ and that man therefore has a gracious God by faith in Christ without the deeds of the Law, is *terra incognita* to all men, including the philosophers.⁸⁷

Whether or not introducing readers to the Gospel is a primary goal of the online writer, the question must enter the thinking of the pastor at some point. “Will my words serve to draw my reader towards the throne of God, or may it repel them from his presence?” Surely, conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is a faithful proclamation of the Gospel that normally paves the way for this miracle. And, while many pastors take secret comfort in fact that they are not called to be evangelists,⁸⁸ we are well reminded that the “Great Commission” is not an *optional*

⁸⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), Kindle.

⁸⁸ The two offices are presented as distinct from one another in the Scriptures. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the

activity of the Church. Furthermore, the prominent placement of teaching (διδάσκοντες) in the chapter emphasizes the fact that our responsibility is to ground the evangelized in the fullness of the self-revelation in Jesus. In his discussion of this passage, missiologist David Bosch writes “what the apostles should ‘teach’ the new disciples according to Matt. 28:20, is to submit to the will of God as revealed in Jesus’ ministry and teaching. There is no gospel that may distance itself in an enthusiasm of the Spirit from the earthly Jesus.”⁸⁹

If evangelism—the presentation of the unencumbered Gospel—is an inescapable concern of pastoral blogging, there is another aspect that similarly underlies the writing done by pastors on the internet. It may not be their intention, but most pastoral bloggers are conscious of the fact that whenever they identify as Christians (much more so as pastors) they find themselves thrust into the role of apologist. This is true whether they desire it or not. We, echo the words of Paul and his companions.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.⁹⁰

Apologetics as a Particular Calling for Some

The field of apologetics is distinct from evangelism, although it can be argued that a concern for the lost also motivates this discipline. In essence, apologetics concerns itself with

body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12).

⁸⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), Kindle.

⁹⁰ 2 Cor. 5:16–20. It is interesting to note that Paul is calling those who are already new creations in Christ to be reconciled to God. Thus, this passage would be apropos for our reflection in terms of reaching out to the lost, as

making a persuasive argument for faith. It is a defense of the reasonableness for believing in Christ. In most cases it consists of a clear presentation of the core of the Christian faith, which was early on summarized in the Rule of Faith and ultimately crystalized in the ecumenical creeds. In truth it has been persuasively argued that the earliest credal statements arose from preaching itself. As J.N.D. Kelly said, “It may be true that often, perhaps usually, the semi-credal confessions which achieved currency in the earlier decades did not give expression to this [fully Trinitarian] framework but were content to announce the purely Christological kerygma.”⁹¹

Apologetics has been a work of the Church since the earliest days. We hear elements of it in some of the sermons recorded in the Scriptures themselves. Many of the Church Fathers devoted great energy to this effort, seeking to gain a hearing for the Christian message, particularly within educated circles. Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) provides a very early example of this labor. We are blessed that two of his apologies have survived to this day. His *First Apology* was written to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and argued that Christians posed no threat to the Roman Empire, and requesting that persecution of believers should cease. The second, addressed to the Roman Senate, argues for the cessation of persecution as well. Justin closes it with an appeal that the document be reproduced and distributed by the Roman authorities, with the addition of their admonition that persecutors throughout the empire should desist. He argues in this very public forum that the reason Christianity is rejected is due to a failure to understand its true nature.

well as exhorting the redeemed.

⁹¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 28. The creeds themselves provide fertile soil for contemporary blogging, and I have used them as the basis for a number of online columns. My intention to do so again in the near future was renewed recently, when I read a blog post by Lutheran lay theologian Uwe Siemon-Netto who described the appalling ignorance even of those who profess Christianity in contemporary France, where he resides part of each year. “Even among those who do attend church regularly few know the essentials of their faith. I recently went to a dinner party of practicing Catholics, all with university degrees. None of them had even heard of the term, *Symbole de Nicée* (Nicene Creed).” Uwe Siemon-Netto, “Where Muslim Dreams may Lead,” December 30, 2015. Accessed January 28, 2016. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/where-muslim-dreams-may-lead-uwe-siemon-netto>.

And we therefore ask you to publish this petition, appending what you think right, that our opinions may be known to others, and that these persons may have a fair chance of being freed from erroneous notions and ignorance of good, who by their own fault are subject to punishment; that so these things may be published to men and women. Because it is in the nature of man to know good and evil, and by their condemning us, whom they do not understand, for actions which they say are wicked . . . And if you publish this [officially], we will make it manifest to all, that, if possible, they may be converted; for we composed this treatise for this end alone. And our doctrines are not shameful, according to sober judgment, but indeed are more lofty than every human philosophy . . .⁹²

Justin was writing to hostile pagans. His best hope was that the enlightened emperor and senators of Rome might grant his case a hearing. As we have already noted, in our postmodern age, the example of Christians laboring in those early, dangerous days becomes ever more timely. And it is not simply the spirit of antichrist with which we contend. Dr. Gene Veith argues that “Christians find themselves in a precarious position” during this age of terrorism. “While they believe the kingdom of heaven comes through evangelism, not jihad, their own culture may be turning against them. . . . There is no difference, [critics] say, between an Islamic conservative and a Christian conservative.”⁹³

A prime Reformation example of apologetic writing would be Melancthon’s *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* itself. It was in fact, a defense of the Gospel as expressed in the *Augsburg Confession*, and a direct rebuttal to the *Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession*. While many of Luther’s writings possess apologetic overtones, the aggressive tone of many of them makes the label “disputations” better fitting. John Newton, a masterful evangelical communicator in his own right, was impressed by Melancthon’s recognition that even our best efforts to present the Gospel are futile, apart from the power of God. Newton’s

⁹² From the conclusion of Justin Martyr’s Second Apology. Justin Martyr. *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, trans. Leslie W. Barnard, Ancient Christian Writers series (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1997), 84.

⁹³ Gene E. Veith. *Christianity in an Age of Terrorism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 16. Veith warns that in the minds of some, “A comprehensive war against terrorism must stamp them both out.”

observation remains pertinent for clergy today.

With such sanguine hopes Melanchthon entered the ministry at the dawn of the Reformation. He thought he had only to speak and to be heard in order to convince. But he soon found himself mistaken, and that the love of sin, the power of prejudice and the devices of Satan were such obstacles in his way that nothing less than the mighty operations of the Spirit of God could break through. And all who preach upon his principles and with his views have known something of his disappointment.⁹⁴

Many prominent Christians have served God by offering effective apologetics during the past century. These would include Francis Schaeffer, John Warwick Montgomery, and C.S. Lewis. I believe an examination of Lewis' apologetics remains of tremendous value to Christian pastors a half century after his passing. The fact is, however, that effective apologetics today will not be identical to what has sufficed in the past. In one collection of essays on apologetics the editors pose the question this way, "Is apologetics still possible in a society that no longer believes in objective truth as demonstrable by a predefined standard of rationality? How do we persuade others of the truth of the gospel in a culture where a variety of rationalities coexist?"⁹⁵ By the grace of God, it is my hope this research project will promote in some modest degree a continuation of this noble heritage.⁹⁶

Pastors who are conscious of the apologetic dimension of their online writing do well to

⁹⁴ John G. Stackhouse, Jr. *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81. Another of Melanchthon's character traits, one for which the most conservative branch of Lutheranism might deride him, was that he "was no controversialist. Irenic by nature, he never went looking for controversy, and when it came he did not relish it. . . . There is irony in the fact that Melanchthon, in pursuing peace and harmony, actually became a controversial figure, because it was in seeking a *via media* that he incurred wrath and hostility from both sides." Dean Zweck, "Philipp Melanchthon: 'Theologian and Servant of God,'" *Lutheran Theological Journal* (Australia) 44, no. 3 (2010), 157.

⁹⁵ Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 11.

⁹⁶ For a thorough and persuasive outline of apologetics in the Lutheran tradition, rooted in Luther himself and the classical dogmaticians, see John Warwick Montgomery's essay on the subject. "Luther is not antiapologetic; he is, rather, exceedingly careful in his starting point. The *point de départ* must be Christ; in methodology one must 'begin at the bottom' with the Incarnation . . ." John W. Montgomery, "Lutheran Theology and the Defense of Biblical Faith," *Fact Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Edmonton, Canada: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology and Public Policy, 2001), 144.

remember that the internet is nothing more than a microcosm of the broader world in which the Adversary's acolytes are simultaneously making a case for his lies. Some doing so brazenly, while most strive to advance the cause of doubt and idolatry with scientism or wit. Thus you will find Richard Dawkins entitling his anti-religious text *A Devil's Chaplain*.⁹⁷ Or you may encounter apostate clergy who use their own betrayed clerical credentials to trumpet the supposed wisdom of atheism. Although many such contemporary voices join in these pagan paeans,⁹⁸ I cite here a book that was just this week suggested for my reading by a publisher that republishes titles that have fallen into the public domain. A recent volume is *An Agnostic's Apology*, written by a well-respected British literary critic of the nineteenth century. It is introduced with the words, "A gripping and emotional work around the power of religion and the defense of agnosticism, Leslie Stephen's *An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays* is considered a seminal work in religious studies."⁹⁹ The author's clerical past lends credence to his dismissal of Christianity. Sadly, the same internet that affords Christians an opportunity to spread the Gospel in a manner undreamed of by our parents, likewise allows for the perpetuation of every dark and destructive word, as well.

Reformed theologian William Placher wisely cautioned would-be apologists about a subtle

⁹⁷ Dawkins closes his volume with an intimate and rather sentimental letter to his daughter in which he ridicules religious faith and writes that in addition to tradition, "The two other bad reasons for believing in anything [are] authority and revelation." Richard Dawkins, *A Devil's Chaplain* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 244.

⁹⁸ "These nature religions are known [today] by other labels. Many, perhaps a majority, of adherents think of them as a form of paganism. The term . . . may be used almost indiscriminately with reference to most any nonbiblical religion . . ." Jacob Neusner, ed. *World Religions in America*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 244.

⁹⁹ Quotation from the Forgotten Books website, retrieved on January 29, 2016. http://www.forgottenbooks.com/books/An_Agnostics_Apology_1000001221. What stood out to me was the intentional use of the word "Apology," to title his work combatting the faith he had formerly espoused as an Anglican priest. He contends, among other blasphemies that "The Bible has been made an idol, and therefore made grotesque." Leslie Stephen, *An Agnostic's Apology: And Other Essays* (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1893), 62–63.

snare. His warning is very applicable to those of us who intentionally strive to present the case for faith in Christ through the various avenues that comprise the internet.

It can be an honorable enterprise, but it always risks becoming “apologetic” in a bad sense: defensive, halfhearted. Christian apologists can adopt the language and assumptions of their audience so thoroughly that they no longer speak with a distinctively Christian voice. As a result, they not only cease to give a faithful account of the Christian tradition, they cease to be interesting to their non-Christian listeners because they do not seem to have anything new or different to say.¹⁰⁰

Although the aforementioned theological concerns—vocation, mission, evangelism and apologetics—will occupy the attention of most blogging pastors, it would be theologically indefensible not to mention that defining doctrine that is quintessentially Lutheran, the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. It is a given that everything proclaimed and taught by Lutheran pastors by definition must properly employ both. Some pastors may experience this as a particular challenge. Two considerations may reduce their anxiety. The first is that the Law need not only be presented as the “hammer of judgment.” It can also speak to the unbeliever in a more subtle manner.

The situation is more complex when we turn to the preaching of the Law as “mirror of existence.” Here, as we noted, the Law functions not as an accusatory Word from beyond us but as a threat which rises from within the actualities of life. Our goal in preaching is not so much to stir the conscience as to awaken consciousness. Listeners are to be helped to a recognition of the reality of their life in the world, a reality of which terms like alienation, anxiety, and despair are descriptive.¹⁰¹

I am convinced that pastoral blogging is ideally, and perhaps divinely, suited to this sort of presentation of the Law.

The second encouragement is offered in light of Luther’s caution that Law and Gospel must not be comingled. It is found in the comforting admonition of the final thesis in Walther’s

¹⁰⁰ William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 11.

¹⁰¹ Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Ramsey, NJ: Sigler, 1991), 47.

Law and Gospel. “You are not rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you do not allow the Gospel to predominate in your teaching.”¹⁰² This concise statement offers comfort to pastors in all of their ministrations, and will be invaluable in terms of providing concrete direction to clergy who venture into the immense and ever-expanding realm of the blogosphere.

Concluding Thoughts

From the discussion in this chapter we are reminded of the necessary evolution of oral proclamation to also include written presentations of the Gospel. The written testimonies were not intended to replace the preaching of the Word, but complemented that preaching with a version of the very same message that was far more likely to survive longer and be less subject to change. Because of that, written Gospels could be used by God to reach those not present in time or space when an oral presentation of the same doctrine might be offered. It is this remarkable power of the written Word to transcend time and space that has driven the spread of the Gospel to many parts of the world.

In the next chapter we will see how Martin Luther regarded the printing press to be a divine gift, allowing as it did for the rapid and wide distribution of the Bible . . . and the Reformation message. The parallels of the internet to the printing press are numerous. We pastors, privileged to live at this precise moment in history, have access to an unanticipated technological breakthrough resembling in many ways the experience of Doctor Luther. Considering his example, we may discover exciting novel ways to exercise our vocations in light of the welfare of the Church, especially insofar as evangelism and apologetics are concerned.

¹⁰² C.F.W. Walther, *Law & Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), Kindle.

CHAPTER 3

THE PROJECT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

“These are the numbers of the divisions of the armed troops who came to David in Hebron . . . Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, 200 chiefs, and all their kinsmen under their command” (1 Chron. 12:23, 32).

This reference to the *prudentes viri* who led the tribe of Issachar has historically been used to allude to those who are exceptionally attuned to the movements and events of their day. In our context, the leaders of Issachar would be those who recognize the power and accessibility of the internet to accomplish the work of God. These leaders would understand that while other technologies bore similarities to the explosion of the internet, that they merely foreshadowed its near-universal reach.¹⁰³ In this chapter we will consider the scope of history that has brought us to this moment—this divinely appointed hour when a pastor can proclaim the Gospel to a vast audience in every corner of the globe almost instantaneously. That same pastor could be crippled by some frailty, or restrained by lack of resources, yet these do not impede his proclamation. He might even be mute, having lost the ability to speak, and his ability to lift up the name of Jesus for all people would not be hindered. This is more than amazing. This is something Doctor Martin Luther would likely consider a miracle, one of the “greatest gifts of God,” as he had

¹⁰³ While some scholars mistake the knowledge of these leaders as familiarity with “astrological and physical knowledge,” Lutheran scholars have recognized “a sound and correct judgment in political matters does not necessarily presuppose scientific training.” These leaders were simply perceptive, recognizing exactly when the precise moment to act in a certain manner had arrived. They did not allow that time to pass, which is also applicable to those contemplating a blogging ministry. The Lord alone knows when the next technological breakthrough could make what is currently cutting edge passé. C.F. Keil, *The Books of the Chronicles, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, edited by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, translated by Andrew Harper (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1878), 193–94.

referred to the printing press in his own day. “Print is the latest and the greatest gift of God. With it he wanted the cause of true faith to be spread to the ends of the earth and translated into every language. This last blaze in the world cannot now be extinguished.”¹⁰⁴

Based as it is upon the Word, it comes as no surprise that the Gospel can only be communicated in its fullness through words.¹⁰⁵ The influential Christian philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, described it this way: “We have now concluded that what marks man as man is verbalization. We communicate propositional communication to each other in spoken or written form in language. Indeed, it is deeper than this because the way we think inside of our own heads is in language.” He closed his argument, declaring, “We can have other things in our heads besides language, but it always must be linked to language.”¹⁰⁶

The Context of the Apostolic Era

In the previous chapter we devoted considerable attention to the development of the

¹⁰⁴ Martin Connell, *Hear the Word of the Lord: The Lectionary in Catholic Ritual* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2015), 24. This translation from the German is offered by a Jesuit professor who praises Luther saying “Luther rescued the Church at large from sins of heresy, covetousness, and the acquisition of money for selling what it does not own” (24). Yet at the same time he argues that the creation of printed Bibles carried a major downside, in that “the Word of God morphed from being a social exchange of living, baptized believers—mouths that proclaimed and ears that heard—to a muted object, the printed Bible, with an individual reader, with both becoming separated from the Christian community” (25).

¹⁰⁵ This is a fact, with all due respect to Saint Francis who supposedly said “Preach always, and if you must, use words.” That sentiment is true in one sense. If our actions betray our words to be lies, they lose their power. On the other hand, this notion that it is really about gracious *actions*, betrays the Gospel by disconnecting the abstract “love” from the name of Jesus. Naturally it is a staple quotation of liberal Christians. Musician and Secular Franciscan Order member John Talbot acknowledges that “Unfortunately, Francis probably did not say it. It does, however, capture much of what Francis said about preaching.” John Michael Talbot, *Reflections on St. Francis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 84.

¹⁰⁶ Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, 30th edition (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), 55. Robert Kolb echoes and elaborates on this truth. “To be sure, art and music can express human emotion without verbalization eloquently and adequately—from me and to me as an individual. . . . if the community is to receive from artistic expression a precise explanation of what I have in mind as I express myself artistically, then human language must come into play. My emotional expression in artistic form will make an impact on your emotions without words, but I cannot share with you the meaning of my experience, what I view as its significance, apart from verbal communication. We may even have a community of expression in playing a duet or in a symphony, but our meanings—and our feelings as distinct from their expression—can become common only

Scriptures themselves as written texts. The meaning of God’s words did not change an iota. However, in written form the Word was freed to travel outward without requiring a human voice to act as intermediate agent. Similarly, the four Gospels were written to provide trustworthy witness to the Gospel for those of us destined to live our lives after the last of the eyewitnesses to the Incarnation had died. The placing of the story in a written form carries the added blessing of preventing the adulteration of the message. The autographs of all of the biblical texts were utterly inspired by God, and textual criticism aside,¹⁰⁷ the message has passed the test of time. This remains a truism: what is spoken may be misrecalled or misreported. What is transcribed or recorded remains there to be seen in its original form. Thus it is that whatever words we pastors commit to printed or digital formats will quite possibly outlast us. This can be daunting, since this remains true regardless of the *quality* of the writing. At the same time it is encouraging in terms of knowing that the effort invested in creating the document is capable of offering continued benefit, rather than being limited to the almost always transitory effect on a finite group of hearers.¹⁰⁸

The oral and written methods of communicating the hope within us are not in competition. We use the appropriate medium in various contexts. It is also natural for an individual’s skills

through verbal ‘sharing.’” Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), Kindle.

¹⁰⁷ Textual criticism is a worthwhile and fascinating study. However, it is important to remember—and to share with laity who may be troubled by such matters—that these textual inconsistencies are minor, and do not call into question any major Christian doctrine. “But scribes did not only make [accidental] mistakes, as we understand them. Scribes, apparently, were also very faithful in their copying—too faithful, one might say [since] when competing readings were in evidence, they were tempted to combine (= conflate) both competing readings, to make sure that the correct reading was not lost.” James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), Kindle.

¹⁰⁸ While some pastors may regard the permanence of online writing to be irrelevant, I suspect that the majority are conscious of the positive and negative implications. In my own case, while studying journalism, I decided to focus my personal effort on magazines rather than newspapers. This was due to two time related factors: (1) longer deadlines, allowing more in-depth research, and (2) the fact that a magazine’s life expectancy invariably exceeds that of a newspaper (as the respective quality of their paper stock visibly attests).

with each to differ. Some who shine in the pulpit will only glimmer behind the keyboard (and vice versa). Yet, some aptitude in each is rightfully expected of any minister of Word and Sacrament today. Preaching, of course, is one of the pastor's core requirements. Writing comes in a distant second and can be neglected to a large degree with little danger to one's pastoral perceived "success." The reasons for this run the gamut. While the most common problem seems to be a lack of time, reasons also include lack of confidence in one's skill, and simply disliking the activity of writing itself. All of these considerations will directly influence a pastor's potential success in online writing, and the study takes this into consideration. While the lack of time required to do all that is expected of us as pastors is endemic to the ministry, when neither of the other two factors are present, it is possible for clergy to prioritize their schedule to allow for writing as well as speaking.

As Christians, we know Jesus Christ is the *Logos*.¹⁰⁹ We have already reflected on the Word as being the One through whom all things were made.¹¹⁰ However, it is worth noting that there was, of course, a pre-Christian use of the word *logos* which was already influential in classical Greece. Without delving deeply into the subject, it is worthwhile to note that for the ancient Greeks, the concept of *logos* enveloped both oral and written dimensions. As explained by classicist Eric Havelock, "The term *logos*, richly ambivalent, referring to discourse both as spoken and as written (argument versus treatise) and also to the mental operation (the reasoning

¹⁰⁹ *Logos* refers in Christian theology to the divine Word of God, incarnate in Jesus. It is the metaphor, or name, for the Lord used in the first verse of the Gospel according to John.

¹¹⁰ Martin Luther held correctly that even when discussing the sacraments, it is the *Word* that allows them to convey grace. "Luther argued that God has bound himself to externals and can be grasped surely only through his Word, whether written, preached, or added to water or bread and wine to make a sacrament. In response to the Swiss insistence that the bread and wine were only signs, Luther downplayed his earlier definition of the sacraments as promise and sign. He did not abandon it completely, but he now emphasized the Word joined to the external elements." Amy Nelson Burnett, "Luther and the Schwärmer," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka, (June 2014), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.030>.

power) required to produce it, came into its own, symbolizing the new prosaic and literate discourse (albeit still enjoying a necessary partnership with spoken dialectic).¹¹¹ This laid a providential foundation for the coming of the Christ. Likewise, for a comprehension of how the written word could remain faithful to the message of the proclaimed Word.

The Context of the Early and Medieval Church

We have already considered the passage of time that compelled the apostles to commit their words to written form. One of the few things Islam gets correct, is that Christians are “People of the Book.”¹¹² One German historian draws a contrast between religions based upon text and those focused on ritual. “We may differentiate these as cult religions and book-based religions. Cult religions are the primary phenomenon everywhere. They arise seamlessly from tribal religions . . .”¹¹³ Most, but not all, transition to a written form. We have already noted the desire of the apostles to preserve the message. From Assmann’s perspective as an Egyptologist, he writes: “The possibility created by writing of story linguistic utterances in their literal form, so that they could be reproduced subsequently without the need to learn them by heart, was a development that liberated people from the repetition compulsion of ritual coherence.”¹¹⁴ Professor Uro acknowledges that beyond the natural dependence on the Law and Prophets, little is known about how the early Christian documents were used.

Although we have relatively little evidence as to what specific role Christian books played in the religious life of early Christians during the first hundred years or so of

¹¹¹ Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 113.

¹¹² In the Jewish tradition, this phrase (*Am HaSefer* in Hebrew) was used to refer to the Jewish people themselves. The Qur’an applies it to both Jews and Christians.

¹¹³ Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 122–23.

¹¹⁴ Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 124.

the movement, it is clear enough that writing was an important medium by means of which Christian ideas were transmitted and consolidated among members of the movement.¹¹⁵

Even as copies of the Scriptures were being meticulously copied by early Christian scribes, new Christian literature was being born. For the same reasons that motivated the apostles, early theologians, bishops and pastors began writing. We have already seen the example of Justin, one of the first apologists. Others followed his example. Correspondence naturally flowed about the Mediterranean initially in Greek and later also in Latin.¹¹⁶ At the outset of the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo described this dispersion of the story of Jesus in *On Christian Doctrine*.

And hence it happened that even Holy Scripture, which brings a remedy for the terrible diseases of the human will, being at first set forth in one language, by means of which it could at the fit season be disseminated through the whole world, was interpreted into various tongues, and spread far and wide, and thus became known to the nations for their salvation. And in reading it, men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written, and through these to find out the will of God, in accordance with which they believe these men to have spoken.¹¹⁷

In the ancient world every copy of each document was by definition a manuscript (*manuscriptus*), quite literally “by hand,” “written.” Because of this, and the fact that not everyone possessed the skills to serve as a scribe, mass producing documents was not common. While noteworthy texts could easily be “published” in this fashion, it was an involved and relatively expensive process. Also, as we noted in our discussion of textual criticism, if a scribe

¹¹⁵ Risto Uro, “Ritual, Memory and Writing in Early Christianity,” 160.

¹¹⁶ Being a universal faith, it was natural for Christian writings to appear in every tongue spoken by believers. Aramaic, Armenian, and Coptic, documents appeared almost immediately. Others followed rapidly. The impulse to translate God’s Word into the languages of his children continues today with the work of Wycliffe Bible Translators and Lutheran Bible Translators. Martin Luther was not the only one whose translation of the Bible was regarded as the origin of a standardized written language. Cyril and Methodius brought literacy to the Slavs, creating the Glagolitic alphabet in the ninth century. Eight centuries later John Eliot published the first Bible in America in the Wampanoag tongue of the Algonquin tribe. Publishing, I am convinced, is deeply embedded in the Church’s DNA.

¹¹⁷ Marcus Dods, ed. *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, vol. 9 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1873), 37.

was working with anything other than the autograph, variations in text were virtually inevitable. Despite those limitations, publishing, though uncommon, was not rare. In fact, it happened with some regularity. Modest works with great import, such as the letters of an apostle, were often copied and circulated to a wider audience than the direct recipient. In commercial endeavors, Greek and Roman authors who gained a following were motivated to expand the sales of their work. Of course, in the pre-copyright world that continued through the Reformation, there were no laws to prevent an entrepreneur from securing a copy of a text and reproducing it for sale themselves, without compensation for the author. The Roman poet Martial (38/41–102/104) complained about this problem. “My book is thumbed by our soldiers posted overseas, and even in Britain people quote my words. What’s the point? I don’t make a penny from it.”¹¹⁸ Martial also deserves mention as advocating the transition from the scroll to the codex.

The roll continues to be the vehicle for the Scriptures read in synagogues today, often in larger formats than were used in biblical times. However, by the first century wax-coated wooden tablets, long known in the Near East, widely used for memoranda, continuing records, and school exercises, were apparently imitated in papyrus or parchment. The result was the codex, the book with pages. In Rome, the poet Martial commended this form of book as more convenient than the roll for a traveller to read. He had copies of works by Homer and Virgil, among others, in this form. . . .

Almost half of the second-century codex books are Christian products, copies of New Testament books, books of the Septuagint, and apocryphal gospels. Why Christians adopted this novel shape of book is uncertain; it may be related to the indications in the manuscripts that many of them were not made by professional book copyists but by clerks in the administration accustomed to writing notes in notebooks or on wax tablets.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Mary Beard, “Scrolling Down the Ages, *New York Times*, April 16, 2009, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/19/books/review/Beard-t.html>. The author, a professor and the “classics editor” of *The Times Literary Supplement*, describes the manner in which large press runs would occur. “The ancient equivalent of the printing press was a battalion of slaves, whose job it was to transcribe one by one as many copies of Virgil, Horace or Ovid as the Roman market would buy.”

¹¹⁹ Alan Millard, “Authors, Books, and Readers in the Ancient World,” *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and J.W. Rogerson (September 2009), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237777.003.0031>.

In contrast to Martial's concern, the last thought on the minds of Christian writers was the potential for making a profit. And this contrast persists to our own day. When a pastor or lay leader enters the ethereal realm of the blogosphere, with rare exceptions they simply hope that their words will be read. They seek no remuneration. They pursue no accolades (although an expression of affirmation is seldom unwelcome). They write not to make money, but to share the hope they know in Christ. Many Christian writers also find themselves almost *compelled* to declare the Gospel with lips and pen. They share with Jeremiah the need to witness to God's demand for justice and offer of mercy. "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer. 20:9). Naturally, not all bloggers will take up the challenge with passion. Some will approach out of a sense of duty. So it is, of course, with various responsibilities of the ministry. Not all duties are intrinsically joyful to perform, but the disciple seeks to be faithful in each.

One of the earliest evidences of the systematic reproduction of Christian documents during the ancient period came with the elevation of the first Christian emperor. Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus (272–337) commissioned the preparation of fifty Bibles for use in the churches of the new capital, Nova Roma, or Constantinople as it came to be called. In a letter to Eusebius of Caesarea, his biographer whom he held in high regard, Constantine wrote:

I have thought it expedient to instruct your Prudence to order fifty copies of the sacred scriptures (the provision and use of which you know to be most needful for the instruction of the Church) to be written on prepared parchment in a legible manner, and in a commodious and portable form, by transcribers thoroughly practiced in their art. The procurator of the diocese has also received instructions by letter from our Clemency to be careful to furnish all things necessary for the preparation of such copies; and it will be for you to take special care that they be completed with as little delay as possible. You have authority also, in virtue of this letter, to use two of the public carriages for their conveyance, by which arrangement the copies when fairly written will most easily be forwarded for my personal inspection; and one of the

deacons of your Church may be intrusted with this service, who, on his arrival here, shall experience my liberality.¹²⁰

One of the many services provided by monastic communities to the greater Church included the preservation and copying of the Scriptures and various other religious literature. During the late ancient and the entire medieval periods, the copying and distribution of God's Word owes much to the efforts of monks who labored at the art of copying in varying conditions of (dis)comfort. Eventually, many monasteries devoted entire rooms to the endeavor. The scriptorium was often designed with consideration to natural lighting and other concerns that might influence the holy effort. Cassiodorus (c. 485–585) was a Roman writer who served in the administration of Theoderic, the Arian Ostrogoth who ruled Italy. After he retired from his civic career, he established a monastery at Vivarium, on his family estate. As a lover of books, it was natural for the scriptorium to be a major feature of his religious center.

Cassiodorus furnished his scriptorium with novel technical devices: lamps that burned brightly and did not require constant attention; a sundial and water clock to tell time. He acquired a substantial collection of manuscripts, for reference and to be copied. . . . Bilingual scholars from the East came to his secluded monastic site, where in peace and quiet they could indulge a passion for translating Greek classics into Latin.

To guide future generations Cassiodorus wrote several books on scribal practice. His *Institutiones* described the model scriptorium and provided a list of books to guide monasteries in establishing and organizing a library.¹²¹

In *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus offers a word of encouragement to any servant of Christ who is singing his praise in writing. He said the Church must “fight against the illicit temptations of the devil with pen and ink. Every work of the Lord written by the scribe is a wound inflicted on

¹²⁰ Eusebius Pamphili, *Life of Constantine* 4,26, ed. Philip Schaff, et al, *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 1, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 110.

¹²¹ David S. New, *The Text of the Bible: Its Path Through History and to the People* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 36.

Satan.”¹²² This is most certainly a fitting analogy, since “the battle is one we fight with the gospel weapons of witness and love, not violence and coercion.”¹²³

The Christian devotion to the Word, and words about the Lord, energized the Church’s efforts to preserve and reproduce the Scriptures and other edifying writings. Nevertheless, many patristic writings have been lost due to war and other misfortunes.¹²⁴ Curiously, although the monasteries did preserve some classical (pagan) writings, many were lost to the dispassion of the years as they passed. It is important to note this was not an active purge of the literature. In fact, as one professor of early English literature writes, it could be traced back to the very earliest days of the transition of predominantly oral transmission to the written text.

As literate authors learned to assimilate oral materials to pen-and-parchment, and since cultural life and centres of writing were controlled so largely by the Church, it was inevitable that the oral transmission of the pagan verse would die out, or at best leave few records of an increasingly precarious existence. Meanwhile, the invasion of bookish culture into an oral tradition proceeded.¹²⁵

Before exiting our review of communicating the faith in written form during the early period, it is fitting that we note it as the era in which the enchiridion as a literary form was born. Among the early enchiridia, one Stoic handbook has survived conveying the wisdom of Epictetus (c. 55–135). His discourses were actually recorded by his pupil Arrian (c. 87–150). One of them stands out as ironically similar to the experience of some who are chided by their peers when they are called into the ministry. In the context of Epictetus, it is those who pursue

¹²² Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), xxx.

¹²³ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Kindle.

¹²⁴ Numerous early church works known only by reference in surviving documents have been lost. Among apologetic works alone, this would include Quadratus who defended the faith around 124, Aristo of Pella and Apollinaris of Hierapolis. A fragment of Quadratus’ work is extant, but no part of either of the other ancient writings is known to exist.

¹²⁵ J.B. Bessinger, “Oral to Written: Some Implications of the Anglo-Saxon Tradition,” *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations*, ed. Marshall McLuhan (New York: Something, 1967), 14.

philosophy who are subject to potential ridicule.

If you have an earnest desire towards philosophy, prepare yourself from the very first to have the multitude laugh and sneer, and say, “He is returned to us a philosopher all at once;” and “Whence this supercilious look?” Now for your part, don’t have a supercilious look indeed; but keep steadily to those things which appear best to you, as one appointed by God to this particular station. For remember that, if you are persistent, those very persons who at first ridiculed, will afterwards admire you. But if you are conquered by them, you will incur a double ridicule.¹²⁶

The most fascinating and valuable ancient enchiridion in my opinion is that written by Augustine. He wrote his handbook at the request of Laurentius, whom he refers to as “my beloved son” in the first sentence. In chapter four he outlines the nature of Laurentius’ request, for which successive generations stand as fellow beneficiaries.

You are anxious, you say, that I should write a sort of handbook for you, which you might always keep beside you, containing answers to the questions you put, viz.: what ought to be man’s chief end in life; what he ought, in view of the various heresies, chiefly to avoid; to what extent religion is supported by reason; what there is in reason that lends no support to faith, when faith stands alone; what is the starting-point, what the goal, of religion; what is the sum of the whole body of doctrine; what is the sure and proper foundation of the catholic faith. Now, undoubtedly, you will know the answers to all these questions, if you know thoroughly the proper objects of faith, hope, and love. For these must be the chief, nay, the exclusive objects of pursuit in religion. He who speaks against these is either a total stranger to the name of Christ, or is a heretic.¹²⁷

In the continuing pursuit of faith, hope and love, let us move now to that contentious era known as the Reformation.

The Context of the Reformation Era

God offered the Reformation, to Giovanni di Lorenzo de’ Medici as a gift. Instead, as Pope Leo X,¹²⁸ he spat on the gift and disabused the emissary, an Augustinian monk from the

¹²⁶ Epictetus, *The Works of Epictetus*, Thomas W. Higginson, trans. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1865), 888.

¹²⁷ Marcus Dods, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, 177.

¹²⁸ He reigned as Pope 1513–21, and lived lavishly. He was not even a priest when elevated to the papal

hinterlands of Germany. Upon Leo's head rests much responsibility for the chaos and violence that would follow this rejection of God's correction. Of course, not all prominent Roman Catholic leaders were antagonistic. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) was a Dutch theologian who was sympathetic to much of Luther's message. Sadly, the two men were not able to achieve a complete alliance.¹²⁹ Erasmus had voiced his own concerns about related corruption within the established church, an example of which we will see momentarily. In his use of the literary form to challenge these ecclesiastical abuses, in contrast to personal disputation, Erasmus served as a "forerunner" to Luther.

The disputation nevertheless did not form the decisive medium for Luther's polemical activity. More important was the influence from the various forms of pamphlets and tracts flowering in both Latin and the vernacular in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, nourished by the humanist movement and strongly dependent upon the invention of the printing press. This coincided with manifestations of a growing dissatisfaction with the existing church and society, and together these tendencies slowly brought about what can be described as a breakthrough in the history of literature. The German literary historian Barbara Könniker has labelled "the discovery of the word as a weapon" and its mobilization for winning over public opinion "one of the most important literary innovations of this age."¹³⁰

It would be inaccurate, historically, to attribute to Luther prescience about the impact of the *Ninety-Five Theses* as he nailed them to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg. The Latin

throne and is reputed to have said to a relative from his rich clan which insinuated its way into the Roman Catholic hierarchy, "Since God has given us the Papacy, let us enjoy it." Whether or not he said it, his actions betrayed this very sort of indulged and spiritually diseased attitude. "He inherited from the frugal Julius a full treasury that he promptly squandered on entertainments, sports, and celebration." Michael P. Riccards, *Faith and Leadership: The Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 99.

¹²⁹ Luther proved too radical and unsettling (in Lutheran parlance bold and uncompromising) for Erasmus. At one point Erasmus criticized Luther for appealing to an argument used by John Wycliffe. "Erasmus subsequently reproached Luther for being in league with marginal eccentrics." Martin Wernisch, "Luther and Medieval Reform Movements, Particularly the Hussites," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel and L'ubomir Batka, (December 2013), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.009>.

¹³⁰ Anna Vind, "Luther's Thought Assumed Form in Polemics," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel and L'ubomir Batka, (December 2013), accessed August 31, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.018>. The phrase "the word as a weapon" evokes Paul's

title of the list was *Disputatio pro Declaratione Virtutis Indulgentiarum*, and this is quite significant. It is noteworthy because of the fact that the entire document was written in that academic language, since its intended audience was not the German people, whom it transformed, but only the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. There is ample evidence that Luther himself was shocked by the warm public reception of his words and his challenge to the church's teaching on the unbiblical practice of indulgences. In March of 1518 he wrote to a publisher that he originally "had no wish nor plan to publicize these Theses."¹³¹ The translation into German reflected "the importance of vernacular publications for reaching a mass audience. Even though only a tiny fraction of the German-speaking people in the early sixteenth century could read, the fraction that could read Latin was much smaller."¹³² For our modern era, in which Bible translation in particular has reached impressive levels, we are well reminded that translation is an art rather than a true science. "Language is culturally specific . . . The way in which any person speaks is always rooted in a specific time and place, in a special historical culture, and in the words and idioms that are used follows the linguistic code of a particular community."¹³³ Because of this fact, "when a message first shaped in one language in a specific historical culture is communicated to another language and culture, care must be taken to make sure that the original, intended meaning of the message is conveyed as accurately in the new language and to the new culture."¹³⁴

famous martial passage in which the Word is "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:11–17).

¹³¹ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 307.

¹³² Mark U. Edwards, Jr. *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 39.

¹³³ Paul R. Raabe, "Cross-cultural Communication and Biblical Language," *Missio Apostolica* 4, no. 2 (1996), 79.

¹³⁴ A.R. Victor Raj, "Eastern Metaphors for the Gospel," Kindle.

Despite his unintended audience, the rapid dissemination of Luther's message and its enthusiastic embrace caused him to reflect on the power of technology to circumvent the forces that had formerly constrained the Gospel. The printing press, known for some time but now vastly improved by the advent of movable type, would become God's instrument for the spread of the Gospel. And Luther would learn to use its potential like a master. No longer would the power of the imprimatur restrict God's people from being liberated by messages vigorously suppressed in one locale before anyone could rally to their defense. Luther recognized this new force and harnessed it. He determined to write many publications expressly for the general populace, likely anticipating the cold reception he would find in ecclesiastical courts. Not that Luther, focused as he was on the urgent Reformation matters at hand, used the press to the full scope of its potential.

A noteworthy transformation occurred early in his ministry, when Luther began to intentionally direct much of his writing to the lay members of the Church. Theological reflection and discussion was being shifted from being the controlled domain of the clergy, to its more biblical position as the shared possession of the entire priesthood of believers.

As he worked his way through Paul's Letter to the Galatians in his first set of lectures on that book in 1516–1517 and took up the Psalms once more, a new theme began to emerge. It is reflected in the different spelling of Luther's name. Martin Ludder or Lutter became Martin Luther, a small change based on the Greek form of the word for freedom, *elutherius*. . . . With this change, Luther also turned to a different audience—one that he had addressed in his preaching but which now also became a concern in his writing. To this point, he had written mostly in answer to church officials or in his feuds with various theologians. Though he continued to write for other academics, after 1517 he began to address pamphlets directly to the laity.¹³⁵

The Reformation restored Christ to His rightful first position, but it failed to put the

¹³⁵ James A. Nestingen, *Martin Luther: A Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 37. Nestingen also notes that Luther's wife, Katharina von Bora, exercised a positive influence on his writing, being the "one who pushed him to write a reply to Erasmus" (66).

mission next. It just didn't seem to be the issue at the time. So it is hardly mentioned in the writing of the Lutheran Confessions or even those of Martin Luther himself. And, to some degree, little has changed among the life of some Lutheran Christians. Some of us would still think the order is not Christ, mission, and lastly, Church. Some would put doctrine before the mission. Some would put church order and governance before the mission.¹³⁶ We have already noted the Church is a *Mundhaus*, with a dedication to the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. This, however, "does not lead to a diminished regard for the written word."¹³⁷ Concordia Seminary President Dale A. Meyer draws this distinction well, and affirms that God's breathing Word speaks to us through both avenues. Writing to pastors, he says:

Johannes Gutenberg's invention of moveable type is a great blessing. We are doubly blessed to speak, hear, and read the living voice of the gospel. But when you open the Bible and when you study theology, take it as the Spirit intends it for you, the living and active word of God that will transform you. When you prepare to minister to others, lift the words off the page, get your head out of the book and manuscript. Speak the living, and active word from your heart to their hearts.¹³⁸

Publishing in the sixteenth century bore little resemblance to the field as it eventually developed. There was, for example, no notion of copyright. Printers were free to publish anything for which they thought there might be a market. While books would represent a significant investment, pamphlets were relatively inexpensive to print, and they could be thrown

¹³⁶ Norb Oesch, "Reflection on the Mission of God," *Missio Apostolica* 20, no. 1 (2012), 66.

¹³⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: the Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, Anniversary edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 327. He continues: "And, precisely because the written word is accompanied by the Spirit, the Christian need not choose between logocentrism and writing. On the contrary, the authenticity of the written text is guaranteed by a 'real presence.' In the Christian tradition, then, written words may mediate personal presence, just as Christ mediates the presence of God."

¹³⁸ Dale A. Meyer, "Living and Active," *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 4 (2015), 289. Robert Kolb notes that the distinctively Lutheran emphasis on the living Word is gradually becoming better understood by other Christians. "Luther's perception that God actually acts in this world through oral, written and sacramental forms of His Word has caused some difficulties for Lutherans in conversations with other Christians over the past centuries. There is less reason for this issue to continue to be a stumbling block because of the recent discussion among linguists of what is called 'performative speech.'" Robert Kolb, "Luther's Truths: Then and Now," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2, no. 4 (2015), 13.

together immediately after the oral delivery of a sermon or lecture. It was literally possible for a sermon preached on Sunday to be available in the marketplace on Monday or Tuesday. And, as the document wended its way across Germany and beyond, any enterprising printer in a new city who thought there was a local market for additional copies, would publish his own edition. The trickle thus became a torrent, and neither all of the Pope's horses nor all of his men, could reassemble the fragments of the papacy's much-abused authority. While Luther was a prolific writer, it is vital that we prioritize the value of his works. He did so himself. Theologian Christoph Burger identifies Luther's translation of the Scriptures themselves as his greatest accomplishment.

It is no exaggeration to characterize Luther's translation of the Bible as the centre of his theological work and the sum of his theology. He himself viewed all his own writings as dispensable if this would mean that the Scriptures would be shown to advantage. With his translation he made an important contribution to achieving this. It was his most significant work, judging on the basis of the effort made, the intensity of his contribution, the number of print runs, the reception of the work, and the number of colleagues who collaborated with him in order to obtain the most comprehensible and, at the same time, the most beautiful text.¹³⁹

Even though the word retained its primacy, the appearance of graphics (typically engravings) reinforced the message.

The sixteenth century Reformation in Europe centered primarily on theology and doctrinal debate. But the Reformation was also a turning point in the history of mass communications . . . Print would be used primarily to publish words. But it was soon discovered that pictures could also have a profound effect on the shaping of consciousness. One who most helped advance that awareness was Albrecht Dürer, a fellow German and contemporary of Martin Luther.¹⁴⁰

The genre of the pamphlet reached great heights during the Reformation. Gifted (and pedestrian)

¹³⁹ Christoph Burger, "Luther's Thought Took Shape in Translation of Scripture and Hymns," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel and L'ubomir Batka, (January 2014), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.006>.

¹⁴⁰ Diana Severance, "Albrecht Drer [sic], Reformation Media Man," Church History Timeline, *Christianity.com*, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1201->

artists added to their attraction with often outlandish woodcuts. Not surprisingly, the very success of the Reformer's pamphlets inspired their nemeses to create their own. The good news, for the Reformers, was that their message resonated with the people. The examples which follow illustrate how each camp vied for the attention and support of the masses.



Figure 4. Contemporary woodcuts tell the story. From left: the pious Martin Luther is anointed by the Holy Spirit, the Pope is portrayed as the Antichrist, and Roman Catholics reciprocate by revealing the Reformers to be the true Antichrists.

It mattered not how persuasive Luther's arguments were, nor how many had been persuaded by his pamphlets. It ultimately came down to this—was he willing to die for the message he proclaimed? The Roman Catholic Church had much experience in the fiery extermination of reformation movements, and they were already gathering the wood for Luther's pyre. He recognized he was signing his death warrant by refusing to recant, but Luther's bold courage is legendary.

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.¹⁴¹

As his bold declaration was famously rendered in the classic 1953 biographical film,¹⁴² “No man can command my conscience!” Luther’s appeal to his conscience was profound, and bears great significance for faithful Christians in our day. However, before examining the nature of the conscience in greater depth, it is time to compare our own day with that of the century that birthed the Reformation.

In some ways the contemporary era is unimaginably different from the sixteenth century. In others, it is very similar. Differences are innumerable and evident. The *similarity* is due to the fact that the human condition remains the same. There is some innate nobility in humanity, a glimmer of the fact we were fashioned in the image of our Creator. There is likewise immense tragedy in the sinful human nature, the legacy of the fall. In our world, there are redeemed people, grafted into the living Vine, and these seek to make the world a better place. Simultaneously, there are many, a much larger number indeed, living for themselves in selfish abandon. There are even some, a far from negligible number, who actively militate *against God* and against anything even a typical unbeliever would view as “good.” Humanity remains unchanged, and because of that, the core mission of the church, clergy and Christian military chaplains remains the same.

On the other hand, the modern world bears little resemblance to the pre-industrial, pre-

¹⁴¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 32, *Career of the Reformer II*, ed. George W. Forell & Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 112.

¹⁴² *Martin Luther*, performed by Niall MacGinnis (1953; Louis De Rochemont Associates, Vision Video, 2002), DVD.

antibiotic, and pre-plumbing world of Luther and his cohorts. Because of these changes, we must consciously ponder the most effective means of discharging our Great Commission responsibilities. Questions such as the best worship alternatives are crucial (and sadly, contentious) . . . but they are not the concern of this paper. The sole focus here is how we might best *communicate the Gospel*, leveraging available technologies to the timeless task. During the course of working on this paper, I have been refining the concept of my major project. How may we, like Martin Luther before us, most effectively use all of the means available to us to speak God's word? How may we convincingly speak faith to the lost and provide balm for the conscience of our neighbor? These are exciting questions whose answers will only be hinted at here.

Citing a parallel between the printing press and the internet is admittedly superficial. There are, in fact, enormous differences between the press and the internet. For one, since medieval printers relied upon the *sale* of their pamphlets, the message had to be *marketable* (or subsidized, as in the case of some of Luther's rivals). Today, communication through email, social networks, personal web domains, blogs, and podcasts is virtually free. This is no exaggeration; I believe that using community-based computers (accessible in public libraries) a person could access most if not all of these at absolutely no cost. And, once you are "present" on the internet, your message immediately becomes available to readers around the globe.

A second striking difference arises from the aforementioned commercial interest of the printers. Few published writings out of the goodness of their hearts, although some doubtless did because they sincerely embraced the message. As one historian notes, "printers and other contributors were as important as authors in determining what was published."¹⁴³ For centuries

¹⁴³ Amy Nelson Burnett, "Preaching and Printing in Germany on the Eve of the Thirty Years' War," *Library*

printers and publishers held the power to publish in their viselike grip. Without their blessing an author would need to personally commission (fund) publication. (This is one reason that many authors in the classical era required rich patrons.) This alternative for rejected authors is referred to as self-publication. It is typically accomplished with the assistance of a so-called “vanity press.” This avenue has traditionally been looked down upon, since “true” publication only came from persuading the gatekeepers to take a chance on the writer’s work. However, this stigma is lessening. In the past decade it has become possible to “self-publish” first class copies of one’s books with little investment. And, considering the nascent world of (digital) epublications, including generic and proprietary¹⁴⁴ ebook formats, it can literally be done *at no cost*.

Modern technology allows for swift, two-way communication. This is particularly true in the Twitter universe, but is also a fact for blogs. It is not uncommon to carry on rather substantial “debates,” in blogs.¹⁴⁵ The amazing fact is that this too—this swift, conversational debate—is not new to the modern era. An article in *The Economist* described this phenomenon during the Reformation.

Although Luther was the most prolific and popular author, there were many others on both sides of the debate. Tetzels, the indulgence-seller, was one of the first to respond to him in print, firing back with his own collection of theses. Others embraced the new pamphlet format to weigh in on the merits of Luther's arguments, both for and against, like argumentative bloggers. Sylvester Mazzolini defended the pope against Luther in his “Dialogue Against the Presumptuous Theses of Martin Luther”. He called Luther “a leper with a brain of brass and a nose of iron” and dismissed his arguments on the basis of papal infallibility. Luther, who refused to let any challenge

of the Written Word: The Handpress World, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 9:156.

¹⁴⁴ The most well known proprietary formats today are Kindle from Amazon and Nook from Barnes & Noble. This field remains quite competitive, and new formats appear with regularity.

¹⁴⁵ An example of this occurred in my own blog where I discussed a university’s use of an offensive “exercise” involving stepping on the Name of Jesus. A university professor objected to my characterization of the event, leading to an invigorating exchange of sixteen posted “comments.” The end result was a positive one, as she and I have corresponded privately about theological matters several times since that interchange. Robert Stroud, “Sinister Initiations,” Mere Inkling blog (March 3, 2013). Accessed June 26, 2015. <http://mereinkling.wordpress.com/2013/03/25/sinister-initiations>.

go unanswered, took a mere two days to produce his own pamphlet in response, giving as good as he got. “I am sorry now that I despised Tetzal,” he wrote. “Ridiculous as he was, he was more acute than you. You cite no scripture. You give no reasons.”¹⁴⁶

Despite there being a number of fundamental similarities between our two eras, there are some noteworthy differences. Chief among them is the radical shift in the general *weltanschauung* (worldview). During Luther’s life you would have been hard-pressed to gather together a handful of who deemed religion as irrelevant to them. Today, we live in an arguably post-Christian era where the most recent Gallup Poll addressing “American Religiousness” found nearly a third of the population self-identifying as “nonreligious.”¹⁴⁷

Before advancing to the modern era, it is worth noting that enchiridia as a theological genre continued to appear throughout the Reformation age.¹⁴⁸ The sole change was a major one; the press now allowed for the rapid distribution of such works, and due to the sheer number of copies increased the potential for these documents to survive. The value of a handbook to guide actions or to understand complicated processes was recognized early and applied continuously. In that very spirit, the enchiridion that comprises the heart of this research project is offered to the Church. While the genre was used by proponents and adversaries¹⁴⁹ of the Gospel alike

¹⁴⁶ “How Luther Went Viral,” *The Economist* (December 17, 2011). Accessed June 24, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/node/21541719>.

¹⁴⁷ Frank Newport, “Seven in 10 Americans are Very or Moderately Religious,” Gallup Politics, December 4, 2012. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159050/seven-americans-moderately-religious.aspx#1>. Despite the optimistic title of the article, it should be noted that the 69% who claimed to be religious would include all faiths, spiritualities, superstitions, etc. The percentage of the population belonging to the true Body of Christ remains known only to God.

¹⁴⁸ Concordia Seminary Professor Charles Arand illustrates how Luther himself appreciated this sort of tool. “In spite of our historical distance from the sixteenth century, our goals today should remain the same as they were for Luther. . . . Luther wrote the catechism in order to form Christians for, as he says, the catechism ‘contains everything what every Christian should know . . .’ We might say that he saw it as a handbook of the Christian life. To make that point, Luther added the word enchiridion (handbook) to the title page of the catechism in the 1531 edition.” Charles P. Arand, “Teaching the Faith Once Delivered,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (2014): 33.

¹⁴⁹ The preeminent representative of these opponents of the renewal of the Church was Johann Eck (1486–

during the Reformation, we will only briefly note here examples of the former.

Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586) was so essential to the second generation of the Reformation that he has received the accolade of being the *Alter Martinus*, the Second Martin. As Chemnitz was a thoughtful scholar with a heart devoted to the proclamation of the Gospel, he combined the richest streams of pastoral ministry.¹⁵⁰ While serving as Ecclesiastical Superintendent (i.e. a Protestant “bishop”), he compiled an enchiridion of his own. It was appropriately devoted to the training of clergy, and suited for the examination of potential pastors. “And since the first part of this little book contains very good and Christian instructions on how to examine the young preachers before ordination, when they want to enter their office, it would also be much better simply to . . . exhort beginning preachers to study this little book diligently . . .”¹⁵¹ One of the pertinent comments in this rich volume relates to Chemnitz’ affirmation of the written Word, which, although it is not addressed in the handbook, would logically serve as his endorsement of the proclamation of the Gospel itself, in written medium as well. He begins with a question, for which he provides the answer: “Are people to be exhorted to read, hear, and meditate on that Word, both written and oral (as it is commonly called)? By all means. For Scripture can make us wise unto salvation . . .”¹⁵² The following question asks “But it is certain that God Himself works all things. Is it, then, magic to ascribe to either the syllables

1543), who made it his life’s work to obstruct the Gospel as restored by Luther and his fellow reformers. “Eck also attacked Erasmus’ Annotationses in Novum Testamentum.” Johann Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2.

¹⁵⁰ Affirming Chemnitz’ skills as an educator and preacher, Robert Preus writes, “Much of Chemnitz’ profound theological impact was achieved through the written word . . . Chemnitz was never bombastic or polemical in a vicious or unkind way.” Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 48.

¹⁵¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, trans. Luther Poellot, J.A.O. Preus, and Georg Williams (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), Kindle.

¹⁵² Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, Kindle.

and letters of Scripture or to the frail voice of a preacher such power and efficacy?”¹⁵³ The response serves as a potent reminder to all pastors, perhaps particularly to those who commit their words to writing.

It is doubtless true that this power and efficacy does not lie in syllables as characters. Nor do we mean this, that the voice of the preacher, which passes away, is so efficacious of itself. For to illumine and convert hearts and initiate and effect repentance, faith, and new obedience are solely works of God Himself, who works these things in men by His almighty power. And without the power of the Spirit Scripture is only a dead letter.¹⁵⁴

Johann Gerhard penned *Enchiridion Consolatorium* in 1611, and it has recently been restored to the English speaking world in a welcomed new translation.¹⁵⁵ In this text Gerhard provides comfort from the Scriptures and Confessions, in direct response to forty-six fears or temptations. He was surely “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” having recently lost his son and facing the imminent death of his wife. Another pastor Joachim Mörlin served alongside Martin Chemnitz as superintendents of Braunschweig. “Also in 1554, Mörlin published the *Enchiridion*, an adaptation of Luther’s Small Catechism that grew to be one of the most popular catechisms in the German language in the second half of the sixteenth century.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, Kindle. The power, as we know, comes from God. This requires that the mortal preacher is faithfully proclaiming the Gospel. “Preachers today know how hard it is to get people accustomed to visual communication to sit still and listen. Preachers need to learn all they can about effective rhetoric and communication techniques. However, as important as it is that preachers know *how* to speak, it’s more important that they know *what* to say. That is, they need to *proclaim* the gospel, not merely *explain* it.” Senkbeil, “Engaging Our Culture Faithfully,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 4 (2014), 308.

¹⁵⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, Kindle.

¹⁵⁵ Johann Gerhard, *Handbook of Consolations: For the Fears and Trials that Oppress Us in the Struggle with Death*, trans. Carl L. Beckwith (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

¹⁵⁶ Michael J. Halvorson, *Heinrich Heshusius and Confessional Polemic in Early Lutheran Orthodoxy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 82. Catechesis permeated Luther’s literary work. “Luther used catechetical forms and content in many ways and types of writings. His engagement with the catechism provided structure, touchstone, reference point, resource, and purpose for his own theological work.” Mary Jane Haemig, “The Influence of the Genres of Exegetical Instruction, Preaching, and Catechesis on Luther,” *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L’ubomír Batka, (December 2013), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.029>.

The *Erfurt Enchiridion*, on the other hand, is noted as the second Lutheran hymnal. Its title page presents the reason for the publication, that “the humming of bees in the churches should end . . .”¹⁵⁷ Along with similar worship resources, it served to help lay the foundation of the Lutheran reputation as a singing church. “The early Lutheran *enchiridia* typically included a body of vernacular songs along with the orders of worship for Vespers, Compline, Matins and Mass.”¹⁵⁸ And, as we transition to the modern era we recognize that Luther and his companions were not alone in being disgusted by the carnality of much of the medieval Church. An *enchiridion* written by Erasmus, who remained faithful to Rome, sounds like an echo of many of Luther’s writings. In his manual for the “Christian knight,” he heaps coals on the ignorance and hypocrisy that plagued many monasteries. Like his kindred spirit, he too was a monk, and knew the common flaws of the practice during his age. Rather than quote such a passage here, let us consider words from the beginning of the handbook that are pertinent as a caution to pastors who find success in their writing ministries.

Albeit, most virtuous father, that the little book, to the which I have given this name or title *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, which many a day ago I made for myself only, and for a certain friend of mine being utterly unlearned, hath begun to mislike and displease me the less, forasmuch as I do see that it is allowed of you and other virtuous and learned men such as you be, of whom (as ye are indeed endued with godly learning, and also with learned godliness) I know nothing to be approved, but that which is both holy and also clerkly: yet it hath begun well nigh also to please and like me now, when I see it (after that it hath been so oftentimes printed) yet still to be desired and greatly called for, as if it were a new work made of late: if so be the printers do not lie to flatter me withal.

¹⁵⁷ Another comment on the title page laments the sad state of music in 1524, when “many had spent the whole day standing in the choir, shouting like the priests of Baal in unclear cries; even members of Collegiate Churches and Monasteries would often not understand what they sing or read; instead they cry like the forest-donkeys to a deaf God.” Christianae Broderson and Kai Broderson, *The Erfurt Enchiridion: A Hymn-Book of 1524* (Speyer, Germany: Kartoffeldruck-Verlag, 2008), Adobe PDF eBook.

¹⁵⁸ Mattias Lundberg, *Tonus Peregrinus: The History of a Psalm-tone and its use in Polyphonic Music*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 144.

But again there is another thing which oftentimes grieveth me in my mind, that a certain well learned friend of mine long ago said, very properly and sharply checking me, that there was more holiness seen in the little book than in the whole author and maker thereof. Indeed he spake these words in his jesting bourdyngly, but would to God he had not he had spoke so truly as he bourded [jested] bitterly.¹⁵⁹

The Context of the Modern Era

Recent decades have not treated the various Lutheran communities in the United States well. Despite decreasing numbers, precipitous for the denomination that forsook its commitment to *sola scriptura*,¹⁶⁰ we accomplish much for our Lord's kingdom when we view the world from God's perspective. Doing so requires that we not be so anchored in the past that we cannot communicate the Gospel effectively to our peers today. At the same time, we need to take care not become so enraptured with the current age that we jettison the foundation God has built. In the words of James Nestigen, "like Hermann Sasse, I believe that the Church's good health requires a balance between the past and the present. As Lutherans, we have a history that dates back to Wittenberg and long before; as preachers, teachers and evangelists, we are called to bear witness in the present. This sets up a dialectic in which fidelity to our heritage expresses itself in the willingness to engage present cultural challenges."¹⁶¹

We have already cited Luther's declaration that "Print is the latest and the greatest gift of God."¹⁶² Lutherans have maintained to believe that the printing press was a precious gift¹⁶³ which

¹⁵⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *A book called in Latin Enchiridion militis Christiani, and in English The Manual of the Christian Knight*, (London: Methuen, 1905), 1–2. The "virtuous father" to whom Erasmus inscribes this introduction is his abbot, Paul Wolzius "of the monastery the which is commonly called Hughes Court."

¹⁶⁰ I was a delegate to one of the final conventions of the American Lutheran Church where I witnessed this first-hand in their endorsement of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church, which created the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

¹⁶¹ James A. Nestigen, "Decline in American Lutheranism: A Study," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2, no. 4 (2015), 44.

¹⁶² "Whether the new art was considered a blessing or a curse; whether it was consigned to the Devil or attributed to God; the fact remains that the initial increase in output did strike contemporary observers as sufficiently remarkable to suggest supernatural intervention." Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 50. As for

allowed the Gospel to spread rapidly in the sixteenth century, and continues to play a similar role today. The value accorded publishing by confessional Lutherans is evident in the address offered by Walther at the dedication of the church's press, the esteemed Concordia Publishing House. He begins by highlighting its greatest value in providing affordable copies of God's Word. Then he recounts the Reformation legacy we emulate.

That man of God, Martin Luther, stepped forward and not only preached the ancient Gospel of free grace and the one and only salvation of all sinners in Christ once more, but he also grabbed a pen and wrote what he preached: But the printing press now bore his herald's Word as quickly as on wings in the wind, in countless pages, into every region of the world.¹⁶⁴

After cautioning that "Satan and all of his powers of darkness have the printing press as their mighty instrument too,"¹⁶⁵ he affirms that the Gospel is triumphant and therefore "the noble printing press, despite all of its abuse unto death and destruction, is no less to be acknowledged and celebrated as a precious, valuable gift of God."¹⁶⁶ Walther's final emphasis is to consecrate the press and curse any who would pervert the Gospel.

May our Concordia Publishing House be dedicated to God so long as she stands . . .
Accursed be the hands that write anything against the Word of God, which would be

who might be threatened by the advent of movable type, she continues, identifying "the guildsmen who had made a livelihood from manuscript books."

¹⁶³ This has not been a unanimous opinion in Christendom. A revivalist minister of the nineteenth century proposed a bizarre theory that was not so outlandish as to be unable to find a publisher. "When I attempt to speak to you to-day of the use the devil makes of the printing press, and the evil resultant therefrom, I realize that I am approaching by far the greatest potency in our civilization. . . . In nothing is this awful speed of attainment more manifest than in the growth and development of that art [publishing] that is of all others the preserver and guardian. Four centuries ago, and the first book was displayed; credibly reported to have been produced by witches' and magicians' secrets. Today the world is filled around and running over with its offspring . . . It is little wonder that the powers of evil should have invaded the province of the influence of the book shelf and bound up in attractive colors and insidious page the poison of wickedness and sin." "The Devil's Printing Press," Thomas E. Green, *The Man-Traps of the City: A Young Man's Warning to Young Men* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1884), 125–26.

¹⁶⁴ C.F.W. Walther, "Address at the Dedication of the First Synodical Publishing House," *Lutheran Bread Crumbs*, trans. Joel R. Baseley (Dearborn, Michigan: Mark V Publications, 2008), 271. This book is a translation of *From Our Master's Table: Sermons and Addresses*, (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1876).

¹⁶⁵ C.F.W. Walther, "Address at the Dedication of the First Synodical Publishing House," 271..

¹⁶⁶ C.F.W. Walther, "Address at the Dedication of the First Synodical Publishing House," 272.

reproduced by this printing press of God! . . . Accursed be this whole building with all that is in it, if ever it should be taken by Satan to be employed in his service. . . . may the Lord grant that all who approach be under his blessing and protection, whoever will come in or go out of our Concordia Publishing House.¹⁶⁷

The seriousness with which the LCMS regards the concern for faithfulness in the spirit of Walther's comments here, is seen in the "Doctrinal Review process" which is described on the publishing house's website as warranting "that the materials published by CPH are doctrinally sound and in accordance with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions."¹⁶⁸

The publishing industry no longer requires a battery of slaves to copy each title. Nor does it demand a scriptorium filled with squinting monks. Publishing became ever more common, and books flooded the market during the last century. Eventually it became inexpensive enough that it was simple for anyone to finance their own book in what is commonly known as vanity printing.¹⁶⁹ Innovations in digital technology have only accelerated the number of self-published titles. The simplicity of publishing an ebook is shocking. And Amazon.com makes marketing the work, which has always been the greatest challenge, immeasurably simpler.

Accordingly, books abound. They multiply at a geometric pace. Booklovers will appreciate this flood. Most pastors, in fact, consider their libraries one of their treasures.¹⁷⁰ They see the wisdom in Gerberding's classic counsel that in the pastor's office, "Let the necessary

¹⁶⁷ C.F.W. Walther, "Address at the Dedication of the First Synodical Publishing House," 272.

¹⁶⁸ "About CPH: Doctrinal Review," Concordia Publishing House. Accessed January 10, 2016. <http://www.cph.org/t-about-dr.aspx>.

¹⁶⁹ Self-publication does not always suggest an inferior product. Many accomplished authors have used it during past centuries to exercise more control over their work or to maximize their profit. These have included Carl Sandburg, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain and Zane Grey.

¹⁷⁰ Not a treasure to be hoarded, in the sense of Matt. 6, to which we referred earlier. Still, for most pastors, their library is precious. A store of knowledge accumulated over a lifetime. Scratch the surface of most pastors and you will find a bibliophile.

bookshelves be ample but plain—better put the money into books than into costly cases.”¹⁷¹

Today though, the pastor’s library is as likely to consist of digitized texts on their computers, augmented perhaps by the aptly named Logos software.¹⁷²

The Context of the Contemporary Era

Religious pluralism, with an unhealthy dose of syncretism, is the current name of the game in the Western world. Even Pastor Ingqvist encountered this fact when he left the insular Christianity of Lake Wobegon.

He was taken to the chapel [of the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport] . . . There were soft pews and an altar in front, and above it hung a large Lucite ball, backlit, and two candles, and a book that lay open. He looked around for a cross, but there was none, just the ball. Interdenominational, evidently. He stepped up front and looked at the book, expecting it to be a Bible, but it wasn’t: it was called *The Book of Wisdom*, and it was sort of a spiritual Yellow Pages, alphabetically by problem: words of wisdom when troubled by Adultery; Anger . . . Business Failure . . . Criminal Indictments; Doubt—with a whole page of meaningless platitudes for each one.¹⁷³

We have already discussed the importance of words. And words, when they are about the Word, gain a holy or sanctified sense in their own right. When they are titles of God or, more commonly, Jesus, the holiness is actual. Thus, the name Good Shepherd is consecrated, not because of the words themselves, but by virtue of the One to whom they refer. Likewise, we could say that the Gospel brings light to a sin-darkened world, but it is the Light of the World who utterly extinguishes darkness.¹⁷⁴ It is urgent that Christian clergy be equipped to successfully

¹⁷¹ G.H. Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), 162.

¹⁷² Logos Bible Software, with offices in Bellingham, Washington but actually headquartered at Logos.com, has become a huge literary enterprise. Their approach to “converting” seminarians during their studies to their system has apparently proven quite successful.

¹⁷³ Garrison Keillor, *Life among the Lutherans*, ed. Holly Harden, First Augsburg Books edition, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010), 109–10.

¹⁷⁴ “And night shall be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light . . .” (Rev. 22:5). This is an *extremely* powerful image, emphasizing the actual triumph of God. “And I saw no temple

proclaim the Gospel in this technologically transformed age.

Yet, even at its most oppressive, globalization has never been unidirectional. . . . The personal computer itself is an American cultural product. As an advanced technology, it is particularly Western. Its basic function is an innately democratizing one. But “globo-electro-Westernization,” as Carl Raschke has called it, is radically unprecedented essentially by virtue of the connectedness it facilitates, not the ideologies that have gone into hyperdrive because of it.

While I make no claim that the technology is neutral, the church needs to come to terms with the fact that the world has changed because of it. Missiology has long recognized the necessity of addressing context both critically and pragmatically. The global village is our new context, for good or ill—and probably for both.¹⁷⁵

Skilled use of current technologies—not sloppy, moldy, or stale efforts—hold the potential to catch the eye and ear of the very sophisticated members of our society, which has little interest in recycled litanies. A recent issue of *Christianity Today* discusses the predicament in which we find ourselves in a post-Christian America. In an article about reaching “nominal” believers before they lapse completely, we encounter in the piece’s subtitle a brilliant, and concise, subtitle: “Nominals don’t hate Christianity. They just find it totally irrelevant.”¹⁷⁶ And even though the “no preference” party is growing faster than any other, we cannot forget that there are myriads of other “religious” voices out there. Some religious groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, have devoted significant resources to encouraging their members to proselytize on the internet.¹⁷⁷ Some are historic traditions, many are new age. And, returning to

in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there” (Rev. 21:22–25).

¹⁷⁵ Greg McKinzie, “Glocalization: The New Context of the Missio Dei,” *Missio Dei* 2, no. 2 (2011). <http://missiodeijournal.com/article.php?issue=md-2-2&author=md-2-2-preface> accessed December 4, 2015. Paragraph 10.

¹⁷⁶ “How can churches reach nominal believers before they become ‘nones?’” *Christianity Today* 58, no. 2 (March 2014): 24–25.

¹⁷⁷ LDS leaders provide motivation, resources and guidance on the “value of sharing the gospel online” here: <https://www.lds.org/topics/internet/leaders?lang=eng>.

the title of this paper, not a few of them even promote resurrected, neopagan faiths. Many of these alternatives offer alluring websites, apps and interfaces. Due to the length of this study, a single example should suffice.

Your Ancestors Were Heathen. Many people with Northern European ancestry do not realize that the original religion of their Ancestors was not Christianity. If you go back a 1000 years or more, prior to the conversions to Christianity in Europe, our ancestors had their own native Folk Religion that was rich and meaningful in their lives. Our People honored their own Gods and Goddesses, their ancestors, and the spirits in nature. . . . Some of these heathens . . . were coerced to convert based on threats of physical violence. . . . As one delves fully into Heathenry, it becomes evident that our mainstream culture within which most of us were raised has been heavily influenced and shaped by centuries of Christianity and the *foreign* cultural values that came along with that conversion. [italics added].¹⁷⁸

Not to be left out, the atheists have their own internet evangelists. In addition to prominent people like Christopher Hitchens who make (in his case, “made”) the major purpose of their lives the breaking down of Christian faith, there are legions of anonymous missionaries tirelessly attacking the Gospel of Christ. A single example of this genre is found on a site actually named, “The Atheist Missionary.” The introduction to the site is not quite as provocative as its title. “The purpose of this website/blog is to inform atheists and engage theists in reasoned debate. Posts cover a variety of topics including skepticism, humanism, philosophy and critical analysis of religious belief systems.”¹⁷⁹

Of course, there are many thousands of Christian individuals (and institutions) offering messages of hope. A recent online discussion among Christian “internet missionaries” revealed the following insights.

¹⁷⁸ [Http://heathengods.com](http://heathengods.com). This domain obviously proselytizes for Germanic or Nordic deities, but it is representative of a much wider neopagan renaissance.

¹⁷⁹ [Http://www.atheistmissionary.com](http://www.atheistmissionary.com). From my observation, it appears the majority of anti-Christian websites are sponsored by apostates who had at least a nominal exposure to the faith.

“Woe unto me if I blog not the Gospel,” one man responded in the LinkedIn group Christian Authors, Editors, Publishers, and Bloggers to a question about reasons he blogged. . . . A national survey conducted by Pew Research lists eight motivations found in numerous other studies either all or in part: self-expression, life documenting, sharing practical knowledge or skills, influencing others, motivating people to action, connecting with others, staying in touch or updating people, and making money. . . . The top three motivations they found to start a blog were: to let off steam, to keep track of thoughts, and to formulate new ideas. After two years of blogging, the top three motivations changed: to provide alternate perspective, to inform people, and to influence opinion.¹⁸⁰

With all of these Christian voices competing in the forum, it becomes ever more important that we be faithful to the *missio Dei*, and not blur the lines. “Individualistic thinking is not a novelty,” write Harold Senkbeil of Doxology, “You can find examples of this movement in much of the preaching of pop Christianity today. The mission of the Christian takes over for the mission of Christ.”¹⁸¹

Missiologists have now embraced what was already realized years ago by clergy on the cutting edge of technology. The advent of the internet is just as momentous as the invention of moveable type for the printing press. In a recent article a Lutheran professor posed this question: “As the work of mission evolves in the twenty-first century, technological achievements like social networking have forced the Church to confront new questions: Do the ‘ends of the earth’ include cyberspace?”¹⁸² The answer to this question must be a deafening *yes!* Through cyberspace we can reach some places traditional missionaries have little success penetrating.

¹⁸⁰ Regina Burgess, “Understanding Christian Blogger Motivations,” *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 2, no. 2 (2013).

¹⁸¹ Harold Senkbeil, “Engaging Our Culture Faithfully,” 296.

¹⁸² Joel C. Oesch, “Working the Harvest in Digital Fields,” *Missio Apostolica* 21, no. 1 (2013): 31.

Sixteenth Century Anno Domini	Twenty-First Century Common Era
<p>Enemy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † The Adversary † Principalities & Powers † Our Own Sinful Nature <p>Forces Arrayed Against Us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Works Righteousness Religion † Monolithic Church Institution † Occasional Heretical Voices 	<p>Enemy (Remains the Same)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † The Adversary † Principalities & Powers † Our Own Sinful Nature <p>Forces Arrayed Against Us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Secular Worldview † Faithless “Churches” † World Religions
<p>Battlefield Terrain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Theistic Presumptions † Superstitious Worldview † Cultural Homogeneity † Frequent Illiteracy † Personal & Community Isolation † Governmental Support of Religion 	<p>Battlefield Terrain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Agnostic Presumptions † Materialistic Worldview † Cultural Diversity † Nearly Universal Literacy † Instant International Connectivity † Governmental Neutrality (increasing Hostility)
<p>Strategic Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Personal Witness & Persuasion † Defensive Bastion (Isolation) † Mission Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Physical Missionaries † Literary Texts † Musical Compositions † Visual Images 	<p>Strategic Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Personal Witness & Persuasion † Bastion Mindset (Only Delays Inevitable Loss) † Mission Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Physical Missionaries † Literary Texts † Musical Compositions † Visual Images † Radio, Television & Cinema † Internet & Developing Technologies



Figure 5. Strategy and Tactics for Soldiers of God: Contrasting the “battlefield” in Luther’s day and our own, as influenced by my ministry as a military chaplain.

As Figure 5 reveals, the repertoire of the modern missionary is much broader than that of our predecessors. While they were able to use oral, literary, musical and visual tools, we have at our fingertips potent new media. As inspiring as early artistic renderings were, be they sculptures, frescoes, mosaics or stained glass, they pale beside the overwhelming wonder of a modern film. And, beyond film and broadcast media, we are merely enjoying a foretaste of what the internet promises. Human beings are connected with one another as never before. This fact can be used for good or ill. May God grant that we, his church, would seize the opportunity to

harness these new (and all *future*) technologies, to his glory.

Paul Hiebert offers a clear explanation of the “great revolutions” in communication, beginning with “the invention of the phonetic alphabet” and continuing with moveable type. He combines “the telegraph, telephone, radio, movies, television, and now the Internet [in] a second major revolution.” Most historians (and theologians) would agree with this broad sweep. Hiebert’s particular missiological observation comes in the questions that remain in just how this revolution will work itself out.

Electronic media open the door for the information age in which knowledge and ways of knowing become dominant worldview themes. They blur the line between real and virtual and break down time and space. They give rise to short attention spans and multitasking. They lead to branching logics that seek broader patterns rather than precise linear progressions. They open the door to universal, instantaneous access to more information and people but with less depth of understanding and fewer relationships. As the electronic generation takes over the dominant society, we can expect to see major changes in cultures and worldviews and the social organization of the glocal world.¹⁸³

The Context of the Current Blogs

We began this chapter with the description of the leaders of Issachar “who had understanding of the times.” Members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod can take comfort in the fact that we have similar leaders in our own midst. In addition to the hundreds of pastors who are already blogging, there are several recent examples of the church embracing this opportunity. Most noteworthy is the high profile “Leader Blog” on the official LCMS website.¹⁸⁴ This new website boasts twenty-two exceptional “authors” and, in a denomination often

¹⁸³ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), Kindle. Theologian Walter Ong makes the point that “Writing is in a way the most drastic of the three technologies. It initiated what print and computers only continue . . .” Walter J. Ong and John Hartley, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*. Thirtieth Anniversary Edition. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 81.

¹⁸⁴ Another recent LCMS contribution to the global internet conversation is found in “Reformation 2017,” which offers information and links to many related sites. “Reformation 2017,” <http://LutheranReformation.org>,

maligned as misogynistic, it is good to find no fewer than a half dozen are women.¹⁸⁵ Many of the church's theologians also host active blog discussions. One excellent example of these is Cranach: The Blog of Veith,¹⁸⁶ written by Gene Veith. He keeps up an amazing pace of publishing quality posts on a *daily* basis. A recent post recounts a serious discussion about the merging of humanity with technology that begins, "If you're under the age of 40, there is a good chance you will achieve 'electronic immortality' during your lifetime." Veith provides a sound and engaging Christian response to this thinking.

A futurologist is predicting that we will merge with computers and evolve into a new species: Homo Optimus. We will live in the internet, be able to project our consciousness into multiple android identities, and live forever. This may happen as early as 2050. I think I am evolving into Homo Pessimus. . . . What all of this amounts to is a new technological religion.¹⁸⁷

Another Christian theologian who blogs daily is J. Budziszewski, who is a professor of government, but specializes in ethics. At my suggestion,¹⁸⁸ he recently described in successive posts "What I've Learned about Blogging."¹⁸⁹ He offered a number of valuable suggestions for potential bloggers, and ended in an especially inspiring manner.

accessed January 15, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ <http://blogs.lcms.org/category/leader-blog>. President Matthew Harrison has a personal blog on the site: <http://blogs.lcms.org/category/lutheran-witness/from-the-president>.

¹⁸⁶ *Cranach: The Blog of Veith* is hosted by a major, interdenominational online community, with the address <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/>. Veith is not the only LCMS leader with a blog at Patheos.com. We cited one of Veith's work on contemporary events earlier. Another interesting book, significant in subject matter to those who would be successful bloggers, is about the imagination. Veith says Thomas Aquinas "would spin off imagination from memory . . . This included fantasy. . . . But it is Luther who writes about imagination in connection with the Word of God." Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Matthew P. Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed: Glorifying God with a Neglected Part of Your Mind* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 38.

¹⁸⁷ Gene Veith, "We Will Soon Evolve into 'Homo Optimus'" *Cranach: The Blog of Veith*, February 2, 2016, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2016/02/we-will-soon-evolve-into-homo-optimus/>

¹⁸⁸ We exchanged six emails, between January 21 and February 3, 2016, with the briefest including links to the two posts and saying, simply, "As ordered."

¹⁸⁹ The first was: J. Budziszewski, "What I've Learned about Blogging (1)," *Underground Thomist*, January 27, 2016, <http://www.undergroundthomist.org/what-i've-learned-about-blogging-1>.

Perhaps the most important thing I've learned—and I'm still learning it—is this. When I began, I already knew that anyone who reflects on the state of the culture will have to blow some blue notes on his horn. What I didn't fully appreciate is that whether I blow them or not, more people are hearing the world in a minor key today than twenty years ago—and many are finding it very hard to bear.

So I'm learning not to end on those blue notes. There is no need anyway, because I don't believe in Fate; I believe in Providence. Long before we saw the gray banners of the neo-pagans, our foremothers and forefathers faced down the black ones of the pagans. And though I may be only a scullion, I seem to remember that when knights were slaying dragons, they always sang.¹⁹⁰

A new LCMS blog that merits attention in this study is *Meet, Write and Salutary* which is written by Mary J. Moerbe, an LCMS deaconess. The blog is a new effort, started on New Year's Day of 2016, and Moerbe's vision for the site parallels some of my own in conducting the current research. Her description of her "philosophy" displays a desire to support and encourage other confessional bloggers.

I believe that writing can be much more than self-gratification, rather it can be a true, loving, and faithful service. Writing benefits neighbors, from family and friends to faraway fellows. It hones the mind, strengthens communication, and by its nature pays homage to Him who crafts and gave language to us in the first place. Even better, as one who believes in the Word of God as a means of grace, it can be shaped and reflective of the very Word-made-Flesh, Jesus Christ.

I am a Lutheran and a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I experience theology as a daily matter, and I hope this website can become a forum for like-minded people, who incorporate Christ as the Lutheran Confessors profess Him according to God's holy Word.¹⁹¹

One of the most visionary LCMS pastors, Greg Seltz, the speaker of The Lutheran Hour, offers a challenge to us to embrace the changes that have enveloped us, rather than retreat from them. The more clergy and lay members of the church who accept his invitation, the brighter the future not only for the Synod, but for the Kingdom of God.

¹⁹⁰ J. Budziszewski, "What I've Learned about Blogging (2)," *Underground Thomist*, January 28, 2016, <http://www.undergroundthomist.org/what-i've-learned-about-blogging-2>.

¹⁹¹ Mary J. Moerbe, "Blog Philosophy," accessed February 2, 2016, <http://www.maryjmoerbe.com/blog->

Something has changed and that's good. It is said that the context of twenty-first-century ministry is unlike any other ministry before it. Never has there been a time of such mass, immediate communication of information, never has there been a time of such mobility, and never has there been a time when cultures could so continuously engage each other daily as neighbors. Foreshadowing the vision of Revelation 7, we are confronted by the joyful reality of "every tribe and nation" in the communities in which we live. Such an opportunity is exciting to a church which has been invited by its Lord to "make disciples of every nation" as ambassadors of his grace. . . .

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, as a confessing church, feels this clash specifically as it proclaims the authority of the Bible and the particularity of the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ "alone" for all people, all nations.

The church, especially today, must not retreat into its particular, cultural comfort zones. Rather, in the midst of the confusions of modern culture, amidst the cacophony of competing voices of right and wrong, fulfillment and purpose, God's people are called in Christ to live purposeful lives of grace in grace for the sake of one's neighbor. Amid such real tensions the church of Jesus Christ is challenged to be the body of Christ for others, to build bridges, to more boldly speak Christ's message beyond the safety of its confessional walls.¹⁹²

So we see that since God restored the unblemished Gospel to the church during the Reformation, Lutherans have been at the forefront of proclaiming the good news. Times change, and it is not uncommon for leaders to become mired in approaches that have been successful in the past. Where, though, would we be today if Luther had been reluctant to embrace technological innovations? Looking back upon such a faithful history of serving God, it would be a shame for confessional Lutherans to allow history to rush past them today. This MAP is offered as a call to the church to avoid that tragedy. If it serves to alert even a few preoccupied pastors to the opportunity for expanded ministry afforded by the internet, it will have been worth the effort.

philosophy/. Coincidentally, Moerbe is the daughter of Gene Veith.

¹⁹² Gregory P. Seltz, "Empowering Confident Confessor-Servant Evangelists Twenty-First-Century Multicultural Mission Work," *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 3 (2014), 205–06.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord: that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the Lord looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die, that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise . . . (Ps. 102:18–21).

Blogging has come of age. Not only has the LCMS established multiple official blogs of its own, it has recognized that some material appearing on other blogs is actually useful and reliable. Rather than dismiss the internet, and blogs in particular, it was encouraging to me as a pastor to read the following. It appeared in the most recent report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, which offers a convincing response to scientism and the godless worldview it is established upon. “More generally, a good strategy when engaging any material using science to advocate for non-Christian conclusions is to consult the best evaluation of that work (for example, in book reviews, articles, or on blogs) from a qualified Christian thinker.”¹⁹³

We have already noted that there has never been any published research related to pastoral blogging. That does not mean that no research has been conducted on religious themes, though most of it is quite recent. Most data related to blogging comes, of course from secular sources, with various attitudes towards the value of faith. However, as I discuss the literature related to

¹⁹³ *In Christ All Things Hold Together*, 137. This work is filled with wisdom applicable to the ministry of writing online. For example, it affirms cultural sensitivity while rejecting the error that our culture can set the agenda for the Church. “While cultural sensitivity and understanding are valuable for Christian evangelists and apologists, the basic problem for the Christ of Culture view is that even the best of culture is still infected with human sin. To follow culture when it conflicts with loyalty to Christ is selling out the faith to seek honor among men” (29).

my project, I follow in the footsteps of one of Concordia Seminary's former professors. "While this [MAP] incorporates observational insights from the social sciences, it does so as a handmaiden of faith."¹⁹⁴ I am of the school that believes the church has nothing to fear from facts, and that valid data from all sources can broaden the knowledge base of Christians. In our present context, that of determining how to effectively blog as a part of one's pastoral ministry, this means that we should look not only to the insights offered by secularists, but also to the experiences of adherents of other religious traditions who have ventured into these uncharted waters before us.

The information which follows is grouped into five sections. First, we will consider information that is general in scope, but still applicable to the ministry of a pastoral blogger. Second comes a review of literature addressing matters of human nature and spirituality from a secular or interfaith viewpoint. Third, we will consider research which has considered use of the internet and blogging by professing Christians. Fourth, we will consider the interplay between competing messages in what I refer to as the Digital Areopagus. The fifth and final section will focus more sharply on the concerns of the Christian blogger.

The Digital Terrain: The Nature of the World of the Web

Technological dynamism has become the norm as the digital world appears to change more rapidly each day. Lutheran professor Dale Sullivan writes, "we are betrothed to technology and . . . simply take for granted that our future is in the machine."¹⁹⁵ The merging of technology with our personhood can be illustrated by the omnipresent cell phone. Some people are so attached to

¹⁹⁴ Anthony A. Cook, "Media as a Source of Information and Identity," *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 146.

¹⁹⁵ Dale L. Sullivan, "A Call for Reaffirming a Humanist Understanding of Technology," *Programmatic*

theirs that losing access causes them genuine emotional trauma.

One Reformed theologian from New Zealand points out the fact that the internet is merely one step in normal technological advancements that shape how Christians fulfill their mission in the world. “The Internet is neither the beginning nor the end of social change and intellectual development.”¹⁹⁶ He continues, saying, “The initial impact of new technology is to change the means by which existing goals are accomplished, but the longer-term impact has often been to change the goals themselves.”¹⁹⁷ It is vital that Christian theologians are conscious of, and actively involved in, the ways this evolution occurs. Just as we should recognize that the internet is not the culmination of intellectual development. It is merely one step in that journey.

We have identified the change initiated by the printing press. However, as one writer observes, that transformation actually took decades. “By contrast,” he says, “we are immediately experiencing a qualitative difference in our lives.”¹⁹⁸ One Episcopal theologian describes how the internet has drawn passive observers into the reshaping of our very culture. “Whereas once people were primarily consumers of mass-media culture, increasingly they are collaborative coproducers.”¹⁹⁹ These are not insignificant observations. Recent technological advance have

Perspectives 5, no. 1 (2013), 154.

¹⁹⁶ John Roxborough, “The Information Superhighway as a Missiological Tool of the Trade,” *Missiology: An International Review* 27, no. 1 (1999), 121.

¹⁹⁷ John Roxborough, “The Information Superhighway as a Missiological Tool of the Trade,” 121. Roxborough notes that “The challenge of information technology for the missiological community is to be a critic of its social and religious effects and at the same time be stewards of the power it provides and contributors to the futures it creates.” John Roxborough, “The Information Superhighway as a Missiological Tool of the Trade,” 117. This MAP offers a glimpse into the use of the internet for mission. As such, it appropriately criticizes many elements of the world wide web, while still challenging pastors to be the “stewards of the power it provides” that Roxborough envisions.

¹⁹⁸ Michael Harris, *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2014), Kindle. He writes, “Our fate is instantly and comprehensively reimagined by online technology.”

¹⁹⁹ Dwight Zscheile, “Social Networking and Church Systems,” *Word & World* 30, no. 3 (2010), 247.

dramatically changed our lives, and that uninterrupted process appears to be happening at an increasingly rapid pace. If these scholars are correct, it is crucial that more theologically literate minds, guided by a Gospel impulse, participate in the culture-shaping discourse.

In some ways, blogs are not so radical as they may seem to those viewing the world with analog eyes. In the words of two German researchers, the primary essence of blogs is nothing new. They simply repackage the content for our digital age. Thus, “weblogs build on a generic pool of textual structures and arrangements from classic print journals and log books but also enhance them.”²⁰⁰ This fact is valuable to communicate to clergy who are wary of even considering whether to blog because it seems so alien. In truth, there is far, far more that resembles that with which they are already familiar, than differs from it.

Memes, cultural images and/or phrases that are replicated widely throughout the web, are a daily feature of life on the internet. Some memes possess religious messages, and this subject has received some study as well. Memes are so popular that several online generators allow people to add their own twists to common themes. One graduate student at Texas A&M writes, “Religious-oriented internet memes offer an interesting form for examination of how religious understanding is produced, consumed and circulated online.”²⁰¹ The study makes note of the fact that not all memes are positive, and that some “present God as a harsh or unethical entity to be questioned or viewed with suspicion.”²⁰² This, of course, reinforces the need for more Christian alternatives reflecting an accurate picture of the God willing to offer up his only begotten Son to die that we might have life.

²⁰⁰ Christian R. Hoffmann and Wolfram Bublitz, *Narrative Revisited: Telling a Story in the Age of New Media* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins, 2010), 11.

²⁰¹ Wendi Bellar et al, “Reading Religion in Internet Memes,” *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 2, no. 2 (2013), 6–7. Accessed from <http://jrmdc.com>.

Like all technologies and tools, the internet can be harnessed for good works or ill. There are intentionally evil applications, such as pornography which has found a deep, dark, dank, pit in the internet. There are also uses that while not overtly “evil,” serve to lead people farther away from the truth. Among these I would include the rampant materialism, which instills an unquenchable appetite in human beings to have “more.” Another example would be the plethora of “entertainment” options that divert the attention of men and women from what is of eternal significance. They serve the identical purpose as the circuses (*panem et circenses*) enshrined in history and literature by the Roman poet Juvenal. “Computers [and the internet] are made by people who by God have been given creative abilities. If the users of computers have bad or evil intentions, the computer will assist them in such activities.”²⁰³

Theologian Joel Okamoto identifies the problem created when technology displaces God as the object of humanity’s hope. “Science and technology are sources of hope because they already have proven so useful and given us so much.”²⁰⁴ It is this prior utility that makes us vulnerable to its lure. Pastors should be immune to transferring their hope from Christ to science. They should also be far less likely to succumb to the sirens of the internet and technology than the average person, but it is wise to be forewarned and vigilant.

²⁰² Wendi Bellar et al, “Reading Religion in Internet Memes,” 14.

²⁰³ Viggo Sjøgaard, *Media in Church and Mission* (Pasadena: William Carey Library Publishers, 1993), 208–09. A Roman Catholic moral theologian puts it this way: “Some versions of ‘the internet as tool’ recognize that tools are not merely neutral but, in fact, shape us and our ability to respond to the world well. So, some raise the question, ‘Is the internet a force for good or evil?’” Jana Marguerite Bennett, *Aquinas on the Web: Doing Theology in an Internet Age* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 16. Bennet argues that “Theologians who do not participate in any form of [digital discourse are] missing out on an important theological conversation.” Jana Marguerite Bennett, *Aquinas on the Web: Doing Theology in an Internet Age*, 29.

²⁰⁴ Joel P. Okamoto, “Science, Technology, and the American Mind, *The American Mind Meets the Mind of Christ*, ed. Robert Kolb (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2010), 97. Okamoto develops the theme that precisely because we place our trust in technology and science, it constitutes a potential threat to our very humanity, writing, “hopes and fears of this kind are most intense when it comes to developments in science and technology involving human beings” (100).

The diversity of the voices is enabled by the internet in a way not imagined since the biblical promises that all nations might experience harmony in the light of the Messiah. “What is actually happening in postmodern globalization is globo-electro-localization. Rather than suffering homogenization, everyone is showing up at the village council . . . Our fate is instantly and comprehensively reimagined by online technology.”²⁰⁵ This might suggest to the blogging pastor that if he wishes to reach the broadest possible audience, he should compose his messages accordingly. That does not mean, of course, that all readers are receptive to identical presentations. Clergy are well acquainted with shrinking attention spans, especially as it pertains to preaching. One concern voiced by some pastors is the common emphasis on brevity in blogging. This was one of the most useful critiques received during the current research—that the Handbook assumed a short format approach as preferable—and this shortcoming was addressed in the revision of the resource. In the words of the participant, “The advice that spoke about keeping the blog simple was not exactly helpful. . . . This is a long form approach to media that isn’t limited to the short posts of social media.”²⁰⁶

One Lutheran theologian draws an ominous link between modern technological depersonalization and an ancient threat to the Gospel. “As human communication substitutes face-to-face experiences with tweets, texts, and blogs, the Church may be witnessing the

²⁰⁵ Greg McKinzie, “Glocalization,” paragraph 17.

²⁰⁶ As one writer notes, this impulse to prize brevity above all else, can be especially detrimental when communicating complex ideas. “Velocity, the remnant of what was once called pacing, has taken precedence over all other features of dramatic structure. The lifetime it takes to master a theologically or religiously based poetic gave way to the dozen hours it takes to read a novel . . . gave way to the two-hour feature film . . . gave way to the sixty or thirty minute broadcast episode . . . gave way to the three-minute video . . . gives way to the several seconds it takes to absorb an image, tire of it, and hit the remote control button for another.” David Marc, *Bonfire of the Humanities: Television, Subliteracy, and Long-Term Memory Loss* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 130.

reemergence of an ancient heresy.”²⁰⁷ While this may sound like an impetuous connection at first glance, Oesch offers a sound argument. Meanwhile, some religious bodies rush headlong into the internet. One leader in the Mars Hill church movement writes, “I find it troubling that so many communities of faith are in hot pursuit of these technologies. The Internet is seen as the Holy Grail of ‘building community.’ However, churches will find the unintended consequences of this medium coming back to bite them.”²⁰⁸ One Wesleyan scholar warns of a rather sinister means of addressing this depersonalization which comes in the notion of devising an enhanced sense of *connection* over the internet. “Amidst a widespread concern that we are in danger of being ‘disembodied’ by our technologies, it is claimed that the value of face-to-face contact can be reproduced in the experience of ‘telepresence.’”²⁰⁹

The Digital Cosmos: Spirituality on the Web

One way our inter-connectedness has dramatically transformed everyday life is the loss of solitude. While unrecognized by many (especially digital natives), “as we embrace technology’s gifts we usually fail to consider what they ask from us in return—the subtle, hardly noticeable payments we make in exchange.”²¹⁰ The journalist who made this observation expresses concern

²⁰⁷ Joel C. Oesch, “Working the Harvest in Digital Fields,” 34. He is referring to the dualism of Gnosticism. “OSNs [online social networks] similarly reinforce the notion that bodies are superfluous to community. . . . but OSNs encourage users to upload a substitutionary image, or avatar, that best represents their persona to the digital universe. There is no promise or expectation that the image will be an accurate representation of one’s own physical body When these technologies supersede God’s word as the fundamental defining factor in one’s identity, individuals begin to separate their selves from their bodies to their own detriment.” Joel C. Oesch, “Working the Harvest in Digital Fields,” 34.

²⁰⁸ Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 115. He adds, “The Internet is a lot of things, but it is emphatically *not* a neutral aid. Digital social networking inoculates people against the desire to be *physically present* with others in real social networks—networks like a church or a meal at someone’s home. Being together becomes nice but nonessential.”

²⁰⁹ Philip R. Meadows, “Mission and Discipleship in a Digital Culture,” *Mission Studies* 29 (2012): 168.

²¹⁰ Michael Harris, *The End of Absence*, 48.

for future generations. “I fear we are the last of the daydreamers. I fear our children will lose absence, and never comprehend its quiet, immeasurable value.”²¹¹ This concern should strongly resonate with Christians who are acquainted with God’s call to simply “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). Those who have always considered the library a quiet refuge will recognize the truth of this assessment by an American writer: “Until recently, the public library was an oasis of bookish tranquility . . . Internet access is rapidly becoming its most popular service.”²¹²

In a 2011 text, Milad Doueïhi of Paris-Sorbonne University provides sobering observations about the power and influence exerted by the internet. “We can compare the rise of digital culture and its universalist tendency to religion. In fact, I would argue that currently, digital culture is the only rival to religion as a universal presence.”²¹³ Doueïhi further develops this analogy with the claim that “. . . digital culture, no matter how vaguely we define it, is laying a claim for the status of an equivalent of a world religion with its prophets and priesthood.”²¹⁴ It has been effectively argued that scientism constitutes a religion of its own. This explains why the LCMS report mentioned earlier begin with a lengthy introduction entitled “The Challenge of Scientism.”

One professor has researched the “stunning array of websites [that] have emerged,” and effectively describes how they span the spectrum from so-called established faiths, to “pan-religious or meta-institutional, to those focused on new, ‘fringe,’ or emerging religious or

²¹¹ Michael Harris, *The End of Absence*, 48.

²¹² Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 97.

²¹³ Milad Doueïhi, *Digital Cultures* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2011), 2–3.

²¹⁴ Milad Doueïhi, *Digital Cultures*, 2–3.

spiritual movements.”²¹⁵ What makes his book worthwhile is his recognition that even “sites that are self-consciously ‘anti-’ or ‘ir-religious”²¹⁶ are active competitors for readers’ spiritual education. Pastoral bloggers will be most successful if they recognize the immense range of options available in the digital forum. Some of their readers will be kindred spirits, others curious travelers, and still others, active adversaries of the Gospel.

There is also the consideration of the value of blogging academics to their institutions. Their primary utility comes in fostering swift dissemination of information, and immediate opportunity for feedback, but “blogs also increase the bloggers’ (or the institution’s) visibility. Previous research has revealed that most academic blogs have a promotional purpose.”²¹⁷ In the same way, a pastor’s blog, well done, likely raises the regard of readers towards his congregation and denomination. That does not mean that professors accept the demands of blogging for selfless reasons; they typically benefit professionally as well. Still, while research acknowledges self-promotion as a common motivator, Luzón’s study of the academic blogosphere also identified a more altruistic impulse at work.²¹⁸ It is precisely this sort of sincere desire to serve others and society that I believe motivates many Christian pastors and theologians to blog. Few pastoral bloggers hold any delusions about gaining fame from their blogging, or having their

²¹⁵ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*. Media, Religion and Culture. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 48.

²¹⁶ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, 48.

²¹⁷ María José Luzón, “Understanding the Academic Blogosphere: A Look into the Generic Tangle,” *Internet Issues: Blogging, the Digital Divide and Digital Libraries*, ed. Cassie M. Evans (Hauppauge, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 57.

²¹⁸ María José Luzón, “Understanding the Academic Blogosphere,” 57. “There is another motivation that has been devoted little attention in the literature on academic blogging, but helps to account for many entries in this kind of blogs: the ethical and social motivation.” A prime example is how the so-called *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* papyrus fragment was able to be determined to be a forgery before it could continue to deceive and trouble vulnerable Christians. As one Lutheran theologian reports, “Within hours of the release of the photograph of the fragment, several scholars began blogging and conferring about the text.” Charles A. Gieschen, “Research Notes: The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: A Modern Forgery?” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2012), 336.

salary increased because they doubled their number of posts.

In an essay entitled “Technology and Community,” Rev. Matthew Kobs alleges that because we are immersed in a technologically dynamic world, “we [presumably all people, including pastors] accept it and adapt to it without a second thought.”²¹⁹ I find this comment suspect, since many of the clergy I know seem more reluctant to embrace new technologies than to welcome them. In fact, some pastors I know in their fifties (no small number, in our aging Synod), could arguably be described as luddites, in terms of their receptivity to new technology. I’m mindful, of course, that many clergy who grew up knowing nothing but computers and keyboards do enjoy sampling new technologies, but I doubt they are yet in the majority. Eventually the digital natives will outnumber the immigrants—but that day has not yet arrived.

It is normal when discussing the internet to use the plural “media,” since digital communication encompasses all of the forms adapted to it, including textual, graphic, and auditory. However, for our purposes here, we will focus primarily on text. While almost all blogs incorporate graphic images, and many include audio and video, the indispensable element that defines a blog is text. It is, ultimately, all about the words. While a picture may be “worth a thousand words,” images cannot displace text *completely*, or what remains is no longer rightly deemed a blog.²²⁰ The focus on words, in the context of blogging, is particularly apropos for Christians. As we have already discussed, no one possesses a higher view of the Word. Likewise, Christians commonly believe that words can be devoted to no more noble a purpose than

²¹⁹ Matthew Kobs, “Technology and Community,” *Inviting Community*, ed. Robert Kolb and Theodore Hopkins, (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2013), 180.

²²⁰ There are other types of platforms devoted to image or sound collections. The most prominent at the present time is Pinterest, which allows members to archive images (“pins”) and other types of media to a collection which is then accessible to others. Since most images are simply grabbed while users are surfing the web, copyright transgressions are an ongoing concern.

celebrating the work of their Savior. Thus it comes as no surprise that Christians—people of all proselytizing faiths, for that matter—have staked out claims to the ethereal internet real estate.²²¹

In *Confessions of an Insignificant Pastor*, the author discusses the possibility that “pastors will become extinct as we know [them] today.”²²² He reflects the frustration of some older pastors who agree with his sentiment that ministering in this alien environment is daunting. He repeats questions that sound preposterous to traditionalists, but are on the lips of many digital natives. He follows it with a mocking lament of those who are determined that the Church cannot sell its birthright for a meal that doesn’t satisfy. “Can’t we just do church in chat rooms, instant messaging, blogs, email, MySpace pages, Facebook pages, and podcasts?”²²³ This pastor is not alone in his concerns about the undermining of commitment to religious community. One professor of Christian Social Ethics sees the internet as accelerating the “perception that religion is what people do in their solitude.”²²⁴ Some clergy may worry about contributing to this disconnection from fellowship through their blogging, so in the Handbook I offer specific advice

²²¹ This analogy is intentionally ironic, since the terrain of the web is constantly expanding. There is a sense, though, in which it is quite true. On the web, and certainly in the blogosphere, there are domains that establish quite significant presences. While these are not physical per se, considerations such as “traffic,” readership, and the like correlate to a website’s influence and viability. It could be compared to a pair of pastors publishing similar treatments of some theological concern. One does it well, “rightly handling the word of truth.” The other approaches the topic in a less conscientious manner. The two pastors have different “platforms,” one leading a megachurch with televised services, and the other serving a small rural congregation. The success of the respective books will rarely be determined by the quality of the material itself. This same scenario holds true with blogging. It is not uncommon for bloggers to find building their audience to be a greater challenge than the act of writing itself.

²²² Mark Elliott, *Confessions of an Insignificant Pastor* (Lima, Ohio: FaithWalk Publishing, 2009), 187.

²²³ Mark Elliott, *Confessions of an Insignificant Pastor*, 187. Some clergy would argue that it is genuinely possible for the Church itself to exist in a digital state. One case is a British Methodist experiment “intended to last just three months,” that has persevered over a decade, and provided actual ministry to its members. It began on a virtual world platform, and has gone through several iterations, as technological shifts have led its members to more comfortable contexts. “The church relaunched as ‘St Pixels’ in 2006, using a new website that allowed members to write their own blogs, discuss issues in the forums, and pray or chat in the chatroom.” Tim Hutchings, “Real Virtual Community,” *Word & World* 35, no. 2 (2015), 159.

²²⁴ Brent Waters, “Is Technology the New Religion?” *Word & World* 35, no. 2 (2015), 145. Waters adds that “This tendency is reflected in the burgeoning number of books, websites, and blogs devoted to giving guidance on spiritual self-help. Again, this stress upon spiritual solitude hides or occludes an underlying interdependence.”

about reminding readers that such physical bonds are not optional.

The Digital Dialogue: Online Theological Conversations

One sociologist of religion from Stockholm University describes it this way: “Websites and blogs can be connected by networks of links, but exist primarily to provide a platform for their owner’s voice.”²²⁵ Thus, in pastoral blogging the blog becomes the platform for whatever message or ministry purpose its creator determines. Hutchings addresses one of the most significant decisions that pastoral bloggers need to make—how to facilitate “conversation,” while guarding against inappropriate contributions. He cautions that those who desire to use blogging as an element of their online ministry must give serious consideration to the tolerable boundaries for such response and conversation. This is something too important to be decided on the spur of the moment. Rather than be intimidated by the prospect of spirited debate, many clergy welcome the opportunity for vigorous dialog. Boundaries do remain important, though. And those pastors who are afraid of angry responses to their posts should remember that *they* remain in control of all that appears on their website.²²⁶

Hutchings makes another observation about direct implications for the church that relate to our earlier discussion about mission and ecclesiology. “As society becomes increasingly

²²⁵ Timothy Hutchings, “The Internet and the Church: An Introduction,” 15. This contrasts with “Network-focused media, including forums, chatrooms, virtual worlds, social network sites and email lists, [that] exist to support engagement between participants.”

²²⁶ Some participants in the research for this MAP indicated experiencing trepidation about reactions to what they might write. One pastor suggested some clergy are reluctant to blog because they would “make themselves open to criticism by the more extreme, conservative sides of our brotherhood” (I). Another described “pandemonium” in the LCMS blogging environment, saying, “several times a year there is usually a pretty good internet flap over a blog post here or there . . . every once in a while they will touch a nerve. . . . So, knowing the sensationalism that occasionally comes out . . . is frankly why I have never blogged before now” (VII). One shared his intention to preclude negative responses by focusing on uncontentious subjects. “Some guys in the LCMS love to push the envelope and . . . write about controversial topics and I don’t think for LCMS pastors that’s necessarily wise” (IX).

networked, we can expect to see Christian churchgoers continue to look to . . . blogs and online communities as well as local church congregations to find their ideas and inspiration.”²²⁷ The end result may well be a wider group of people with a much shallower connection to the Body of Christ. This possibility will be especially alarming to sacramental clergy, and it is a temptation pastoral bloggers can warn their readers against. Recognizing that this tendency describes a natural current, or more accurately perhaps, a riptide, will hopefully allow us to be proactive in weakening it.

One problem is that we are deluged with information, leading a pair of writers to quip “it must have been nice at the dawn of time because there was a scarcity of information.”²²⁸ The same authors identify damage to the social fabric with obvious consequences for the church, “as Internet use grows, Americans report spending less time with friends, family, and other people.”²²⁹ On the other side, Roman Catholic theologian Walter Ong offered a hopeful thought. He suggests that although we may see consequences such as the lessening of face-to-face socialization, it does not necessarily require that there be a net loss. “Technologies are artificial, but—paradox again—artificiality is natural to human beings. Technology, properly interiorized, does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it.”²³⁰ The church needs to explore ways of enabling this hope to be realized. If we can use this latest “great gift of God” as Luther would say, we must ask ourselves how we can best share all the hope, encouragement and grace embodied in the Gospel using this tool. For some who prayerfully ask, the answer will come, in

²²⁷ Timothy Hutchings, “The Internet and the Church,” 18.

²²⁸ Ed Shane and Michael C. Keith, *Disconnected America: The Future of Mass Media in a Narcissistic Society* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5–6.

²²⁹ Ed Shane and Michael C. Keith, *Disconnected America*, 18.

²³⁰ Walter J. Ong and John Hartley, *Orality and Literacy*, 82.

part, through the ministry of pastoral blogging.

Many professionals have recognized the value of blogs in promoting professional interaction. For example, within the archaeological discipline, which possesses obvious significance for religious studies, “Many established academics maintain a professional blog as a means to communicate new ideas and engage a wider audience with their research.”²³¹ Here, one biblical studies professor cites the example of another discipline as a good model for his own peers to follow in utilizing the internet. “The practitioners of biblical studies can certainly learn from the work Assyriologists have done to digitize their profession over the last decade.”²³² Meanwhile blogs already play an important role for biblical studies. A growing number of exegetes are setting up blogs of their own, and contributing to the online platforms of their peers, not to mention their own institutional websites. Clearly defining the focus of a blog is important for increasing its visibility to others. This ability to narrowly target one’s audience, to maximize the benefit to readers of one’s blog was clearly a major influence in the decision of one of the pastors in the current study to participate.

I do see that the online writing ministry is important for the purpose for which I undertook it, which was to try to be a blessing and benefit to other brothers and congregations that are in multiple parish partnerships, for the purpose of lifting them up, encouraging them, and helping them to study issues of the faith that apply to this setting. . . . [Since beginning] I’ve met a few brothers in the multiple parish setting and they have agreed and affirmed the need for this kind of encouragement (XIII).

Much of the literature directed towards potential bloggers emphasizes the direct benefit they will receive. “Writing a blog is instant self-publication, which is its own special kind of

²³¹ Doug Rocks-Macqueen and Chris Webster, *Blogging Archaeology* (Sparks, NV: DIGTECH Publications, 2014), 11. In sixteen essays, the editor supports his argument “that blogging represents the perfect medium” for effectively disseminating information about archaeology that was formerly accessible primarily to academics (13).

²³² Russell Hobson, “Does Biblical Studies Deserve to be an Open Source Discipline?” *Digital Humanities in Biblical, Early Jewish and Early Christian Studies*, ed. David Hamidovic et al (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2013), 265–66.

creativity,” touts one such publication.²³³ The author then proceeds to praise perhaps the greatest strength, and certainly one of the worst weaknesses, of blogging. “If people have access to a computer and the Internet, they can promulgate their ideas. They don’t need credentials or money. There are no gatekeepers on the Internet.”²³⁴ The lack of gatekeepers is the precise reason for so much σκύβαλα²³⁵ finding its way online. On the other hand, any censors appointed by temporal authorities would likely strive to prevent the Gospel from being freely proclaimed over the world wide web, so no sensible pastor would argue for such an arrangement (i.e. with governmental censorship). As a writer, I have found the best “gatekeepers” to be reviewers who critically read my work prior to its submission to a traditional publication, or its uploading to a digital context. Naturally, theological subjects are best critiqued by those with skill in both theology *and* composition.

One unintended consequence of blogging may be to humanize the bloggers, whose social “estate” may have formerly made them appear elite. One university professor writes, “Blogs are counter-heroic in that they expose the life of the academic as banal.”²³⁶ The same can be said for pastors who blog. They take their place in the democratic digital forum, sans collar and stole. This vulnerability can feel threatening to some, but it makes the message accessible to some who would never knock on the door of a pastor’s study.

Some people believe because the internet allows free access (except in nations where that is prevented), that by its nature it is inclined to be a pro-democracy or pro-humanity force. This is

²³³ Mary Pipher, *Writing to Change the World* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 216.

²³⁴ Mary Pipher, *Writing to Change the World*, 216–17.

²³⁵ Phil. 3:8. This is *not* the “polite” Greek word for dung that the apostle chose to use here.

²³⁶ Melissa Gregg, “Feeling Ordinary: Blogging as Conversational Scholarship,” *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006), 158.

not necessarily true. “The idea that the Internet favors the oppressed rather than the oppressor is marred by what I call cyber-utopianism: a naïve belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication.”²³⁷ Likewise, the pastoral blogger is wise to recognize the internet as a neutral instrument. It is neither the guarantor of reaching all tribes and nations,²³⁸ nor the conduit through which every cultural corrosive known to man or demon gains direct access to all of our homes. This mixture of good and ill can serve as an impetus to pastors who wish to alter that balance.

Two theologians, one an editor at InterVarsity Press, discussed the proper role of digital publishing, given that “the arrival of the Internet and electronic media presents a unique challenge and opportunity for the academy. The world of academia is rightly and necessarily centered on the written word, and until very recently, this was defined by the printing press.”²³⁹ They believe Christian theologians and pastors make an invaluable contribution to the blogosphere. In highlighting the promising potential of theological blogging, they write: “More specifically, blogs ought to function as a kind of ‘liminal space’ for theological research and conversation. The word “liminal” comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning ‘threshold,’ ‘entrance,’ and ‘border.’”²⁴⁰ In this sense, pastoral blogging can serve as an introduction to Christianity, and offer a welcome to those who are curious about who Jesus of Nazareth is.

The evolution of blogging is ongoing. It is not yet what it will be. One author hinted at how writing about the subject is nearly obsolete by the time it is published. “Blogging is changing so

²³⁷ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: PublicAffairs Books, 2012), xiii.

²³⁸ As John witnessed, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages . . . crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev. 7:8–9).

²³⁹ David Congdon and Travis McMaken, “Theo-Blogging and the Future of Academic Theology: Reflections from the Trenches,” *Princeton Theological Review* 17, no. 2 (210), 91.

²⁴⁰ David Congdon and Travis McMaken, “Theo-Blogging and the Future of Academic Theology,” 92.

fast that trying to document it in a book is like using a stylus and clay tablets to describe a horserace in progress.”²⁴¹ No expert truly has all of the answers. One recent text correctly noted that “It will be decades before we have a clear view of what the blogs are, exactly, and how they have affected American—and world—society.”²⁴²

The Digital Areopagus: Competing Voices in the Religious Dialogue

Every imaginable (and imaginary) religion is represented on the internet. Advocates of ancient traditions and faiths *du jour* all compete with the truth of the Gospel. As a part of that theological morass, it is also home to self-identified agnostic and atheist voices. They assuredly profess a faith system of their own, whether it is based upon humanism, scientism or some personal whim. Many of these websites are blatantly foolish, and do not impede the Gospel, except insofar as they waste peoples’ time. Some cultic spokespersons, however, are quite persuasive and gain large audiences.²⁴³

One example of the impact of blogging in a non-Christian environment comes from Iran. Iran could well provide fertile soil for the gospel, as disseminated through blogging. In 2006 it was reported that, “In September 2001, a young Iranian journalist . . . established one of the very first weblogs in his native Persian.”²⁴⁴ Coincidentally, the Bahá’í religion which began in Persia,

²⁴¹ Suzanne Stefanac, *Dispatches from Blogistan: A Travel Guide for the Modern Blogger* (Berkeley, California: New Riders, 2007), Kindle.

²⁴² Aaron Barlow, *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 159.

²⁴³ Only God knows how many people have been led astray into new age labyrinths by voices like Oprah’s. One of her current spiritual offerings is the “Oprah & Deepak 21-Day Meditation Experience.” You can also enjoy the companion recording “Become What You Believe,” for a mere \$49.99. Accessed March 2, 2016. <https://chopracentermeditation.com/?acode=oprah>.

²⁴⁴ Bill Berkeley, “Bloggers vs. Mullahs: How the Internet Roils Iran,” *World Policy Journal* 23, no. 1 (2006), 72. In his review of *We Are Iran: The Persian Blogs* by Nasrin Alavi, Berkeley quotes the author as writing: “Iranians have no illusions to shatter. They are all too aware of the difference between the Paradise they were promised and the harsh reality of living under the rule of the Islamic fundamentalists.” The fact that many spiritually hungry people being crushed by their Mullahs are actively conversing with others on the internet should encourage

is devoted to providing their members with encouragement, and guidelines, for their involvement with the internet. “The Bahá’í Internet Agency (BIA) seeks to advise and direct members of the Bahá’í faith on how to properly use the Internet.”²⁴⁵

Not all of the alternative voices in the blogosphere represent familiar religious alternatives. Some are rooted in one of the many “isms” that divide humanity. For example, a recent volume on feminism and its “expanding borders” fostered by technology includes contributions from seven writers.²⁴⁶ They approach the subject from a number of diverse angles, including Roman Catholic discourse, and “Mormon Feminist Blogs and Heavenly Mother.” While little in this volume appears particularly edifying, it does open a reader’s eyes to the fact that there are numerous fringe communities with peculiar worldviews on the internet. And what these communities may lack in numbers, they compensate for with extremely zealous followings. Adversarial voices outnumber the orthodox Christian blogs. A recent collection of atheist testimonies relates several cases where online sites played primary influences in leading people from doubting to disbelief.²⁴⁷

Pastoral blogging is not only concerned with outreach and apologetics. It is a valid form of pastoral care. After all, LCMS laity are no different than anyone else. They too are exploring the web and the more quality material we can provide, the greater the chance they will be encouraged to embrace their confessional heritage. As two relatively early (2003) researchers

even more Christians to consider joining them in a global dialog.

²⁴⁵ Heidi A. Campbell and Drake Fulton, “Bounded Religious Communities’ Management of the challenge of new Media,” in *Social Media and Religious Change*, ed. Anita Greenhill, David Herbert, and Marie Gillespie (De Gruyter), 194. The report continues: “The BIA has also written a number of documents that provide members with specific guidance about appropriate Internet use, such as blogging, podcasting and social networking.”

²⁴⁶ Gina Messina-Dysert and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. *Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century: Technology, Dialogue, and Expanding Borders* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

²⁴⁷ Dan Riley, *Generation Atheist* (<http://www.generationatheistbook.com>, 2012). The book includes testimonies of several atheists whose “conversions” began with exposure to atheist blogs.

noted, “Computer-mediated interaction can be considered meaningful in that it provides relationships in which one’s own religious identity can be confirmed and strengthened.”²⁴⁸ This benefit would be particularly important when a religious group’s members find themselves in a minority and seldom encounter locally anyone else who shares their theological positions.²⁴⁹

The Digital Ministry: Blogging and the Great Commission

Digital connections are not the same as physical relationships. One researcher who addresses this difference says, “We have to recognize viewing [digital communication] for what it is—interaction with a digital representation of another person instead of with the person himself.”²⁵⁰ While the deepest level of human interaction is arguably only possible in physical proximity, the simple fact is that genuine community, in the sense of a bond of shared identity, can indeed be experienced via digital media. As a military member who was at various times separated thousands of miles from my family, I understand this reality firsthand. Not only telephones, email and video chat programs allow for sincere and intimate interaction; removed from my family for an entire year in the pre-internet world, we experienced not only maintenance of our bonds, but growth of our family “community” relying on daily correspondence mailed through the United States Postal Service.

This intrinsic divide between physical and digital realities poses a particular challenge to clergy from sacramental traditions. Joel Oesch offers specific advice for Lutherans seeking to

²⁴⁸ Alf Linderman and Mia Lovheim, “Internet, Religion and the Attribution of Social Trust,” in *Mediating Religion*, ed. Jolyon P. Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2003), 229.

²⁴⁹ As an example, consider the rarity of LCMS congregations in Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont which we noted earlier. A young adult growing up in those regions could go some time without physically meeting another member of the denomination. At the same time, they could network on the internet and find resources, *and relationships*, that support them in their faith.

²⁵⁰ Matthew Kobs, “Technology and Community,” 193.

provide “authentic” ministry through these media. “A healthy approach to OSNs [online social networks] uses connectivity as a means to a particular end, community, but not as an end in itself. To be virtually connected in the body of believers via OSNs must serve a greater purpose: to be in an authentic, confessional community.”²⁵¹ Online interaction need not remain at a superficial level. It is possible for deep and genuine bonds to develop through digital links. As one ELCA bishop puts it: “I do not fear social media. It amplifies some parts of communal life, even as it underperforms in deepening relationships in other ways.”²⁵²

An Australian Lutheran pastor engaged in church planting, argues that effective pastors must intentionally make an effort to connect with digital natives. Pastor Hedt offers the optimistic insight that the Church’s *own digital natives* will be effective in this effort, “as they discern how to master the tools without giving in to the idolatries of the age, as they engage with the tools in mission, and as they challenge and subvert the surrounding culture.”²⁵³ However, he tempers this hope with a cautionary thought which underlies the motivation for this current research project. “But this will not ‘just happen.’ It will require diligent and intelligent thought, prayer and practice in partnership between God and the digital natives and digital immigrants.”²⁵⁴ Amen. This is a task which must be undertaken by the entire Church, despite the fact the older generation remains slightly handicapped and apprehensive. They, “learn—like all immigrants,

²⁵¹ Joel C. Oesch, “Working the Harvest in Digital Fields,” 37.

²⁵² Jon Anderson, “Virtual Community? A Gift to Be Nourished,” *Word & World* 35, no. 2 (2015): 182, 184.

²⁵³ Nathan Hedt, “Missional Spirituality Among Digital Natives: Technology, Spirituality and Mission in an age of Social Media. *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 47, no. 3 (2013), 201. Lutheran pastor Armand Boehme echoes the recognition that Millennials are not merely a major mission field—they are also the generation from which the Church may recruit some of its most effective missionaries. He writes, “the church needs to make diligent use of every possible means in order to communicate the gospel . . . This is an area in which the skills, talents, and insights of Millennial Christians can be excellently employed. . . . Unleash them to use it to touch the lives of their fellow Millennials and all others with the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.” Armand J. Boehme, “The Church and the Culture of the Millennials—the Best or Worst of Times?” *Missio Apostolica* 21, no. 1 (2013): 116.

²⁵⁴ Nathan Hedt, “Missional Spirituality Among Digital Natives,” 201.

some better than others—to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their ‘accent,’ that is, their foot in the past.”²⁵⁵ Relying on younger clergy to represent the Church in the trenches of modern technology may be appealing to pastors still reeling from the “information bomb . . . exploding in our midst.”²⁵⁶ However, it should not afford them an excuse for failing to prayerfully consider whether they should venture into the “battlefield.”

The only book I have uncovered that has been published on the subject of pastoral blogging was written by an Orthodox priest. He approached the subject in the context of daily blogging during “festal celebrations like Christmas and Pascha [which] offer the opportunity to reach your readers when they want to be reached.”²⁵⁷ Its style and restricted scope make this tiny ebook of limited use to Orthodox clergy, and of far less value to other Christian pastors.

Despite the focus of this study, I do not wish to suggest that pastors are the only members of the Church who are responsible for maximizing their Gospel influence on the internet. Congregations are only limited in their use of technology by their own lack of vision. One Lutheran pastor in North Dakota writes, “Young people live in a complex, media-driven, consumer-oriented society. We need to be able to navigate their realities in order to engage their faith. At Hope we are working on creating a blog site for our young people where they can ask

²⁵⁵ Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives Digital Immigrants,” 2.

²⁵⁶ This phrase comes from Alvin Toffler’s historic book *The Third Wave*, which ignited some fireworks of its own when it was published. Toffler continues his military analogy, writing that the “explosion” is “showering us with shrapnel of images and drastically changing the way each of us perceives and acts upon our private world . . . We are likely to change the role of literacy in our lives. We may even alter our own brain chemistry.” Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 172.

²⁵⁷ John A. Peck, *The Orthodox Guide to Pastoral Blogging* (Phoenix, Arizona: Preachers Institute, 2011), Kindle. Peck’s ebook is also devoted to writing specifically for an Orthodox audience. Two short pages, however, are devoted to “Apologetic Blogging” where the author optimistically writes, “the Orthodox Church suffers from an abysmal lack of cogent apologetic material. Interestingly, thanks to blogging, I believe this will change soon.” Another more recent publication has a title that promises more than it delivers: *Blogging for Pastors: How Pastors and Churches Can use Blogging to Share their Messages, Grow their Congregations and More!* I do not include it here, because the title is extremely misleading. This brief ebook is an apparent rehash of generic information about how to begin blogging, without any distinctively clerical content, by a prolific “author” who offers many similar

questions and have discussions about what they are learning at church.”²⁵⁸ What an exciting way to engage our youngest members in active ministry. This merits wider consideration.

Missionary James Neuendorf recently offered the LCMS a thoughtful analysis of the Synod’s response to this new world. Discussing how “it can seem that only those churches with the weakest understanding of biblical truth are engaging this new society. As Lutherans, we have a profound responsibility to take up this challenge.”²⁵⁹ One reason “churches with the weakest understanding of biblical truth” can quickly jump on the latest bandwagon is because they do not need to reflect on the various ramifications of such actions. Nor do most of them need to offer any thought to the reactions of their sister congregations. Confessional Lutherans do not have that questionable luxury. Faithfulness to the Scriptures militates directly against simplification that invites confusion. Gerhard Forde described a key challenge for Lutherans—one that pastoral bloggers must remain ever conscious of— that “the theology of the cross is notoriously difficult to write *about*. In fact, it is quite impossible to write ‘the’ or even ‘a’ theology of the cross. . . . Basically all theologies *about* the cross turn out to be theologies of glory.”²⁶⁰

It is vital that clergy who blog keep their eyes focused on the Truth. We cannot afford to be drawn into discussions that may distract from or even poison the reception of the Gospel. As an Anglican blogger reminds us in a post about the enduring nature of digital communication: “We need to approach all issues on this site theologically . . . Even in blogging . . . we are held

digital pamphlets including *Make Big Profits on eBay: Start Your Own Million \$ Business*.

²⁵⁸ Paul E. Nynas, “What are We Telling the Kids? Teaching Genesis to Teenagers,” *Word & World* 29, no. 1 (2009), 62. The blog is part of a more comprehensive technological network. “Students are invited to ‘facebook’ and ‘text message’ us questions about what they are learning and thinking about.”

²⁵⁹ Neuendorf, James A. “Being the Church in the Age of Post-Literacy,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2, no.1 (February 2015), 48.

²⁶⁰ Forde, Gerhard O. *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 3. “‘The cross alone is our theology,’ Luther could say. And those oft-quoted words are to be taken literally.”

accountable for every idle word, and write *sub specie aeternitatis*.”²⁶¹ His warning that we remain conscious we are writing “under the aspect of eternity” serves as a valuable reminder to all pastoral bloggers. Indeed, most pastors are all too conscious of the potentially perpetual existence of anything they write that goes online. This can be intimidating, but it need not be. We should be willing to speak the truth, knowing that when we do, it is timeless and there is nothing to fear in its temporal indelibility.

Blogging represents a wonderful opportunity and responsibility, and clergy who engage in it should do so realistically. If a minister mistakenly believes he must not put pen to paper until he can compose something timeless and profound, he fails before he begins. Pastors who blog must recognize their online writing will be imperfect. Fortunately, recognizing our shortcomings is not usually a challenge to those marching under the banner *simul justus et peccator*. There is a significant amount of advice available for Christian bloggers, although very little of it is tailored to those with pastoral responsibilities. While these resources vary in value, most of the writers attempt to relate their own personal experiences and observations. Unfortunately, since little of the material is written from the perspective of the blogging pastor, much of it is of modest value. And only a fraction of what actually comes from the keyboard of clergy represents the worldview of those who view ministry through the lenses of Word and Sacrament. This *lacuna* should provide an impetus to confessional Lutherans to contribute to the conversation.

One eminent researcher on the topic of religion and the internet, Heidi Campbell, suggests blogging may pose less of a threat to religious institutions than some fear. Although there are examples to the contrary, recent research indicates that the majority of bloggers “frame authority

²⁶¹ James A. Altena, “Response to ‘Undemocratic Sweden,’” Mere Comments, December 21, 2006. http://touchstonemag.com/merecomments/2006/12/undemocratic_sw/. In personal correspondence with Altena in December of 2015, he invited me to read his fourteen principles of blogging, many of which are applicable to the

in ways that may more often affirm than challenge traditional sources of authority.”²⁶² Another researcher noted the value of linking pastors’ personal blogs to their congregational websites. This was especially true when updates about actual ministry projects were included. The benefit came in reaffirming the pastoral role and relationship. “Blogging develops proximal spaces by annihilating relational distance between the pastor and readers while maintaining the pastor’s moral authority as a gatekeeper of religious knowledge.”²⁶³ Parishioners who enjoy spending time online are inclined to appreciate the presence of their own pastor in the blogosphere.

An alluring aspect of blogging is the egalitarian impulse that guides much lay religious blogging. Many individuals feel called to share the Gospel and today “as Christian bloggers, have immediate access to theological reference books online, whereas before, exegesis came from scholars and pastors who scoured scripture and theological books.”²⁶⁴ The study of Scripture and trustworthy exegetical resources is to be commended. However, seeing the inference that running a word search on an online book is an adequate replacement for genuine theological training may also motivate some pastors to help correct this misperception.

Professor Campbell has explored the nature of the digital religious communities that have developed. “The fact is that on-line communities and cyber-churches exist, and what needs to be investigated is how these groups define themselves and function, rather than debating their authenticity.”²⁶⁵ She discusses the important fact that connection with online religious

vocation of pastoral blogging. <http://touchstonemag.com/merecomments/2008/10/altenas-observ/>.

²⁶² Heidi A. Campbell, “Religious Authority and the Blogosphere,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 15 (2010), 251.

²⁶³ Pauline Cheong et al, “The Internet Highway and Religious Communities: Mapping and Contesting Spaces in Religion-Online,” *The Information Society* 25, no. 5 (2009), 296.

²⁶⁴ Regina Burgess, “Understanding Christian Blogger Motivations,” 9.

²⁶⁵ Heidi Campbell, “Congregations of the Disembodied: A Look at Religious Community on the Internet,” in *Virtual Morality*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2003), 179.

communities does not require them to “abandon” their traditional places of worship.”²⁶⁶

Modern media is powerful. “I would contend that media,” writes one Lutheran theologian, “for all intents and purposes, should be treated as a drug.”²⁶⁷ That requires that we, as users, must be wise in how we invite it to influence our lives. However, since we are—in preaching and writing—*sources* of messages, we bear a great responsibility in what we communicate to others. We must not abuse their trust through misrepresentation, manipulation or any other less than honest activity. This is an ethical consideration of inordinate importance. The ends, presumably of fostering faith in Christ, do not justify the means. Should the foundation for such belief be discovered to be shoddy, not only will the structure built upon it collapse . . . the disillusioned receiver of the message will have one more reason to distrust Christians.

The world has changed radically, and for our missions to remain successful, we must modify them accordingly. An LCMS professor at Concordia University Irvine describes the shift in mission perspectives by saying we can no longer restrict our thinking to specific geographic locations. Missiology is taking into account how “For the Millennial generation, living in physical space is being complemented, if not supplanted, by . . . Life in the digital realm. . . . If the terrain of the mission field is changing as dramatically as I imply, the Church must confront these challenges with creative solutions.”²⁶⁸ Oesch is absolutely correct. The change he describes appears to be advancing ever more rapidly. And it is not reversible. It is my agreement with this conviction—that we must proactively, energetically, and creatively confront these challenges—that inspired this MAP. It is my earnest hope that in some small way this research might contribute towards this vital end.

²⁶⁶ Heidi Campbell, “Congregations of the Disembodied,” 196.

²⁶⁷ Anthony A. Cook, “Media as Source of Information and Identity,” 155.

²⁶⁸ Joel C. Oesch, "Working the Harvest in Digital Fields," 31–32.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROJECT DEVELOPED

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:3, 9).

This research project proved even more interesting than I anticipated it would be. Although all such efforts demand considerable investment, and experience unexpected turns during their course, the participation of thirteen dedicated LCMS pastors made this experience a joy. For the most part, the study proceeded as envisioned. As we shall see in the next chapter, the data verifies that its overall objective was attained, with the participants generally finding the use of the blogging handbook provided to them to be helpful. However, I am getting ahead of myself. In this chapter I will describe in detail the project itself. The information provided will be sufficient for the research to be replicated by another LCMS pastor, or duplicated and modified for parallel use by clergy in other religious traditions.²⁶⁹ While the research itself can be similarly reproduced, to do it in the closest manner possible would dictate using the same handbook or enchiridion. A full copy of the finalized version of the handbook is reproduced as an appendix to this dissertation. However, due to its length (and redundancy) the initial draft provided to the participants is not attached. This initial version is available to anyone who desires it by contacting me directly.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Obviously, research related to religious matters does not have to be conducted by clergy. However, I am strongly inclined to believe that theologically trained individuals are the best suited to understand the nuances of such matters.

²⁷⁰ I can be reached through several avenues. I maintain active accounts at LinkedIn and Academia.edu, in addition to Facebook. Even as a Pastor Emeritus my contact information remains accessible on the LCMS rosters hosted at <http://lcms.org>. I also anticipate continuing my blog, Mere Inkling <http://mereinkling.net>, for many years

The Design of the Study

The eruption of the internet has irreversibly changed the world. We have considered how this technological breakthrough bears some similarities to the invention of moveable type by Gutenberg. This comparison is obvious to all, including those who have little interest in the history of religion. To those of us devoted to sharing the Gospel—particularly those of us who align with the Reformation truths proclaimed by Martin Luther—the link is even more important. The printing press provided a way for the Gospel to freely spread across borders that heavily impeded the work of previous reformers such as Jan Hus. Even if the Roman Catholic Church had succeeded in burning Luther at the stake (something that was, for a time, an actual possibility), his words were already written, printed, and distributed. His biblical teaching had been caught up by the wind of the Spirit, and blown far and wide by the grace of God. Once his words were set in type, setting ablaze the monk who restored the Gospel to the Church would have accomplished little.

Billions of people around the globe have access to the internet. Obviously, even the most successful Christian ministries must settle for reaching “mere” millions of those individuals, but the simple fact is that *every single website possesses the potential to reach someone who has never heard the Gospel with the message of God’s love for them*. That means, of course, that every individual confessional Lutheran pastor who can be encouraged to enter the digital ministry field increases the likelihood that these people will find a biblical presentation of Law and Gospel that introduces them fully to the only begotten Son of God who died for them. It is with this conviction that I proposed this research project.

The problem is that most pastors do not blog. One reason for that fact is the truth that not

to come.

all of them *should* blog. Nevertheless, the problem does remain that some—indeed, many—who are fully capable of blogging, and could offer a measurable contribution to online theological dialogue, have yet to attempt to do so. The reasons are manifold, and a shortage of time is at the forefront of most nonparticipants’ lists. However, there are other reasons pastors hesitate as well. Some lack confidence in their writing, their creativity, their perseverance, or some other personal quality they consider necessary for undertaking this new ministry. We have discussed the distinction between digital natives, who have grown up in this brave new world, and digital immigrants, for whom the internet can be *terra incognita*. While most of the former do not appear threatened by the internet, some of the latter still resent its disruption of their lives. While some dislike the web, a handful fear it.²⁷¹

Assuming that it is desirable to encourage confessional Lutheran clergy to enter the digital arena, I thought that it would be worthwhile to explore ways in which my DMin major applied project might contribute in some small way towards that end.

I initially conducted research to determine whether any formal studies had been conducted on pastoral blogging. Although some studies addressed blogging or microblogging by prominent individual clergy, it did not appear that any research had been conducted into the blogging practices of any “typical” (i.e. non-megachurch) pastors. In my initial exploration of the subject I conducted a survey of existing blogs that could be identified as being written by Lutheran Church Missouri Synod clergy. During a two-day internet search, using Google and Bing search

²⁷¹ My choice of the word “fear” is in consideration of the power for evil wielded by the internet. The primary example of this comes in the form of its use as a gutter channeling pornography invisibly into homes. There have been a growing number of studies of the effects of viewing pornography, including some that have focused on clergy. Obviously, some LCMS pastors will have been burned by this vile flame, and they will rightfully be wary of straying too close to their former digital haunts. Research into the broader subject has indicated “that 37% of Protestant clergy members report ‘viewing internet pornography’ as a current internet temptation.” Zeba S. Ahmad et al, “Prevalence Rates of Online Sexual Addiction Among Christian Clergy,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention* 22, no. 4 (2015), 344.

engines, I was able to identify 264 active²⁷² blogs. My initial concept was to analyze all of these sites to explore their similarities and differences. I thought that such an investigation might lead to assessing various blogging strategies to enhance the success of online writers. In my initial MAP proposal, I outlined this plan. I also proposed to devise, as a simple blogging resource, a digital handbook that could be appended to the dissertation in an appendix and made available online for use by LCMS pastors.

It was this “supplemental” portion of my proposal that caught the attention of the faculty members who were advising me regarding my research. They suggested that I forego the Descriptive Survey I had proposed, and focus instead on developing this digital resource, in the form of an ebook. During consultation, we decided the *qualitative research* would occur by having novice bloggers test drive the handbook to individually determine if it possessed any value. The question would be whether or not they believed that the handbook simplified or improved the quality of their blogging experience. The assumption was that if it did prove beneficial in some measurable degree, that it would be revised in light of their recommendations, and made available for use by other Lutheran pastors.

Design of the Enchiridion

While a number of external resources were used to compile the advice in the Handbook, it was primarily a product of my own reflections. In essence, blogging melds two subjects (writing and technology) with which I have had significant involvement for several decades. Writing, as I have related, was a core aspect of my education and it has found consistent application throughout my ordained “career.” Writing as a personal activity, and the mutual encouragement

²⁷² I defined “active,” for my preliminary purposes, as having online activity that was less than six months

of other writers, began in my first parish many years ago. Ever since then I have prioritized finding a local group of fellow writers with whom to meet regularly, whenever I have moved. This literary fellowship, in the spirit of the Oxford Inklings,²⁷³ has improved my own writing and simultaneously improved my skills as an editor and writing instructor.

In terms of the technological side, my familiarity with computers began with the purchase of one of the earliest models produced for the consumer market. It continued on through the building of several computers of my own, and included an early presence on the internet via the hosting of several websites. As static web pages have been eclipsed by more dynamic internet content, several years ago I decided I finally had sufficient time to begin blogging. Personal experience has taught me much about effective blogging. Of perhaps even greater value has been active observation of online writing that is especially compelling. Of far less value in terms of improving my knowledge of the subject, I have also surveyed a number of collections of advice for bloggers. These ebooks are often offered on websites as free gifts to entice visitors to subscribe to future posts. From my experience, these small resources all bear the same traits; they are shallow, obvious, generic, and redundant. They are also, quite frequently, very poorly written.

In writing the Handbook I did scan a few such publications to see if I had missed anything I should mention, but I do not recall finding anything significant in their pages, with the possible exception of mentioning the importance of “search engine optimization.” In actuality, I simply

old. In addition to this number, I uncovered an additional 73 dormant sites that could be attributed to LCMS clergy.

²⁷³ The Inklings were a group of extremely talented writers who gathered regularly at a pub in Oxford to share their current efforts, to critique one another’s work, and to encourage each another. Most notable among their membership were C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. My own commitment to participating in a regular critique group extended to my deployment at Shahbaz Air Base, Pakistan, during Operation Enduring Freedom. There I gathered eight to ten young writers each week to share in this constructive diversion from our wartime duties.

wrote a rough draft and then continued supplementing and editing it over a four to six week period. During that time, I also brought small portions of my manual to be reviewed by members of my current writing critique fellowship. I found some of their comments helpful, despite the fact none of them are either pastors or Lutheran. Curiously none of them currently blog, although all of them expressed a desire to in the future. (Several of them requested copies of the finalized Handbook, although I informed them it would be written for this very specific audience which would limit its value to them.)

I was praying throughout this process, of course, especially at its outset and conclusion. After accumulating a large number of suggestions, roughly grouped by subject matter, I reflected for some time on the proper *structure* for the ebook. When I initially considering using an agricultural template it struck me as too trite. While it possesses the asset of being a familiar biblical theme, with abundant powerful metaphors, my initial sense was that would appear forced. However, as I laid it out in outline, not only did the blogging process parallel sowing and reaping crops, the theme actually provided me with some additional insights. One such idea is the way in which a pastor might leave a blog *fallow* for a season, returning to it later with renewed purpose. While I am certain this overarching agricultural analogy for blogging probably appears hundreds of times on internet sites, I am unconscious of having been inspired by any external source. On the contrary, as I just mentioned, my initial impression on the matter was that using this structure would come across as banal.

I have included in Appendix Five a detailed list of all of the modifications to the Handbook made after receiving feedback from the research participants. In its figurative transformation into the Enchiridion, several changes were made and a number of new elements were added. Some were directly inspired by the research, such as the addition of a “Quick Start” page. Others,

including the addition of an ever so slightly edited Preface by Martin Luther, were purely my own notions. The addition of that specific section arose from my desire to emphasize the historical continuity of what we are doing as pastoral bloggers. At the same time, the study itself provided me with a sense of liberty in adding a new piece that might be appreciated by a few, and ignored by most. This, after all, is inherent in the nature of a manual—users refer to the portions they consider useful or interesting at the moment, and overlook the other material, perhaps returning to it later. The ease with which the research participants did this very thing, along with their apparent expectation that this is exactly how such a resource *should be* approached, encouraged me to include supplemental material without worrying about the percentage of readers who would find it valuable. This liberty could be abused, of course, and I remained conscious of that fact. In the end, I was able to offer a brief rationale for each addition, as evidenced in the Appendix.

Recruitment of Research Participants

The first order of business was to determine the parameters for research participants. They were all to be LCMS pastors. The minimum beginning cadre was set at ten, recognizing that it was possible one or more of that number might drop out during the research period. It was further determined that they would need to be actively serving in a congregational ministry context. This decision was made to better compare the data accumulated during the research. It excluded retired clergy and those serving in specialized ministries such as denominational officials, military chaplains and seminary faculty. The participants did, however, include one hospital chaplain and two armed forces Reserve chaplains (one active and one retired), all three of whom are currently serving parishes as called pastors. Beyond being currently serving pastors, research participants needed to meet one additional criterion. They needed to have virtually no

prior experience with blogging.²⁷⁴

Several official LCMS channels were used to solicit volunteers. These included the official LCMS Facebook page and the mailing list of LCMS military chaplains overseen by the LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces. The third venue in which the invitation was extended was in the Peninsula Circuit of the Northwest District, of which I am an active member. Thirteen of twenty-one volunteers, within the first week after the study's announcement, met the requirements for participation, and I proceeded with that group. I was pleased that none of them dropped out during the course of the research, even though their freedom to do so was communicated verbally and in writing.

No demographic constraints were placed on the potential participants, which made the distribution quite interesting. As noted in Table 1, on page fifteen, eleven different states were represented by the pastors. The number of years of ordained service was also recorded to see how representative the research population was of the clergy population.²⁷⁵ Curiously, the participants fell into two divergent experience groupings. Eight pastors had seven or fewer years of pastoral experience. Five participants had served twenty or more! This meant that there was a large gap for what might be considered mid-career pastors, those with eight to nineteen years of experience. On the other hand, it invited analysis of whether there might be any possible differentiation between the two groups. While second career clergy make *assumptions* about age just that, it is quite possible the two groups approximated the populations we have already

²⁷⁴ Because of the high number of pastors who at some point signed up to start a blog, but never wrote a second post, it was determined to accept these as non-bloggers. Two volunteers shared that during their seminary years they contemplated blogging but did not do so after their initial entry. This requirement was applied strictly, and several volunteers were eliminated from consideration because they “blogged” beyond their initial log-in (even though none had persisted longer than two weeks).

²⁷⁵ Since this was not an essential element of the research model, no comparison is made here to these statistics as they would relate to all Synodical clergy currently serving in parishes.

identified as digital natives and digital immigrants. Biological ages were not solicited since I believed that years of pastoral experience was a more pertinent query. In retrospect, it would have been beneficial to have also requested the ages of research participants, since this correlates to the native-immigrant consideration (and potential to other factors as well).

As to the reason for the absence of mid-career pastors, I can only conjecture. It is possible that many of these pastors find themselves in the prime and most demanding years of their ministry, serving the most active congregations. However, I suspect another consideration to be more likely. As we noted, the study was only open to those who had never blogged before. By default *this excluded from the study those very pastors who were the most motivated to blog*. In other words, the study barred inclusion of clergy who were motivated enough to already have pursued blogging. The remaining mid-career pastors would presumably after a decade in ministry have given the matter some thought and decided that blogging was not one of their interests. At the same time, the response from younger pastors suggests they may have gotten established enough in their ministries to consider embarking on blogging. Likewise, for the more senior pastors, it could well be that this was the right invitation at the right moment to undertake a new ministry approach that they considered too unfamiliar before.

Once a sufficient number of eligible volunteers was recruited, each participant was provided with two documents (Appendix One). The first document was the “Recruitment Statement for Research Participation.” It assured the anonymity of participants and clarified their freedom to withdraw from the research at any time they desired. The second document, the “Introduction to the Study,” detailed the process and expectations for the participants. It also clarified my role during the three month period as simply being an observer. By this I mean that I communicated in this initial document my intention to keep to a minimum any contact between

the pastoral participants and myself. While they were free to contact me for matters related to their involvement in the research, I expressed my preference that they not approach me for advice on how to go about the blogging itself. The rationale for this position was to replicate as closely as possible the future scenario in which an anonymous pastor would download the enchiridion from my website, and have no formal contact with me. The purpose of the research project was to determine whether or not the handbook, on its own merits, could be a useful tool for pastors. All thirteen participants honored this request, and none sought additional guidance.

The Introduction to the Study did not presume that after reading the details of the project all of the initial volunteers would choose to participate. Fortunately, they did. Nevertheless, I ended the document with the sentence “If you desire to participate in this research, at your convenience please complete the initial online survey.”

Research Instrument: Surveys

This leads us to the research instrumentation used to collect data. There were three independent instruments, and all were researcher-designed to gather data appropriate at the different junctures in the research process. The use of three instruments, which shared a small overlap, allowed for some modest triangulation²⁷⁶ of the data. The first two were online surveys, hosted on the zoho.com survey site. The third was an individual interview conducted after the close of the three-month active blogging period. The questions posed by each of the assessments are found in Appendix Two. All three of the instruments were reviewed and approved by my Advisor. Each of them, surveys and interview alike, were designed to gather qualitative data

²⁷⁶ Triangulation “provides a complex view of the intervention enabling a ‘thicker’ interpretation. It is a way to cross-check your data that provides breadth and depth to your analysis and increases the trustworthiness of your research.” Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 72.

rather than quantitative data. Although the next chapter will record raw numbers and data that may appear on the surface to be indicative of quantitative research, there is no pretense of having a sufficient study population to derive any valid quantitative information.

While the narrow purpose of the project would have been satisfied by restricting the information measured to the use of the handbook itself, I strongly believe that would have been a missed opportunity. A broader net was cast in order to see if any patterns might be recognized that could prove helpful to future researchers. For example, there is the question of how much pastors actually enjoy writing, and whether this might to some degree correlate with their ultimate evaluation of their blogging experience. Naturally, even if such a correlation was revealed, there would be no way to measure within the limits of the current study whether this parallel was accidental or actual. Nevertheless, several of these concerns were posed for two reasons. The first was to help the participants to think broadly about blogging prior to beginning. The second reason was to, in a sense, hint to future researchers some paths that might be worth exploring further. Another example of such a question is the inquiry into the MBTI²⁷⁷ type of participants. Unfortunately, only ten of the thirteen participants were aware of their type. Still, for the sizeable group of researchers interested in the study of personality types, even this tiny amount of information might serve to pique their interest.

Survey One involved gathering general background data on the participants. Although the research focus would rest on the handbook, since they had not yet received a copy of it, the

²⁷⁷ The Myers Briggs Type Indicator has become a solidly established tool in a wide range of settings, including university and seminary contexts. It is also commonly used to assess personality types within the military—with the goal of improving teamwork through promoting a better understanding of oneself and others. The Alban Institute, which produces ministry resources published a book on this subject a number of years ago to which I and others continue to refer. Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1988). Their research involved 1,319 ordained clergy and uncovered a number of aspects in which pastors deviated from general population type statistics.

questions explored their tentative blogging plans, and inquired about several characteristics that might possibly influence their blogging experience.

1. Question one gathered demographic information.
2. Question two verified their desire to be a part of the study.
3. Question three reiterated the confidential aspect of their participation and the freedom they had to depart from the study at any time.
4. Question four began the collection of data that could *potentially* have some correlation to their final perception of their blogging experience. This item requested the number of years since their ordination.
5. Question five asked for their Myers-Briggs personality type, if known.
6. Question six asked their reason for participating. It offered eleven options and the opportunity to choose and describe another.
7. Question seven inquired why they had not blogged in the past. It offered eight options and the opportunity to choose and describe another.
8. Question eight asked for their initial subject for their blog (while stating at the same time that this was not binding and they were free to blog in any way they desired). Fifteen topics and the option of “Other” were provided.
9. Question nine inquired into their confidence in their writing skills.
10. Question ten asked how much they *enjoyed* the writing process itself.
11. Question eleven asked about their prior publication history.
12. Question twelve asked what they expected to be their greatest challenge. Nine options plus “Other” were provided.
13. Question thirteen asked them to rank, from a list of five options, their expectation

of how they would feel at the end of the research.

14. Question fourteen inquired as to how likely they thought they would be to continue blogging once the project ended.

Upon completion of the initial survey, which also served to affirm their decision to participate in the research, as outlined in the attachments they had received, I forwarded to each of them a PDF copy of the Pastoral Blogging Handbook. It was formatted in a common paperback dimension, 6x9 inches, and was forty-seven pages in length. A fuller description will be included in the chapter which follows, where I will describe in detail modifications made as a result of the research findings. None of the pastors made any contact with me related to the research.²⁷⁸ To avoid redundancy, since nothing was deleted from the first version of the text, only the final, revised copy of the handbook is included in this dissertation (as Appendix Four).

With the handbook on their computers, and the instructions to begin their blogging on the ten days later on the first day of the new month, everything was prepared for the pastors to commence their practice of blogging. During the next three months I intentionally remained out of contact with the participants. At the conclusion of that time, I thanked them for their participation and provided them with the link to the final survey.

The second survey was intentionally built upon the framework of the first, and Appendix Three includes the combined results of both surveys as provided by each of the participants. The reports in the appendix align the questions that directly correlate to one another. The second online survey was completed at the close of the blogging period. It was intended to allow for a comprehensive collection of pertinent data, since participation in the personal interview was

²⁷⁸ I did have contact with the pastor who was a member of my congregational circuit. We saw one another at monthly pastoral meetings, but we did not discuss the research experience until after he had concluded the normal data collection.

voluntary, and it was considered unlikely that all of the pastors would choose to participate in that. The questions on the second survey requested the following:

1. Name.
2. The primary subject of the blog as they wrote it. (This corresponded to Question Eight from the original survey.)
3. Whether blogging was simpler or more difficult than expected.
4. The most challenging aspect of blogging. (Survey One, Question Twelve.)
5. Their greatest positive surprise.
6. Their greatest negative surprise.

The following questions are specific to the use of the handbook itself.

7. Did they read the handbook prior to beginning their blog? (Three options, yes, no, or “I skimmed it.”)
8. If they did not read it prior to writing their first post, did they read it through at a later point?
9. How useful was the handbook (using a likert scale for the response)?
10. Were there any elements of the handbook that were confusing or unhelpful? Or were there any missing subjects that should have been included?
11. Select any of the following statements that are true (offering the same five statements that were ranked in Question Thirteen of Survey One).
12. Did you receive any assistance with your blog? (Five options offered.)
13. How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you? (Likert scale ranging from negative to positive.)
14. Do you intend to continue blogging? (Yes, no, or “not at the present time.”)

15. Would you be willing to participate in a personal interview about your experience?

The second survey was administered at the conclusion of the three-month research period to which the participants had committed themselves. While some pastors continued blogging, whether they did so or not was irrelevant to the timing of the survey. The final question on this survey asked whether the pastor would be willing to participate in a personal interview.

Research Instrument: Personal Interviews

The original plan for the research project included personal interviews as the primary source for qualitative data that could prove or disprove the hypothesis. While the online surveys did compile some data useful for a variety of purposes, the interview would allow for in depth consideration of the key considerations. It was hoped that at least ten would agree to do so. However, an apostolic dozen volunteered to be interviewed. I initially intended to simply accept the response of the pastor who declined. I reviewed the results of his survey and they confirmed my suspicion that he had one of the *least positive* experiences during the process. I decided to send him a single email request inviting him to reconsider, and allow me to interview him. I offered two reasons for asking him to reconsider. The first was because he was “the most critical reviewer on the usefulness of the handbook, and it is important to capture that sentiment in honestly assessing the resource.”²⁷⁹ I was delighted when he enthusiastically responded in the affirmative.

During the subsequent month I interviewed all thirteen of the research participants. Interviews were conducted via Skype, FaceTime, and telephone, depending on the preference of

²⁷⁹ I continued: “Second, and even more importantly, your feedback has proven quite valuable. I have already incorporated your suggestions, and clearly recognize how they identified a major shortcoming in the handbook. I appreciate the insights you have shared, and hope to glean more from your experience and wisdom.” (Correspondence details not included here, to ensure the confidentiality of the research participant.)

the individual. For some questions the specific wording was tailored to each interviewee, based upon how they had responded to the previous surveys. Most questions were identical for all of them. A sample of the interview protocols is included in Appendix Two. The full transcripts of the interviews are not included in this dissertation, but they will be cited throughout the next chapter.

Subsequent Follow-up with Research Participants

Once the MAP dissertation and the revised enchiridion have been approved by the examination committee of Concordia Seminary, then a copy of the handbook and a summary of the research findings will be forwarded to each of the research participants. This, of course, will not be a part of the research—which they have already completed—although I will invite their ongoing, collegial feedback. This will be especially significant in regard to their impressions of the new website which will be ready to go online, as a direct result of their suggestions. But mentioning this additional online creation which was inspired by the results of this research is getting ahead of ourselves. We will discuss that consequence of the project in the final two chapters.

CHAPTER 6

THE PROJECT EVALUATED

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom. 10:14–17).

The purpose of this major applied project was to determine whether or not a blogging handbook would be of benefit to pastors approaching the online writing experience for the first time. In its simplest form, this could have been accomplished by giving participants a copy and then, after a brief time, simply asking them to respond to a yes/no question. Such information would prove of minimal value. Thus, instruments were designed to glean additional insights that might suggest elements that could affect the answer to the core question. For example, might a pastor’s general attitude towards writing itself influence their blogging experiment and their impression of a handbook designed to assist them? Below I will present the raw data before analyzing it. The results of the first two instruments, the surveys, will be straightforward. The data from the individual interviews will be incorporated into the analysis portion in the form of summaries and quotations.

Findings of the Study: First Survey

The first research tool, the initial survey, was complete prior to beginning to blog. The survey artifact is found in Appendix Two, and all of the participants’ responses are provided in Appendix Three. The survey began by soliciting identification information, including name and contact information. All participants concurred with the next two questions, which confirmed

their desire to participate in the research project, their understanding of the confidentiality of the study along with their freedom to end their participation at any point. The fourth question requested the number of years they had been ordained. The demographic information—combining the state of their residency and the duration of their ministry—was reported in Figure 2, on page fifteen.

The next question requested participants’ Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator (MBTI) personality type. Seven of the thirteen pastors were aware of their personality code.








Myers-Briggs Personality Types		
<p>ENFJ Extravert Intuitive Feeling Judging</p>		
<p>ISTJ Introvert Sensing Thinking Judging</p>		
<p>INFP Introvert Intuitive Feeling Perceiving</p>		
<p>INTJ Introvert Intuitive Thinking Judging</p>		

Figure 6. Personality Types of Participants.

The next question asked their motivation for participating in the study. They were allowed to mark as many options as desired, and invited to add unlisted options (which four did).

Reasons for Participating

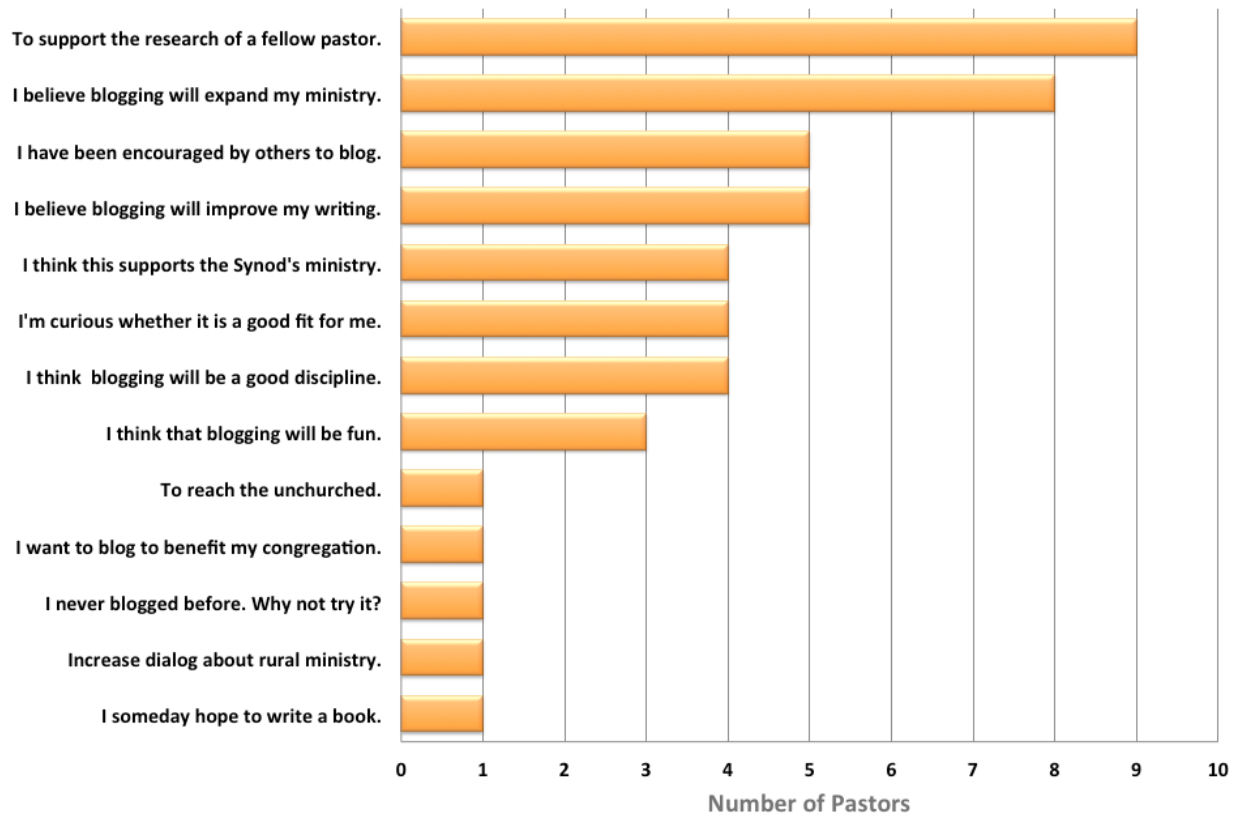


Figure 7. Reasons for Participating.

The following question sought to identify the primary reason preventing them from blogging previously.

Reasons for Not Blogging

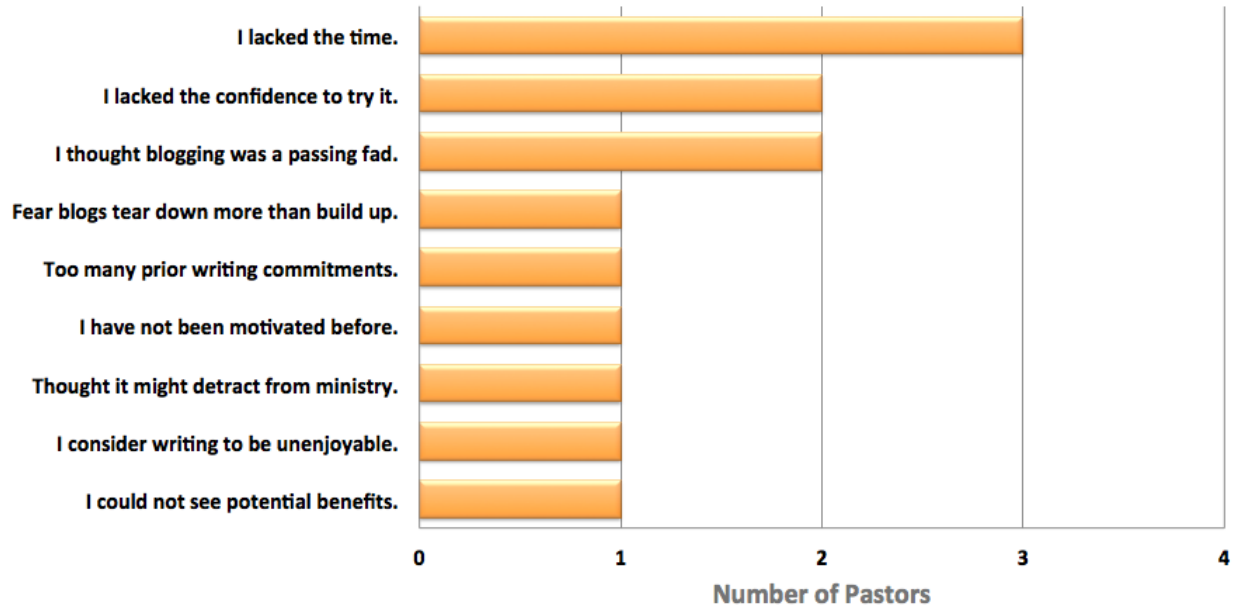


Figure 8. Reasons for Not Previously Blogging.

The next question involved the general theme or emphasis they anticipated using for their blog.

Likely Subject for Blogging

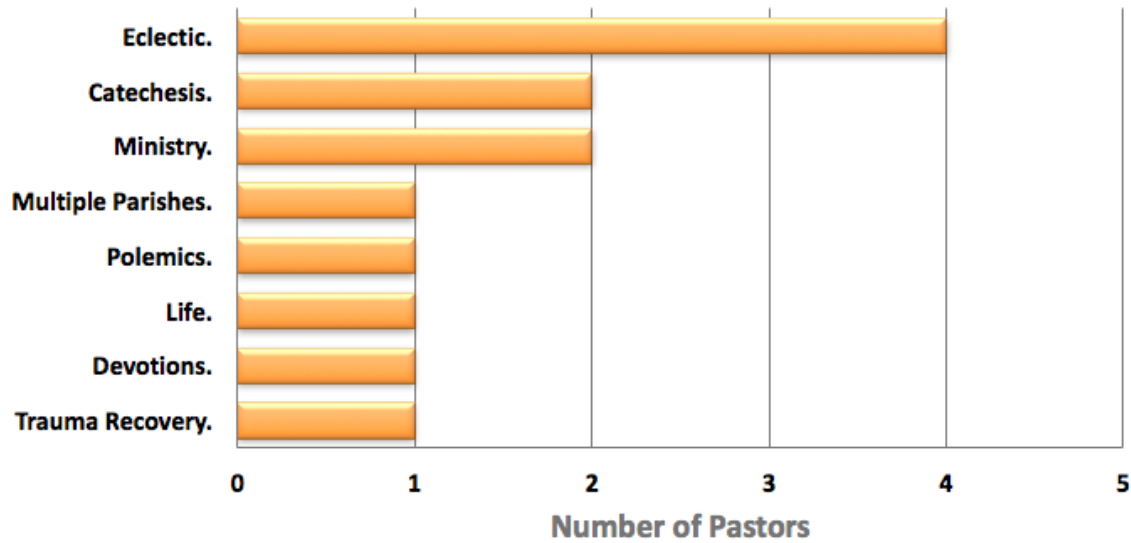


Figure 9. Most Likely Subject for Their Blog.

The next question asked how confident participants were in their writing skills, using a seven level Likert scale in which the poles were: (1) “I know the alphabet” and (7) “I am ready for my Pulitzer.”

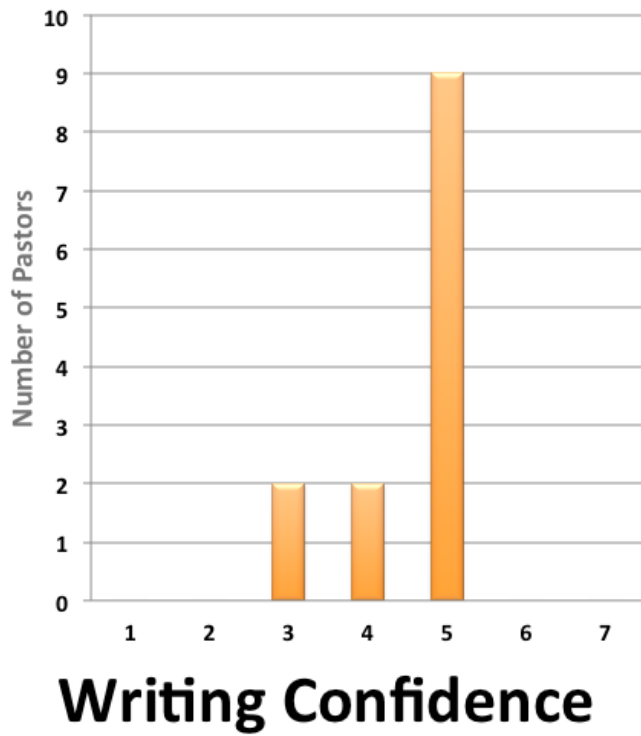


Figure 10. Confidence in Their Writing Skills.

After asking about their confidence in their writing talents, the survey inquired as to how much they *enjoyed* the act of writing. Once again, a scale was used to assess the subject, with the poles representing: (1) “I dread putting pen to paper” and (7) “It is my favorite avocation.”

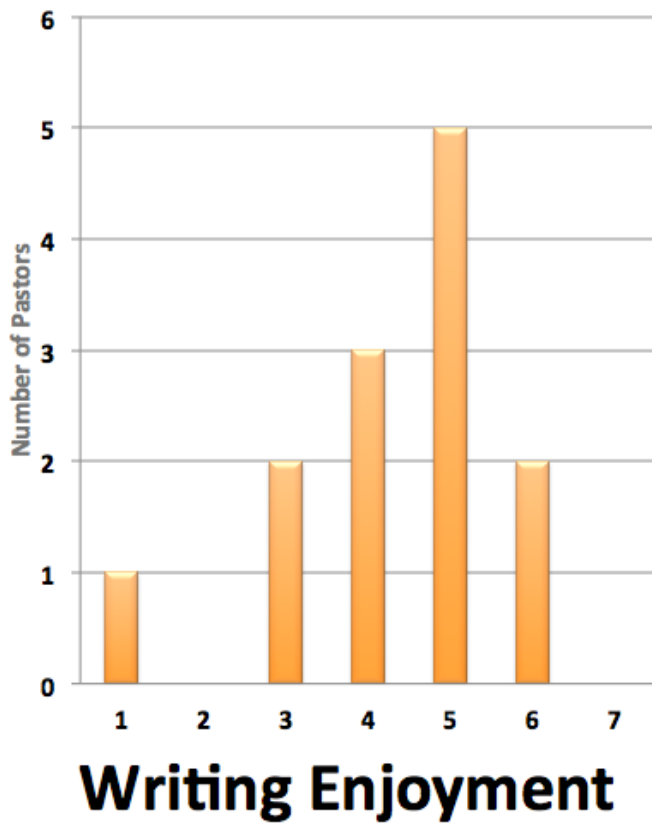


Figure 11. Amount of Enjoyment Derived from the Writing Process.

The next question sought to establish actual writing and publishing experience by listing a number of writing venues, and allowing for the inclusion of others. Multiple responses were allowed since the categories were not mutually exclusive.

Publication Experience

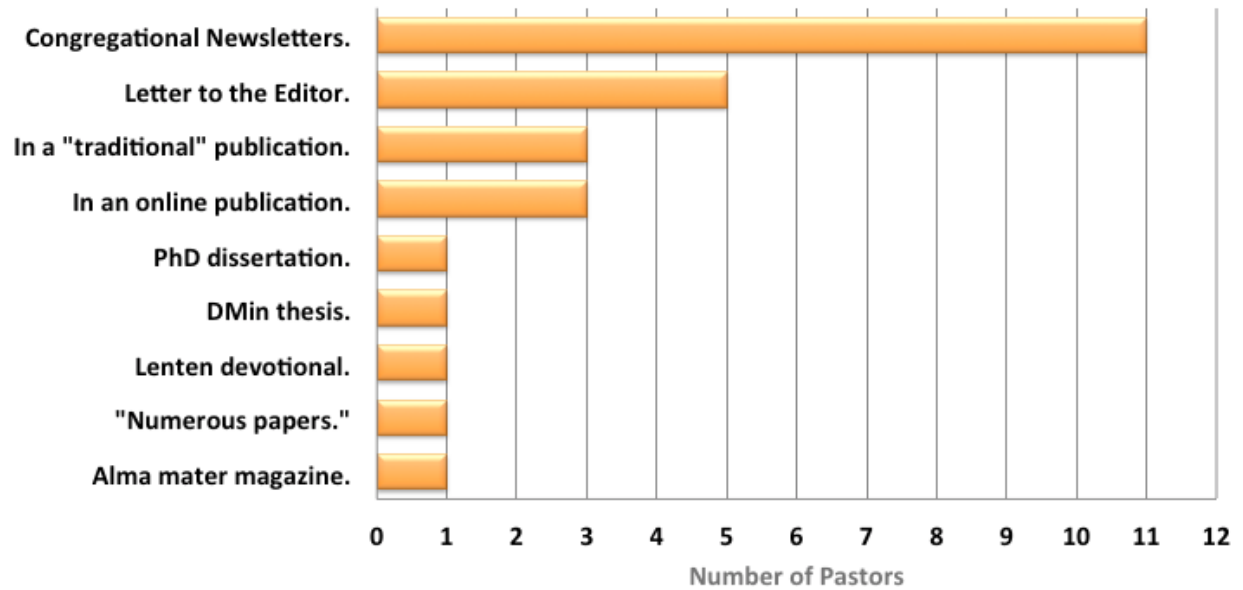


Figure 12. Previous Publication Experience.

The survey next asked participants what they anticipated would be their great challenge in participating in the blogging research.



Figure 13. The Greatest Challenge They Anticipated.

The next question was structured differently than the others in the survey. It asked pastors to rank five options in terms of the most to least likely effects of their participation. “Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.”

Expected Consequences	Most Likely	Second	Third	Fourth	Least Likely
Increased confidence in writing skills.	7	4	-	2	-
Appreciate gaining a new ministry skill.	5	5	1	1	1
Pleased at having made some new friends.	-	3	6	2	2
Will enthusiastically share about blogging.	-	1	5	3	4
Discover that blogging is not for me.	1	-	1	5	6

Figure 14. Ranked Expectations of the Consequences of Blogging.

A Likert scale was used for question fourteen which asked how likely it was that

participants thought they would be continuing to blog once the research effort was completed. Options ranged from (1) Highly unlikely, to (7) Almost certain.

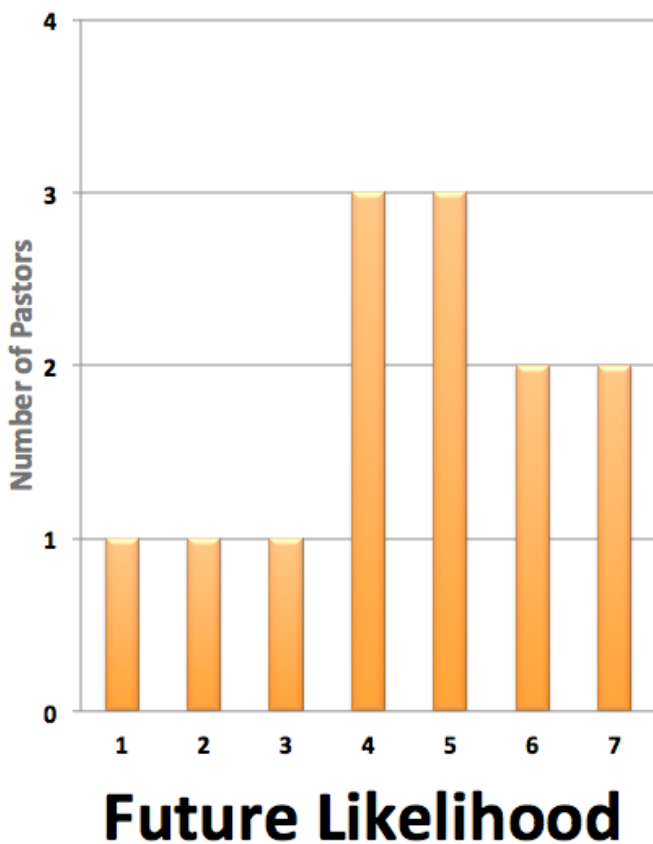


Figure 15. Expectation of How Likely They Would be to Continue Blogging.

These responses represented the mindset of the participants prior to receiving the handbook or undertaking any of the tasks associated with blogging. After the conclusion of the three months of active blogging, all of the pastors were asked to complete a second online survey. All agreed to do so.

Findings of the Study: Second Survey

The second survey was administered after completing of the three month blogging

experience. The survey artifact is found in Appendix Two and the participants' responses are provided in Appendix Three. Since demographic data had been gathered via the initial survey, the first question simply required their name, and number two lined up with item eight of the initial survey. It inquired as to the general theme of the blog.

Actual Subject for Blogging

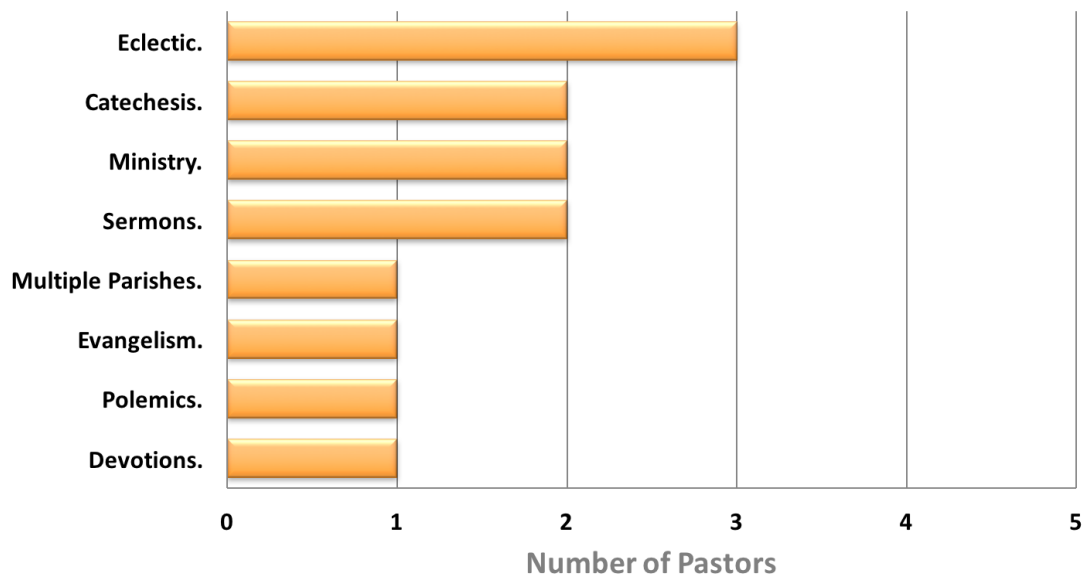


Figure 16. The Actual Subjects Chosen for the Blogs.

The next question asked how the exercise in blogging matched their expectations in terms of difficulty of the challenge. Three choices were offered.

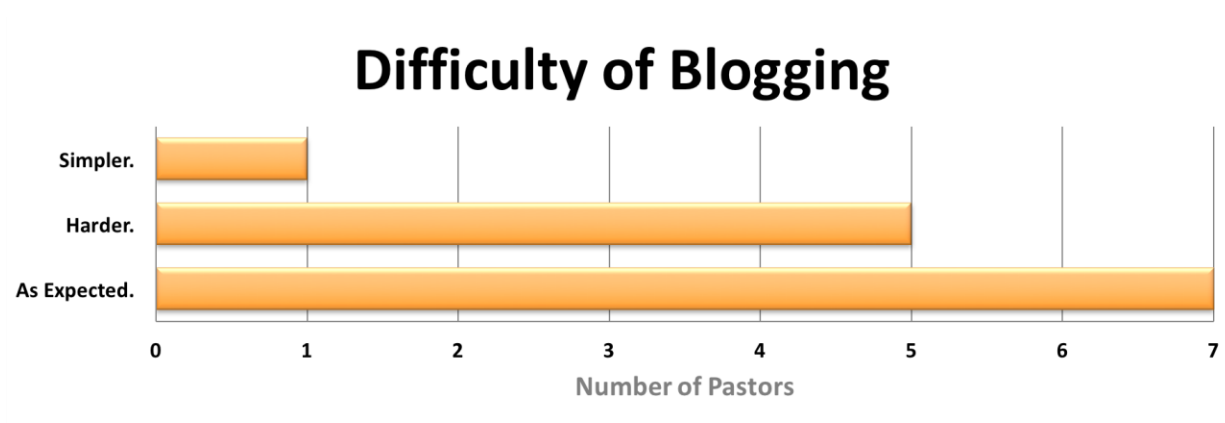


Figure 17. The Degree of Difficulty Encountered in Blogging.

Question four identified the most challenging aspect of blogging for each participant. The response identified on the chart as “unknown results” read verbatim: “Hesitating due to concern over results of posting.”

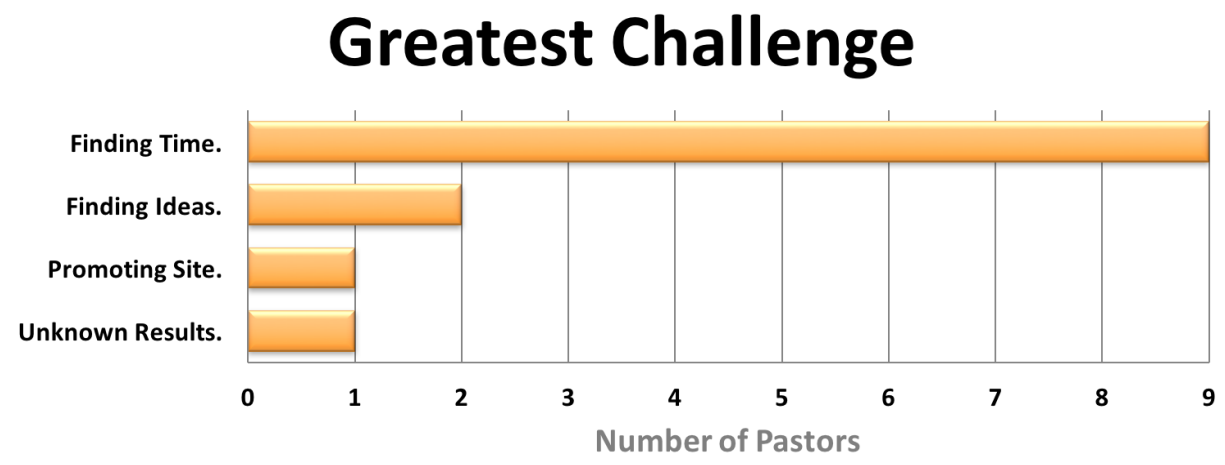


Figure 18. The Greatest Challenge They Experienced.

Next, participants were asked to describe their greatest positive surprise while blogging.

Greatest Positive Surprise	
°I°	Hearing from others that they had gained some sense of care or insight from what was written.
°II°	It was easier and more enjoyable than I thought it would be.
°III°	A poem I posted received 7 likes and also yielded two new followers. This was above and beyond all my other entries. It was encouraging to receive some positive reception.
°IV°	For the few followers that I received, their feedback; especially when that feedback came from unexpected places.
°V°	Honestly, before I stopped, I didn't have any positive surprises.
°VI°	Feedback and how far reaching some posts got.
°VII°	The focus of getting my thoughts out in a new way.
°VIII°	[Left blank]
°IX°	The ability to schedule posts out into the future.
°X°	Once I was able to carve out some time to blog, I found it was almost an exhilarating experience. I enjoyed the opportunity to express myself.
°XI°	How quickly the post could spread through social media.
°XII°	That blogging is so open and available for anyone.
°XIII°	I now know this can be done, and what a unique niche I seek to address. I have a boatload of topics from my D.Min. dissertation and all the other "fallout" that gathered as I worked, and believe it can be of use to bless and encourage my brethren (and their members) serving in multiple parish settings. I also know that this must be a matter about which I must "carve" time, as it will not happen by accident; the pastor's plate is full enough as it is.

Figure 19. The Greatest Positive Surprise.

The sixth question asked about their greatest negative surprise while participating in the active blogging phase of the research.

Greatest Negative Surprise	
°I°	Difficulty to carve out the time to write twice a week.
°II°	The feeling that no one would be reading what I wrote.
°III°	Simply that you cannot rely on your own friends to read your blog.

°IV°	Time... blogging takes so much more time than I anticipated and, like any virtual medium, an inactive site is a dead site. The greatest challenge is to keep blogging so that the site is considered “living” and therefore will continue to garner interest and readership.
°V°	My own uncreativity and the amount of time and energy it took for me to actually write something that was okay.
°VI°	None.
°VII°	The desire to be creative and fresh—it fed my desire to be a people pleaser and my pride.
°VIII°	Difficulty to carve out the time to write twice a week.
°IX°	The amount of time it would take.
°X°	Just finding the time to blog. In a busy pastorate there were times when I needed to make a choice—Do I blog or do I take some time with my wife? Do I blog or do I do that shut-in visit I’ve been needing to take care of? There was a definite need for time to think and write.
°XI°	Personal frustration of not having more time to devote to this. Feeling torn between people I minister to in face-to-face relationships and people I might be able to help/connect from a distance.
°XII°	That experienced bloggers tend to stay away from topics that might be misunderstood and instead develop areas that will interest followers.
°XIII°	How high a priority it must become to blog, or it will get left behind by the other duties of ministry.

Figure 20. The Greatest Negative Surprise.

At this point the survey moved from their overall blogging experience, to a focus on their use of the Handbook and their impression of its utility. The first of these queries asked whether or not they read the Handbook prior to beginning their blog.

Reading Before Blogging

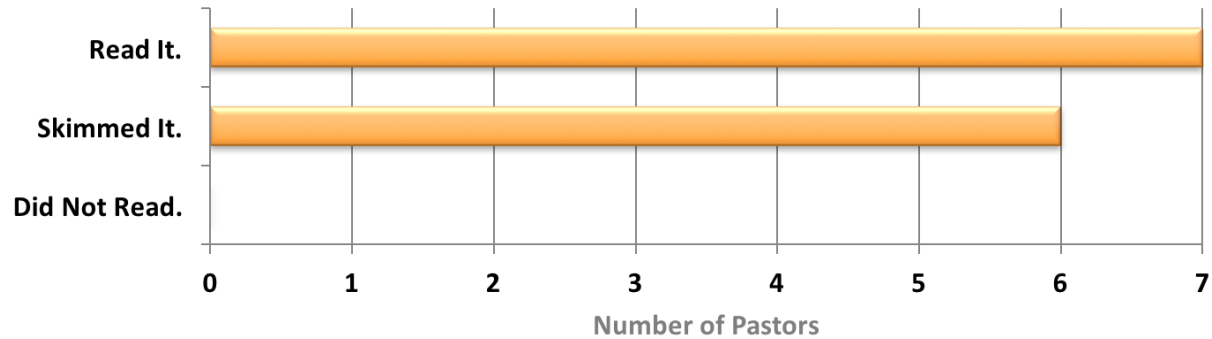


Figure 21. Reading the Handbook Prior to Blogging.

The following question asked if those who had not read it prior to beginning to blog, or had only skimmed it before they started, read through the Handbook at a later time. All six of those who initially skimmed it indicated that they did so.

A Likert scale measured their responses to the question “How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?”

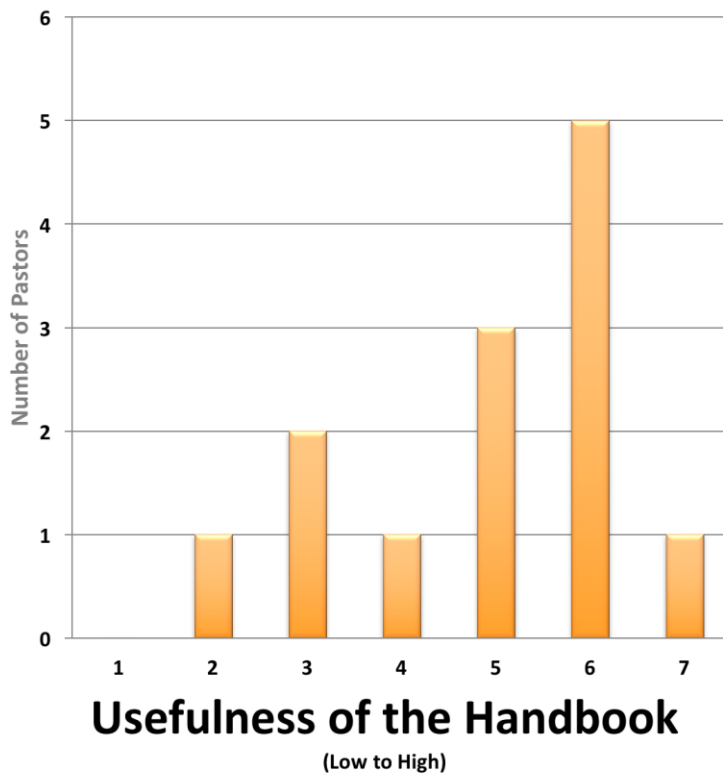


Figure 22. The Usefulness of the Handbook.

Item ten included two open-ended questions and asked: “Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful? Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?”

Confusing or Missing Material		
	Confusing or Problematic Information	Additional Material that Would Be Useful
°I°	[Left blank]	Future groups would benefit from a table with themes and possible topics for “starter” ideas.
°II°	[Left blank]	It was a very good guide.
°III°	[Left blank]	I thought the handbook was very useful.
°IV°	[Left blank]	The Handbook was rather complete in its information.

°V°	Copyright images. I got most frustrated with not being able to find a good image that wasn't under copyright. I suspect that others who used pictures didn't bother much with thinking about if they could use the images they used or not.	[Left blank]
°VI°	[Left blank]	Not that I can think of.
°VII°	The advice that spoke about keeping the blog simple was not exactly helpful. There is a time when it is appropriate to use jargon and complicated concepts within a blog. This is a long form approach to media that isn't limited to the short posts of social media. If it's appropriate for one's intended audience, it can be appropriate when used well.	[Left blank]
°VIII°	[Left blank]	[Left blank]
°IX°	[Left blank]	The handbook was very inclusive. I consider myself quite tech savvy, so most of it was things I understood. I passed it along to my deacon, who was interested in starting a blog. He found it invaluable to get a blog set up.
°X°	[Left blank]	The Handbook led me very well since this was my first experience at blogging. I was a neophyte and the Handbook had all the answers I needed, not only to get me started, but to continue in the mission.
°XI°	[Left blank]	It was very thorough.
°XII°	The handbook had suggested use any online blog; then highly recommended Wordpress. If Wordpress is the best tool for blogging, the handbook should be clear about why use Wordpress.	[Left blank]
°XIII°	[Left blank]	I was pleased with how well matters were covered.

Figure 23. Confusing or Missing Material.

The next item on the survey offered five statements about possible results, and allowed the participants to mark all those with which they agreed. The statements, in the order in which they were presented, read: (1) I have greater confidence in my writing, (2) I have made some new friends, (3) I consider it to have been a waste of time, (4) I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging, and (5) I told everyone I met about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert. Three participants marked none of the blocks, and the remaining ten identified them as below.

Consequences of Blogging

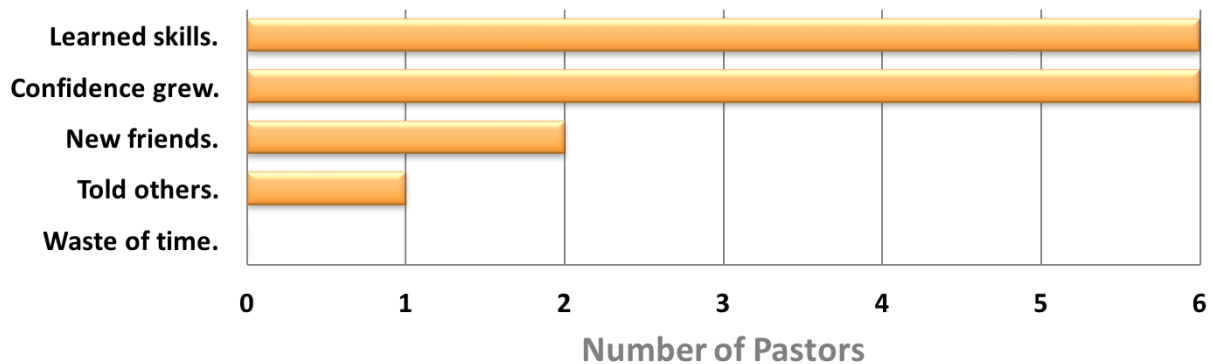


Figure 24. The Consequences of Blogging.

The next question asked whether or not the participants had sought assistance with their blog. Receiving assistance was neither directed nor proscribed in the introductory materials. However, several suggestions in the Handbook itself described the potential benefits of such interaction, and encouraged the possibility. Multiple responses were allowed to the following statements: (1) No, I did not discuss it with others, (2) Yes, I had someone proofread most of my posts before they were published, (3) Yes, I discussed potential subjects with others, (4) Yes, I

have other writers with whom I share my work in progress, and (5) No, but I wish I had someone to dialog with about my blog site.

Assistance with Blogging

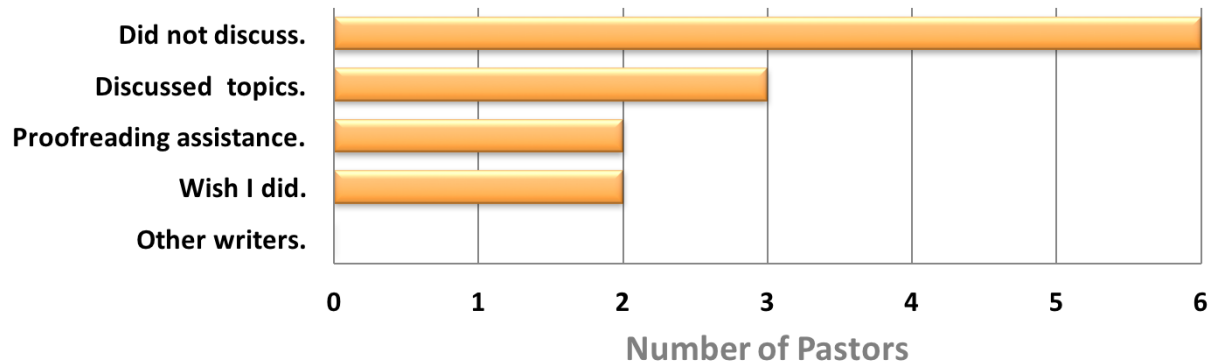


Figure 25. External Assistance with Blogging.

The subsequent question used a Likert scale to assess how each participant thought they would have been affected by “receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger.” The scale ran from “Of negative value” for 1 to “Extremely beneficial” for 7.

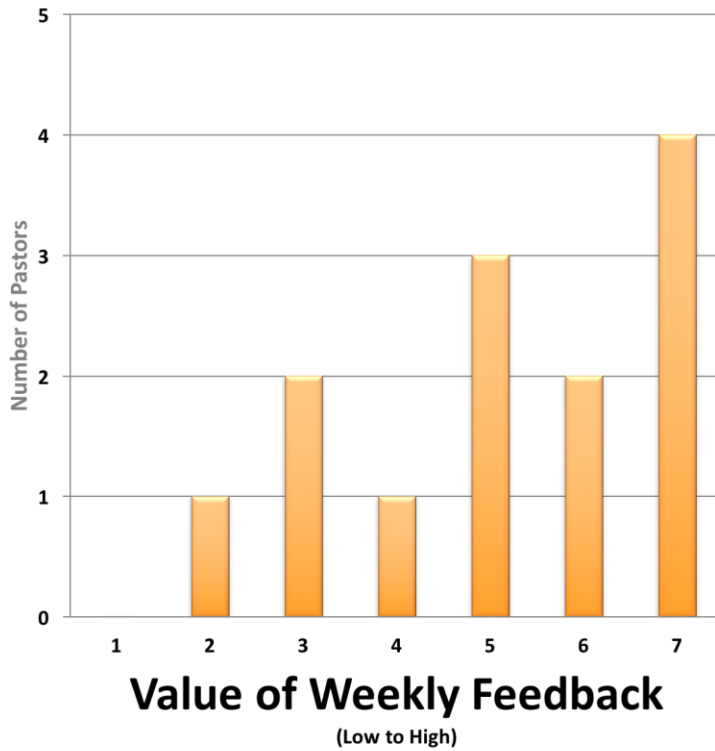


Figure 26. Perceived Value of Weekly Feedback.

Question thirteen asked whether participants intended to continue blogging. This was not posed as a closed yes or no question. To allow for those who had not made a definitive choice *not* to blog, I also allowed for a third option which would allow pastors who were unwilling or unable to continue blogging at the present time an opportunity to indicate they were still open to the activity at some future date: “Not at the present time.”

Intend to Continue Blogging

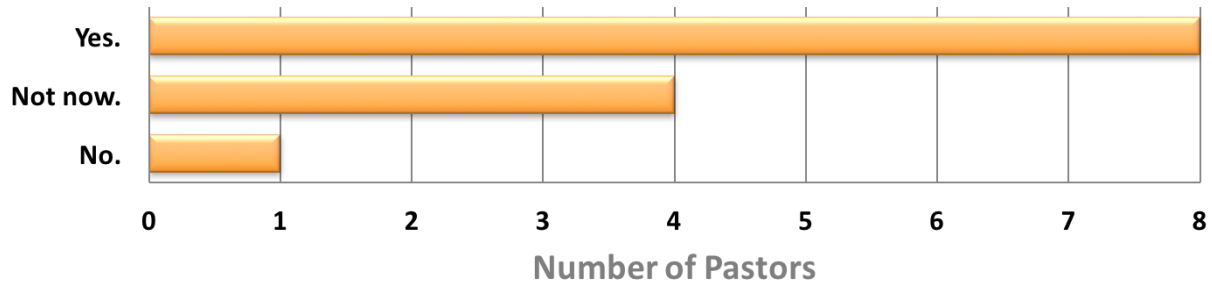


Figure 27. Intention to Continue Blogging.

The Final question in the second survey asked “Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?” As already stated, twelve pastors agreed to this, and the only one who declined reconsidered after I sent him a personal email asking him to reconsider. Thus, 100% of the research group followed through to the third and final element of the research, personal interviews. The questions in the interviews were standardized, but tailored to elaborating on the particular responses of each individual to questions on the two online surveys. An example of this interview template is included in Appendix Two. Full copies of all interviews remain in the possession of the researcher, and pertinent information gleaned from them will be included in the analysis section which follows.

Analysis of the Research

The breadth of the questions posed in the surveys and interview resulted in an excess of data. This was intentional, since I was conscious of the fact that this research constituted a foundational examination of pastoral blogging. Since the research hypothesis was that provision of a Handbook would be helpful to some clergy embarking on this new ministry, we will analyze

first the data that relates directly to that question. Next we will discuss other data relating to the draft Handbook which was provided for participants' use. After that we will more briefly analyze some of the other data which explores pastoral blogging with a wider lens.

Analysis of Initial Survey Responses

The first question to be asked is a simple one. Did the participants actually *read* the Handbook? Seven indicated that they read through the resource before beginning to blog. Six acknowledged that they only skimmed it prior to beginning their blog. All of these did, however, indicate that they read through it during the course of the project. This fact, that all pastors read the Handbook served to validate their observations as to its utility for them individually. One who read it through before starting was particularly thorough. "I even went back to it to re-skim through it after I set up my blog to make sure I hadn't missed anything" (VI).

One participant said his blogging would have been simpler if he had read the Handbook completely at the outset. "The more time I spent with it, the more I'd see. But like with any handbook, you don't really know what's in there until you've tried to use it, and then you come back to it" (XI). Another pastor admitted his blogging experience would have begun more smoothly had he read the Handbook first. "Having read through the Handbook there is a lot of important information that could have been useful to me going in. Having gone through the Handbook again after having skimmed it, I found that some of this information would have been more helpful to have read more thoroughly as I was going to begin" (III). Another said, reading it more fully "would have helped me make more of a kind of a plan of action . . . knowing some of the pitfalls and challenges that people experience. That would have helped me to better foresee those in a way that I could kind of looked out for them" (V). Another who read it superficially said, "I am sure my experience would've been more positive. . . . Just like with

anything, if you have a clear idea of some of the instructions for what you're trying to do [things] tend to go better" (VIII).

One pastor who did read it in full initially found upon rereading that one of its suggestions he had neglected might bear reconsideration. "The thing I didn't do that was strongly suggested was find a blogging mentor. I'm in coaching relationships already . . . [but] for whatever reason, I couldn't tell you why, I chose not to. I just felt that I didn't need a coach for blogging. And it may be something to look at from a different perspective again" (IV).

Some of the digital natives in the study skimmed portions because it was a "timing thing" (IX). Yet, a more complete reading later provided suggestions that extended beyond the technical steps of setting up the blog. "It was very easy to find the stuff I needed, which was one thing I liked about the Handbook. . . . if I had more time I would've incorporated more of the writing from in there . . . But I did think it was very practical" (IX). Another echoed this impression of the Handbook's practicality. "When I read it I thought this is eminently so commonsense that I wish I could've put my name on it. . . . And I appreciated the kind of direction that says 'go ahead'" (XIII).

One pastor said, "I was somewhat familiar with blogging already [but] it's a handy tool to have close by as a resource. . . . So I used it as a resource and looked up the topics and used what I wanted to and read deeper where I wanted to" (XII). Another stated that, in retrospect, his survey scoring of the Handbook's value at an ambivalent four out of seven was due to his preexisting familiarity with blogging. "I can see firsthand how helpful it was to someone unfamiliar with the internet" (IX). The reason this pastor attests to witnessing its effectiveness is because he shared it with "one of my deacons," who "read it word for word." (Since the deacon's participation was not a part of the study, no effort was made to inquire of him as to his opinion of

the resource.)

By contrast, one of the more veteran pastors confessed his commitment to reading the resource fully before beginning, in these words: “For me, being a neophyte in this arena it was very important for me to read and find out what’s going on. Kind of like the guy who skims the instruction manual for putting something together and then wonders why he has parts left over. And the thing doesn’t work. I didn’t want to be that way” (X).

When it comes to expressly identifying the usefulness of the Handbook, we see the numbers in the scale previously reported. Responses on the seven point scale from “Utterly Useless” to “Invaluable,” ranged from 2 to 7. Responses on the top half of the scale predominated, with only four participants choosing ≤ 4 . The median response was 5. The mean was 4.92. The mode was 6 (selected by 38% of participants). This indicates that the majority of the pastors in the study supported the hypothesis that some clergy new to the practice would find a Handbook to be of value to them as they began blogging.

Analysis of Second Survey Responses

The second survey asked how the Handbook might be improved by changes or additions. Consistent with the results just discussed, the majority of comments were positive, such as “It was very thorough” (XI). Another expanded on that, writing, “I was a neophyte and the Handbook had all the answers I needed, not only to get started, but to continue in the mission” (X). These affirmations, expressed by seven (54%) were unsolicited. The anticipated response to the two questions—confusing information, and additional information that could be beneficial—would be either to answer appropriately or leave blank. Ten respondents did, in fact, leave the first answer blank, and one of the three responding did not actually cite problematic information, but actually identified a subject (copyright laws) which he felt needed more elaboration. As to

what additional information could be helpful, while four left the space blank, one said “Not that I can think of” (VI), and one did offer a suggestion related to including “starter ideas” (I), I found it surprising that over half of the participants included a note of affirmation. It is possible that this is because a majority of those involved cited one of the reasons for participating in the MAP as a desire “to support the research of a fellow pastor.” Supporting a fellow pastor was the number one reason cited by nine of the participants, one more than the number who participated to “expand [their] ministry.” This collegial sentiment unexpected in the degree to which it was present, and may actually have potentially distorted the results of the study. The desire to assist a doctoral candidate with his research could possibly have moved a person not sincerely interested in blogging itself, to associate with the study. Such an individual would be unrepresentative of the general populace (of LCMS clergy) who possess little interest in the subject and would ignore the availability of these resources once they are made available. Participation in this research by someone unmotivated to actually blog (for its own sake) may influence in indiscernible ways their evaluation of the usefulness of the Handbook.²⁸⁰

Four specific suggestions were offered by respondents in the survey however, and unsurprisingly three came from those who rated the value of the Handbook at ≤ 4 . The exception

²⁸⁰ In view of this possibility, I reviewed the data for any such indications of a correlation between motivation for participation in the MAP and the reactions to the blogging experience and perception of the Handbook. The only case in which I found a hint of this, however, was with one participant who cited supporting a fellow pastor as his sole motivation for participating. On the scale “How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?” he checked 1 (“Dread it.”). The rest of the pastors ranged from 3 to 6, with a median and mode of 5 and a mean of 4.58. In the first survey this pastor also forecast himself as “highly unlikely” (1) to “continue blogging” after completion of the study. In the second survey he bypassed the “no” response to the question “Do you intend to continue blogging?” Instead he answered “Not at the present time.” Despite these facts, this participant took the research seriously, read and referred to the Handbook, and offered feedback during the surveys and in particularly in the interview. At the interview’s close he offered additional insight into his viewpoint: “I will say just because of my background I was very resistant to starting this blog, but it worked out for me fairly well. And the other thing I might address is the concern of my current District President.” These reservations related to the lasting damage to relationships and reputations that can occur when people carry their disagreements to the internet. “There are ways to address those concerns other than blogging” (IX).

was a commendation from someone rating the value at 5, that “Future groups would benefit from a table with themes and possible topics for ‘starter’ ideas” (I). The three comments from those scoring the value of the Handbook ≤ 4 provide an indication of the specific criticism each participant had for the resource. One cited lack of advice about securing images. “I got most frustrated with not being able to find a good image that wasn’t under copyright” (V). Another criticized the study’s restriction on using the WordPress platform after acknowledging bloggers could “use any online blog . . . If WordPress is the best tool for blogging, the Handbook should be clear about why” (XII). The strongest criticism arose from the individual who rated the manual lowest in value, at 2.

The advice that spoke about keeping the blog simple was not exactly helpful. There is a time when it is appropriate to use jargon and complicated concepts within a blog. This is a long form approach to media that isn’t limited to the short posts of social media. If it’s appropriate for one’s intended audience, it can be appropriate when used well (VII).

All of the recommendations were helpful, and the suggestions directly influenced the revision of the Handbook. The last is particularly interesting, as it validly criticizes a philosophy that underlies the Enchiridion in its original form. It is written with a bias for presentations that address a broader audience in a less parochial language than clergy are often accustomed to using. The truth is that, as this pastor recognized, blogging is also extremely well suited to the detailed presentation of complex concepts that not all readers would be able to comprehend.

Analysis of Interview Responses

During the interview, everyone was asked once again how the Handbook might be improved to be more useful to others. Note that the list of interview questions is provided in Appendix Two. In the context of a personal conversation, participants seemed more inclined to offer a suggestion. Most still declined to identify any of the elements as being confusing or

unnecessary. However, during the interviews most did offer advice about enhancing the Manual. Curiously, one of them illustrated the fact that value is in the eyes of the beholder by commending the very element that had irked VII, the encouragement to treat subjects simply. “I’m especially appreciative of the section on pruning the words. . . . keeping things focused on one topic and talking about it in a way that is easy to understand. A way that is approachable. Rather than trying to do it as an entire theological paper. . . . keeping it simple, you know that ‘kiss’ approach²⁸¹ to things. It’s kind of my approach to writing” (VI).

Several commended the examples of Christian authors illustrating the Handbook and suggested adding to their number. One said, “I think examples like that are always helpful. They help put things in context. . . . I took a seminar class called a Multimedia Reformation. [The leader] pointed out that multimedia, the internet, video presentations in the church, all these things are a continuation of what the hallmark of the Reformation was because the Reformation may not have happened were it not for Gutenberg and the printing press” (II). Another pastor suggested considering inclusion of “testimonies of people who have current blogs and maybe even links to those blogs as examples. I thought something like that would be a good resource for people because being a visual person I went and looked at a bunch of blogs before I started my own” (III). Consistent with his appreciation for the visual, this same pastor praised the historical illustrations.

You have one on the Apostle John and you had his published works, literary message, following his example, and I thought those were little cool theological dimensions to add. Like if this person were blogging today . . . what would they be writing about? And particularly Athanasius, because I love *On the Incarnation*. It’s like I would totally bookmark his blog and read it whenever he added a blog post (III).

One value of the historical illustrations particularly apropos, “for folks who might be

²⁸¹ Kiss is an acronym of “keep it simple, stupid.”

considering blogging but are kind of technophobes” (VI). He continues, saying, “Talking about these examples is good, saying when we have this approach we are not reinventing the wheel. John did this. Walther did this. It’s something that has been done for the life of the church. . . . It’s still the printed word; it’s just not printed on paper anymore” (VI). Even one pastor who said they weren’t “something that I was drawn to” added “But it doesn’t mean that they weren’t of value. I think they were. I find it fascinating that the people of influence were writers. . . . I do understand that people appreciate different things” (XII).

A repeated theme mentioned by several pastors, was pointing readers to existing blogs of merit. “Referencing other blogs . . . particularly blogs written by Lutherans, would be of benefit” (IV). Providing readers with a “broad spectrum” of “valuable blogs to take a look at” would be helpful (VI).

The participant who had recommended in the survey that more material about copyright would be useful elaborated on that in the interview. “It’s not even in the writing itself which I knew was going to be tough for me as well—but simply finding a picture that I could use became a huge frustration for me as well. It was like ‘I’m not even saying anything yet.’ So I believe if you expanded on something like that and offered those sorts of links . . . it would be quite helpful” (V).

One pastor proposed including a sample sheet with a “start date, end date, over three months with two columns [for] tracking your pace.” He qualified this suggestion by stating “this would probably only help someone with my personality” (I). This suggestion was offered in the context of providing assistance with time management challenges. The time required for blogging was recognized throughout the course of the research as one of the innate problems with adding online writing to one’s ministry. Lack of time was the number one reason cited

initially for not having blogged in the past. Nine discrete reasons were identified, with three indicating time was the predominant obstacle. However, when the blogging was completed, nine pastors (69%) indicated “Finding the time to blog” was the greatest challenge they encountered. This is not surprising, since it is a perennial trial for the conscientious pastor. “I have to consciously carve out that time [to blog] or it doesn’t happen” (I). Or, as another pastor put it, “with the week to week deadlines of sermonizing and getting other preparations done, it became another difficulty realizing there was a deadline for a blog I needed to write” (XIII). One participant emphasized the difficulty of carving out this time by describing how it eclipsed the other efforts involved in blogging. “I think that outside of finding the time to write, the other challenges were quite minor. Let me think for a moment about the minor concerns. Maybe . . . trying to find something that would grab a reader’s attention” (XI). Another addressed the challenge beyond simply “finding the raw hours to do it.” He added:

Another part of the issue was finding not just the hours, but the motivation to want to write. Because there were just some points when I felt “yeah, I should, but I don’t feel like it.” And if you wait for the Muse to strike, well, the Muse is a fickle thing and does not always strike when I would prefer (VII).

One pastor cited as his most negative surprise in the survey being “the feeling that no one would be reading what you wrote.” In the interview, when asked about other unexpected results, he cited the chronic requirement to find adequate time. He brought this demand full circle back to his worst surprise, and it is clear how the one amplified the other.

Like anything, it always takes time. And it takes time away from other things you would like to be doing. So, the busier your schedule, the harder it is to set that time aside. But then I’ve had that problem through the years with other things like that. . . . It’s just that, and I guess this gets back to what we already talked about. It’s a balance between how much effort am I putting into this versus the question of whether anyone is going to read it. Will there be any value that somebody gets out of it? (II).

The interviews provided a far richer mix of suggestions for improving the Handbook than the survey format did. All of these suggestions were considered and, due to the decision to

augment the Handbook with a companion website, addressed in a positive manner.

Another worthwhile suggestion that extends beyond the scope of the Handbook—although it does include advice about improving one’s writing skills—addresses developing a literary identity. “Teaching people—I’m not sure how you would do it—but teaching people to find their voice. But maybe, since this is directed to the clergy, most clergy have their voice already. You have your preaching voice” (VI). This concern for providing advice about writing was addressed in the Handbook, and has been expanded. However, it is not a major focus, given the fact that all clergy have already evidenced via their academic credentials that they have writing skills. The first survey asked on a scale just how “confident” the participants were about their writing. Responses somewhat surprising all fell within the narrow range of 3 to 5. They were weighted to the right (greater confidence) side, with a median and mode of 5, and a mean of 4.54. Related to this query was a question about publication history. Naturally nearly all (11) cited writing for congregational newsletters. Several others had written traditional and online articles, and one had written a DMin MAP, while another had successfully completed his PhD.

The participant who was most critical of the effort (VII) offered an additional suggestion for improving the utility of the Handbook. It would require a major re-envisioning of the Handbook, but he suggested it would be more helpful by “treating it in a tangible workbook style, almost having blanks to fill in. . . . I guess I’m not thinking of it so much in terms of a handbook, but in terms of an online media.” As he elaborated on how it could involve forms and “recurrent email” contacts, he appeared to recognize that this would, indeed, be a different sort of project. He ended his response to this question with “I’m not trying to undo your idea.”

Elaborating on his survey response about objecting to downplaying religious jargon, this pastor cited a limitation of his own blog, without noting that the identical imperfection applies to a tool

such as the Handbook itself.

Yes, I'm going to use jargon with this. I'm okay with that and I'm going to explain it and talk about why it's important . . . Not because I'm trying to put people off. . . . So I brought that approach in that this is a place where I can do something for some people, but in the blog I can't be everything for everybody. As much fun as that would be. And so I had, I felt, a compulsion to choose a priority and roll with that (VII).

One participant who commended the comprehensive treatment offered by the Handbook said he could not think of anything to add. When pressed, he did offer: "Perhaps including suggestions for further reading?" (VIII) In a sense, this suggestion has been addressed in the creation of the website, where material can be quickly revised in response to a potential problem that he recognized in his comment. "I know this is probably a risky thing to do [since] you don't know what is going to be written on that blog five years from now. And you don't want to be seen as endorsing something that might be seen as going off the deep end." He concluded with affirmation of the draft version of the Handbook and said, "I can see how it would be great to have a handbook on blogging that was 500 pages long and even more thorough. But it would be rare to find anyone who would read it" (VIII)²⁸² In this context, one pastor said "I appreciated that it was not too wordy. I appreciated it for what it was. It gave me credit that I had half a brain. If it had been too wordy I might not have given it my full attention" (XIII).

Another pastor echoed the notion of pointing novice bloggers to model blogs. This would be "if you had some online version with the links" (IX). He too noted the challenge posed by the transient composition of the blogosphere: "This is one of the hard things about blogs, because they come and go. You hit publish on something and all of a sudden the links are not there anymore."

²⁸² A handbook on *any* topic that required a ream of paper to print, would likely find few readers. However, this pastor will probably be one of those receptive to the expansion of the draft version of the Handbook from forty-

One participant proposed bringing Concordia Publishing House into the venture, suggesting they might “provide a resource for pictures” and other supporting elements. “I think that there is a realization that there are not the kind of resources that could support a Missouri Synod blogger right now” (XII). This same pastor offered the same wish for linked access to supplemental information.

In a technological paper like this I would expect a whole lot of links. I was thinking, *where do I get more information?* . . . I would have three links on every page. . . . Especially if it’s an online resource. Even to have the words defined by a link. The way the internet is set up you have all of this expansive knowledge available. It would probably be creating too much work for you though (XII).

On Matters Explored Beyond the Handbook Itself

As mentioned above, while the scope of the MAP itself was intentionally narrow, in accordance with normal standards, because this research covered virgin territory, I took the liberty to pose questions that might prove useful in suggesting areas deserving future investigation. I cast the net widely, and the data offers some tantalizing hints I may well pursue at a later date. Some of these are noted in what follows, although they are not discussed at length since they are superfluous to the present thesis.

Discoveries Deriving from the Surveys

The incomplete data related to the Myers Briggs personality type means it is impossible to gain any insight from this question. Only 54% (7) of the participants were aware of their type. Nevertheless, it remains of interest to me personally since I saw the tool used with some benefit in the military chaplaincy. If accurate data could be gathered, it might indicate which types of pastors would be most inclined to excel with blogging. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator is, of

seven pages to its final 114 page length.

course, a tool designed to reveal psychological preferences for how people interact with the world. Variations on four dichotomies²⁸³ allow for the identification of sixteen distinctive personality types, or combinations.

Based on Carl Jung’s typological theory, the MBTI is widely used in business contexts. Eighty-nine of the Fortune 100 companies use the instrument.²⁸⁴ Some research has been into personality types and spirituality—including specifically, religious leadership. While there is more current interfaith data available, the most pertinent LCMS MBTI research appears to have been published some years ago by Allen Nauss, who conducted the research while on the faculty at Concordia Theological Seminary.²⁸⁵

The demographics suggest that many of the pastors in what might be referred to as the “prime” of their ministry who are disposed to blogging already are doing so. While the sample size does not allow for drawing any conclusions, it is interesting, but not surprising that the majority of volunteers were either (1) relatively new pastors, still adjusting to the demands of parish ministry, and (2) seasoned pastors whose ministries began when the internet was in its infancy and the pervasiveness of blogging undreamt.

An awareness of the recurring time commitment required by an active blog was a factor in why the participants had not blogged previously. Three indicated it was their primary reason for

²⁸³ The four dichotomies measured in the self-report questionnaire are: extraversion/introversion, sensing/intuitive, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving. In the four-letter shorthand used to identify personality types, the letter “N” represents intuitive, since the “I” indicates introversion.

²⁸⁴ Todd Essig, “The Mysterious Popularity of the Meaningless Myers-Briggs (MBTI),” *Forbes* online, September 29, 2014). <http://www.forbes.com/sites/toddesig/2014/09/29/the-mysterious-popularity-of-the-meaningless-myers-briggs-mbti/#c689ff950adb>

²⁸⁵ On 22 April 2016, in response to my email query of the previous day, the Rev. Dr. Nauss indicated that he has not “kept up with the literature and research with the MBTI” since leaving the seminary for a position at Concordia University in Irvine, California in 1978. He did, however, publish articles using the MBTI as one instrument in analyzing LCMS clergy. See Allen Nauss, “Leadership Styles of Effective Ministry,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 17, no.1 (1989), 59–67 and Allen Nauss, “Personality Stability and Change Among

not blogging. However, at the conclusion of the study nine (69%) cited “finding the time” as the greatest challenge. This suggests that although some new bloggers may be aware of this factor in advance, it proves to be a greater burden than some others possibly realized at the outset. It is reasonable that this contributed to the fact that five (38%) found blogging to be harder than they anticipated while only one (8%) discovered it to be easier than expected. This could naturally discourage them, and increase their likelihood of ceasing to blog. Perhaps additional cautions about realistic time expectations at the beginning can influence pastors in ways that encourage them to wait until the right moment for them to start?

On the matter of subjects chosen for blogs it was not surprising that the majority (nine, 69%) related to what would be considered “ministry-related” themes. Without examining individual posts it is unknown what percent of the posts by the other four pastors who planned to address “eclectic” subjects were in actuality also relating to “ministry” considerations. Incidentally, only three (23%) ended up writing eclectic posts; the other individual posted sermonic material instead.

Inadequate information was gathered to even hint at the possible value of prior publication experience as it might correlate to success in blogging. Nevertheless, I suspect that it, along with the pastor’s confidence in their writing alongside their subjective emotions related to the act of writing, would indeed correlate to their enthusiasm for blogging and their consequent perception of success. This is unproven, but logical, since most human beings approach tasks they enjoy more readily than those they deem burdensome.

I had asked the participants to *rank* five “expected consequences” in the first survey, but failed to allow for a comparison of the post-blogging results by posing the question in a different

Ministerial Students,” *Religious Education* 67, no. 6 (1972), 469–75.

way in the second survey. If I had the opportunity to redo it, I would have worked to phrase it differently so the data would line up more clearly. My desire, however, was not to rank the results so much as to identify all of the consequences experienced by participants. Thus, we see an agreement between the fact that seven pastors considered gaining new confidence in their writing as being the most likely result. Six cited this as true. Similarly, ten ranked appreciating the fact that they had gained a new ministry skill as the first or second most likely result. Six cited this as true. None regarded their participation as a “waste of time.”

Blogging is one of those activities which can be a solitary endeavor. Some prefer it that way. Others will benefit from involving others in their online writing. The parameters of the study did not stipulate anything related to interacting with others in regards to their blogging. Accordingly, it comes as little surprise that eight (62%) did not discuss it at all with others. This includes two (15%) who agreed with the statement “No, but I wish I had someone to dialog with about my blog.” Three (23%) discussed potential subjects” with others. And, despite being encouraged to do so by suggestions in the Handbook, only two (15%) had someone assist them as a proofreader. It would be fascinating to explore in the future and compare the ramifications of approaching blogging as a totally individualistic activity versus something which involves other actors in various roles (e.g. proofreading, offering feedback, encouraging faithfulness to one’s chosen publishing pace).

The next question broached on this issue by asking the participants to identify on a 1–7 scale how “receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger would have affected” them. Most leaned towards a favorable view of the prospect, with only one responding with a 2, and two with a 3. Meanwhile, four responded that it would have been “extremely valuable.” The range was 2–7. The median was 5. The mode was 7. And the mean was 5.15, suggesting that

there might be some benefit to new pastoral bloggers if they had an experienced mentor helping them get started.

The final survey asked for their “greatest positive” and “most negative” surprises. Those responses were cited during the individual interviews, and they were asked if they could provide an addition example. Among the positive revelations were:

- “That people actually wanted to follow it” (I). From the initial survey: “Hearing from others that they had gained some sense of care or insight from what was written” (I).
- “My wife really enjoyed it [and now] she thinks that I should be a writer” (II).
- “It sparked my interest in writing more poetry” (III).
- “It clarified my views on things” (IV). From the survey: “Feedback came from unexpected places.”
- “Folks all across the United States, and even a couple international folks, were reading the blog. And I thought, ‘wait a minute, I’m just a parish pastor from [city]. . . Having a lot of folks reacting positively to what I thought were just my random thoughts seemed like that old *Saturday Night Live* sketch with the “Deep Thoughts”²⁸⁶ (VI).
- “The focus of getting out my thoughts in a new way” (VII).
- “It was easier than I thought it was going to be to get it set up and looking nice” (IX).

²⁸⁶ “Deep Thoughts by Jack Handey” ran on Saturday Night Live during the eighties and nineties. The real Jack Handey, who was a writer for the show, has a website dedicated to his most famous work: <http://www.deepthoughtsbyjackhandey.com/category/deepthoughts/>. Handey was not shy about religious subjects, as the following thought reveals. “If God dwells inside us, like some people say, I sure hope He likes enchiladas,

- After blogging, “I was able to come back to my next task on my agenda feeling refreshed” (X).
- “How quickly the post could spread through social media” (XI).
- “It permits the blogger to just go in directions wherever they would like to go” (XII).
- “I now know this can be done . . . and believe it can be of use to bless and encourage my brethren (and their members)” (XIII).

Among the negative surprises were:

- “The difficulty [it was] to carve out the time to write twice a week” (I).
- “The question of whether anyone is going to read it. Will there be any value that somebody gets out of it?” (II).
- “Wondering how you get those people most familiar with you to read your blog” (III).
- “The time aspect was the biggest surprise and it has been a continuing hang-up” (IV).
- “After I got into it, I realized I was struggling to come up with stuff that would be interesting for other people to read and talk about. And I thought, ‘oh, I’m not as interesting as I thought I was’” (V).
- “The only thing for me that would even remotely approach being negative was . . . feeling a deadline . . . the blogging experience as a whole was a very positive experience” (VI).

because that’s what He’s getting.”

- “The desire to be creative and fresh. It fed into my desire to be a people pleaser and my pride” (VII).
- “Not getting much feedback was one aspect that was kind of challenging” (VIII).
- “You get the heresy hunters that are out there . . . I’ve seen that happen [where people] read it out of its context” (IX).
- “There was just the challenge with the time” (X).
- “Personal frustration with not having more time to devote to this . . . feeling torn between the people I minister to in face-to-face relationships and people I might be able to help from a distance” (XI).
- “I tend to fill my schedule far beyond what I am capable of completing” (XII).
- “How high a priority it must become to blog” (XIII).

Discoveries Deriving from the Personal Interviews

The interviews allowed for more complex questions to be posed. A number of these related to theological issues that are less well suited to the survey format. Some of these questions related to the biblical and historical considerations discussed in earlier chapters. For example, I asked “What relationships, if any, do you see between your preaching and your online writing ministries?” This was designed to discover whether the participants discerned any connections between the two, especially in the sense of the two being different manifestations of their Ministry of the Word. As we discussed earlier, Martin Luther’s emphasis on the oral proclamation of the Gospel has sometimes led people to deprecate the written proclamation of good news. “Perhaps no one understood the oral nature of the Christian message better than Luther, who somewhere claims that ‘the Gospel should not be written but screamed’ and

promulgated a confessional definition of the gospel that totally bypassed its written character.”²⁸⁷

In response to this question, one pastor said he sometimes found himself “expounding on an illustration or one of the facets from Sunday’s message” (I). Another saw a clear distinction. His posts “had ties not so much to [his] preaching, but to [his] catechesis. . . . the connection wasn’t so much with the preaching as it was with instruction and Bible study” (VII).

One participant noted extensive parallels, since they are “serving the same function . . . both are a proclamation of the Word. Both are a proclamation of Truth” (II). He elaborated on them being primarily “unidirectional,” while allowing that in the pulpit “you do get some immediate feedback in terms of expressions,” and when blogging “people can at least make comments” (II). One senior pastor said over the years “my preaching has become much more conversational in tone” (VI). He noted this as a similarity, since “I try to bring that same sort of conversational speaking style to the writing style that I use on the blog” (VI).

One pastor who differed from most in feeling a gulf existed between the two activities put it this way: “I don’t really see too much connection. . . . It was more of me in the blogs, I guess is one way to put it. Where in preaching I’m more cognizant of speaking on behalf of God” (V). Although he was the sole person to express this, I believe that most people would agree with the observation that in blogging we usually feel a little more liberated to shoot from the hip in terms of injecting more of our own personalities into the effort. This, of course is in direct contrast to the reservations that some bloggers have about publishing their words because of the *permanence* of the medium. As one participant identified in the first survey, his greatest concern in participating in the research was “To not get paranoid that whatever is written is ‘out there’

²⁸⁷ Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 11.

permanently” (X). Even today, not all sermons are recorded, much less podcast. On the other hand, once posted to the internet, it is nearly impossible to retrieve and amend one’s words.²⁸⁸

One participant developed a great appreciation for the complementary nature of preaching and blogging.

I think that there’s an obvious connection . . . as you’re meditating on the texts for the week and preparing to preach, your online writing ministry gives you an opportunity to explore different connections between the text and the world, which either might not be appropriate, or might be limited based on time in the preaching context . . . With blogging you have greater creative license. So I think they go together well and they can build off of one another (VIII).

Another pastor said in response to another question that blogging “is an interesting process and I found it helpful while I was preparing my sermons” (VI). One pastor who acknowledged the complementariness of the two also identified the significant differences in terms of their audience.

I tried not to—and I appreciated what you said in your Handbook about this—I tried not to just reproduce sermons. I didn’t want to just take my sermon manuscripts and turn them into blogs. I tried to make my sermons directed especially to the people right there in the congregation who I know and visit with. I want to address their issues. But if I’m going to write online, I have to try to write to a much broader audience, and I am trying to think of nonbelievers who might be reading it, or Christians from other traditions, so those are things I’m taking into consideration more in a blog post (XI).

Another pastor who affirmed a strong relationship between preaching and blogging by saying “the connection between the two is obviously that the Word is going out” referred directly to an element in the Handbook.

I do think that blogging certainly provides a great opportunity. Just as you commented in the handbook, I believe Martin Luther would’ve been a blogger. In a sense he really was, although his blogging was a hard copy with all of those guys

²⁸⁸ While it is a simple thing to edit and update the files on an individual’s own website, if the text appears on a different site, it is far more complex. And, with the rapid automated caching on pages on the internet, it may be a rather moot point since theoretically the words may remain on the worldwide web indefinitely.

taking notes and transcribing them for him. So I do see a connection between the two (X).

During the interviews, I asked the participants what sort of advice they would offer to a pastor considering blogging. Several pastors confronted the inner voice that tells pastors to wait until some day in the future to start (a day that may never arrive). “I would say, ‘number one, just do it,’ and ‘number two, look up this very manual, because it’s a great place to start.’ And I’m serious about that” (II). “Consider it prayerfully. Do it deliberately” (IV). “I would warn them about comparing themselves to other people who are writing. I think that is one thing that holds you back. . . . After all, I don’t write as well as Bonhoeffer did, so why should I ever try to write a book? I mean, who does?” (III). “Just do it,” was the suggestion of one pastor (VI) who then launched into a lengthy story about how he had allowed fears of “flame wars” to prevent him from blogging, which he had wanted to do for years. “I had this concern about how other folks are going to respond. This is going to turn into a flame war or I’m going to get some Doctor of Theology who wants to nitpick” (VI).

Several advised making it a regular part of one’s schedule, so that it does not get shunted aside in a busy schedule. “It’s just like Bible study and personal devotion time. If you are going to grow, you need to carve out the time” (I). “I would say plan ahead as much as possible. . . . Give it a bit of an overall direction to provide steppingstones to follow towards that goal” (V).

One pastor approached the question from a pastoral care angle. “The advice, or rather the questions I would begin with, ‘why do you want to blog? What do you hope to get out of that effort?’ And offer a little bit of pastoral concern like ‘is this something you want to be of benefit for the church, or is this something you want to do for your own benefit? . . . to feed your ego?’” (VII).

Several offered practical advice to improve the odds that the prospective blog would be

successful. “I would kind of echo some of the stuff I recall from the Handbook. Make sure you know what your topic is, and your intended audience . . . Try to make it purposeful” (XI). “Come from a perspective that makes people stop and think. Ask a question . . . begin it with a hook to draw them in, rather than just saying ‘this is my opinion’” (X). “Find somebody who has done it before and [seek] a mentoring relationship” (VIII). “Keep it positive and build up people and the church. If you’re not going to use it for that, then don’t do it” (IX).

One offered a very practical suggestion for pastors who may not enjoy wholehearted support from their congregations. “I would encourage him to share with his elders that he was considering blogging and see if they’re in favor of him doing it” (XIII). He elaborated on this caution, one that unsurprisingly comes from a veteran pastor: “I think it would be beneficial for a pastor to suggest to his elders . . . that he will do it on his own time, just to take away any kind of concern and so they could use that in his defense with any congregational members who might say that ‘pastor just spends all of his time on the computer blogging,’ because no good comes of that” (XIII).

One pastor inadvertently raised to my attention how we need to realize a pastor’s attitude towards blogging may be directly affected by something extraneous to blogging itself. “Writing wasn’t something that I wanted to be doing . . . because I have had some neck and shoulder issues for about ten years now . . . and I think that problem would reflect in my response about not really enjoying blogging. Simply the posture required to write aggravates it” (V).

A final suggestion may sound discouraging when offered at the outset of a new blogging ministry. However, it can also be a liberating word that inspires a prospective blogger to give it a shot. “I would give people permission not to succeed at blogging, but I would encourage them to try it” (XII). This specific comment provides an example of how the interviews influenced the

revision of the Handbook. It encouraged me to elaborate on the few suggestions I had included about periodically assessing our blogging and asking the question about when a particular blog has run its course, whether we should leave it fallow for a season, or whether we should plant a new “crop” (theme or subject to explore).

Related somewhat to the previous question of similarities between preaching and pastoral blogging, I asked the participants for strategies they considered the most productive for pastors sharing the Gospel online. Some of the advice reinforced general principles about blogging, but were offered within the specific context of how we can best communicate the Gospel through an online writing ministry. Several mentioned that prospective bloggers need to be conscious of the time commitment, and that “the Muse may be moving now, but are you prepared to continue on when the Muse stops moving?” (VII). Other practical advice included: “Definitely speak terms that are relevant today. Learning the language” (I). One pastor volunteered “I think it was something you said in the Handbook,” and then offered the following advice far more eloquently than expressed in the Handbook. “Try not to use jargon, or simply remember what it was like not to know all of this stuff. Try to approach it with fresh eyes, not just assuming that the reader knows what you’re talking about” (XI).

Continuing in this practical vein, there were other useful suggestions. “We should move more towards bringing in some of the videos. Things like that . . . because of how short peoples’ attention spans are getting. If they continue along the traditional lines of blogging as word-based, there need to be images and links and stuff for the same reason” (V). “One thing you mentioned in the manual was brevity. If you’re sharing the gospel online it’s something that non-Christians or people who don’t know who Jesus is, will appreciate” (IX). He wisely advised reminding new bloggers that they need not do it all themselves. “Also, use additional resources and link to other

articles. So if you're talking about the topic of the Trinity, for example, something complex that some people would have a problem with, you can bring that up and link to other articles written by people who explain it perhaps better than you could" (IX). "Find a particular topic that you are the most excited about, and go with that. . . . And definitely get another set of eyes on what you write before you post it" (III). Another individual agreed with the first part, saying "definitely choose an area of interest," but qualified it with "ask the Lord where he wants you to blog, in terms of subject" (XII).

Another pastor who expressly addressed spiritual concerns such as the one just mentioned, said: "Very much in terms of preaching too: Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. If your blog doesn't have the cross in it, and forgiveness and God's love, then you haven't done your job in blogging" (IV). He was adamant about this, insinuating that if a blog was about anything other than Jesus and the Gospel, it might not deserve to be labeled "pastoral blogging."

Several participants addressed the tone of the blog, which was alluded to in the previous quotation. The first suggestion he offered was practical. "Be clear, direct and focused on a specific topic each time you write. If you go out and try to do a whole shotgun blast and cover everything at once, it loses focus . . . like when you write a sermon" (VI). He then offered this second piece of advice: "*Offer it*, instead of forcing it. . . . Set it out there to be discussed without being a competition [where] one person is going to win and one person is going to lose" (VI). "First and foremost I think, is to remember the patience and tact that comes with 'always having an answer.' Remembering that I'm *talking* to people . . . not in a boxing match" (VII). "Try to not get sucked into some of the arguing that goes on in the comment sections of blogs or twitter. Try to stay positive" (VIII). He echoed a message from the Handbook with the hope of getting readers "connected to an actual congregation where they can meet with people face-to-face, and

get plugged in and involved. Using the blog maybe as a gateway to our congregations rather than a standalone thing. Although the Holy Spirit can certainly work through a standalone blog itself, so I would want to limit it” (VIII).

In the context of intentionally sharing the Gospel online as part of one’s mission, the most concrete advice on this subject was: “Once they’ve determined that this is how they are going to blog and share the Word, they need to make it a part of their schedule . . . literally, on their calendar” (X). Another pastor advised against getting caught up in “political” matters. “What is the blog? Is it Christ against culture? Is it Christ within culture? . . . I think a lot of pastors would be Christ against culture. And I don’t want to be coming across that way. . . . We don’t want it to appear that we are here for an earthly purpose. We have a higher calling. One that reaches the hearts of people with the Gospel” (XII).

One pastor was particularly modest. “I don’t really know, since I’m still a newbie at this. I hope to learn much more” (XIII). And a final participant indicated he had nothing additional to suggest, beyond using the Handbook. He reported he had done additional research on the subject but did not have anything to offer during the interview that was not already directly addressed in the Handbook. “Yeah, I googled that and researched it a bit. I would say the things I saw all reinforced what the manual presented. I don’t remember getting anything new out of that search” (II).

Surveying the LCMS Terrain

Every religious body possesses its own history, culture, emphases, strengths and (to be perfectly honest) vulnerabilities. One of the assumptions of this research was that Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod clergy were not identical to their ministerial counterparts in other denominations. We have already noted this. Some of the distinctives, such as an all male clergy,

are evident. Likewise, doctrinal positions are displayed for all the world to see, such as a commitment to the authority of the Scriptures and our uncompromising commitment to the sanctity of the lives of unborn children. Others are less visible, and not in fact, universal. They are more cultural, and influenced most by each individual's personal past and theological training. These would include things such as preferences about the jot and tittle of liturgical matters, and theologically-based approaches to evangelism, catechesis and youth ministry. Because of the uniqueness of each faith tradition, I considered it valuable to begin to survey or explore the theological landscape of pastoral blogging within the LCMS.

I posed two questions intended to examine the perception of these thirteen pastors about the subject at hand. The qualitative research may be of some value to future researchers, and even to those of us reflecting on this subject today. The responses to the questions will be intermingled in the analysis which follows. The specific questions were: (1) Contrasting your identity as an LCMS pastor with clergy of other Christian denominations, in what ways might you expect your blogging ministries to be similar? and in what ways do you think the two ministries might differ? (2) What might be the results of having more members of the LCMS writing online?

Comparing LCMS Blogs with Those of Other Denominations

One pastor cited as a similarity "that we would both be utilizing modern technology to proclaim our position, the truth as we see it" (II). Yet he immediately identified that as a superficial similarity where he and another pastor could only "talk about the technical aspects." He continued: "What I see would be different would be our whole Lutheran heritage being strongly Word and Sacrament. . . . We always go back to the sacraments, and the means of grace overall, as the means through which God today accomplishes his purposes in us" (II). Another suggested that a similarity would be in "increasing the umbrella of people they could reach with"

their message” (III). Echoing the previous respondent, he added that the difference would likely be due to “the quality of the theology” combined with the reduced importance placed by some denominations on the doctrinal expressions of their pastors. He said:

I am very careful what I put on my blog in that sense because I know that in the LCMS you can get hammered down pretty quickly if you post something that even resembles anything that is not doctrinally accurate. . . . I am also representing the LCMS and I do not want to do anything to cause any controversy for the denomination which I serve.

Similar goals would unite most clergy bloggers in the mind of some research participants. Both LCMS and other pastoral bloggers “would be trying to present ourselves and speak in ways that we are heard as people who follow Christ. That no matter what our topic was, ministry or autos or computers or anything else, we would still try to bring Christ in some way into the picture” (V). Just *how* that was done would vary. “We would have [theological] aspects where we would disagree like with how faith comes to us. Perhaps they would mention in the passing comments ‘the day I chose Jesus’ or something. Whereas a Missouri Synod clergyman would never say something like that” (V).

This was a common pairing of similarities and differences, sharing a common purpose, but a different theological stance. “We would share an interest in getting the Gospel and Christian teaching out on a larger platform, and longing to do it in a creative way” (XI). However, “We belong to a denomination where we tend to hold each other accountable more so than I see in other denominations that are more loosely organized” (XI). Because of this, we are “more conscious” about how conscientious we are in teaching and writing doctrinally sound material.

One participant said “The obviously tongue-in-cheek answer is that they both use the internet [but] thinking in terms of a religious blog, they are both used not to serve the pastor themselves, but to serve the people with the Gospel” (VII). This same pastor noted two major

differences. “I, as an LCMS pastor tend to focus very directly and concretely and completely on Christ [in contrast to] someone’s sort of testimony.” The next observation was not theological. “I also have noticed that non-LCMS folks tend to do web stuff better . . . and, frankly, I would expect a non-LCMS person to have a cleaner and more focused and flashier blog than a lot of LCMS pastors would” (VII).

One participant said that the extent of similarity would only reach so far as the other clergyperson was willing to base their messages “squarely on the Word of God and not on ‘this is what I think,’ or ‘this is what so and so says’” (X). Correspondingly, he described the greatest difference being that “we bring so much theology and Scripture to the table, where so many others are more feelings based” (X).

One younger pastor pointed out a difference in “the sort of ecclesiastical supervision we LCMS pastors have. And it’s valid. If you publish things that are out there you need to be writing stuff that is good. But I suppose there are some people who want to write about controversial topics and I don’t think for LCMS pastors that’s necessarily wise” (IX).

One “idealistic” pastor said, “My hope would be that they would be similar in that they would be pointing to Christ” (VIII). This was a common theme of the participants. Another said, “Ideally pastors of other denominations would be focused on Jesus and his love as well” (IV). But he added that the differences would be extremely pronounced “when writing about things in a liturgical context . . . particularly within the context of the church year” (IV). Similarly, another difference cited was the “very distinct language” of confessional Lutherans which can serve as a barrier if “it sounds like we’re trying to confuse them” (I).

“I would hope the ultimate goal, whether you’re LCMS or clergy within another Christian denomination, that the ultimate goal is spreading the proclamation of the Gospel. For without

sharing the good news, how does Paul put it, ‘we’re nothing more than clanging gongs’” (VI). However, he acknowledged that we don’t always understand the “Law Gospel distinction” in the same way, and one difference would certainly be “the synergism piece that often creeps [into] other Christian blogs” (VI). Another pastor said, “Something that would make ours distinctively Lutheran, is our focus on how you get there. As Lutherans we obviously place a heavy focus on Word and Sacrament and I think sometimes other Protestants have a little bit more of a mystical view of things” (VIII).

The Potential Impact of Increasing the Number of LCMS Bloggers

When it comes to predicting the impact of increased blogging by LCMS pastors, the responses ran a wider gamut than I anticipated. Most were optimistic, as I had expected. The majority, however, were slightly wary, and a couple of the pastors were actually concerned about problems that might arise. One of the positive responses began “I think some pastors would actually become better writers. Maybe we would have a united message that is reaching people with the good news of Jesus” (XII). He added that it might provide some “balance” to “rude posts and all kinds of negative things out there where people are mistreating one another online.” He concluded with the conviction that because of our Gospel message of mercy and grace we can potentially raise the visibility of the Synod and “speak about the matters that people are dealing with in their daily lives and draw some of them into the Christian faith” (XII).

One pastor provided a response to the result of increased LCMS blogging with a thought I had anticipated. “I think it would not only give more visibility for the LCMS and highlight our denomination, but I think it would also help good doctrine to get out there. That would help expose people to the Gospel. . . . And more guys doing that, getting that sort of truth out there would be beneficial for everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike” (III). Another agreed that

“It would give us a better social presence. Particularly, it would be a great way for us to share with others what the *solas* mean and how they are a touchstone for faith and life” (IV).

Another respondent affirmed the benefit of allowing geographically distant LCMS pastors in terms of “the sharing of ideas ministry-wise” (IX). He expressed general confidence in blogs written by his fellow pastors. “I know because we are LCMS and share a confessional standard that [especially with someone he knew and trusted] I could pass on to my congregation.” The danger he sees posed by the accessibility of the blogging platform is that “there are certain blogs that are out there . . . just to tear down. . . . There’s no conversation. It’s so easy to say something online about somebody or something or express some stance without checks and balances” (IX). Agreeing with the positive benefit of supporting other pastors and laity, one interviewee said “positives would include camaraderie, being encouraged by other brothers and pastors” (XI). The possible danger he noted is that as a blogging pastor you might “pour yourself into this platform as opposed to the face-to-face ministry we have” (XI). This concern was voiced by another pastor who was uncertain of the results of increased blogging due to the fact that “there are plenty of people, or some at least, who think it is just another waste of time for pastors to be sitting at their computers when they could be out talking face-to-face to people. I feel that pressure all of the time” (XIII).

Another pastor who saw pros and cons suspected that the results would likely vary based on the age of the LCMS members who saw the blogs. “For some of the Missouri Synod members, especially the older ones, they would probably look at it from a negative perspective” due to the negative blogs they have seen in the past. “Some of our younger pastors and congregations would see it in a more positive way. More of the younger folk are communicating in this way now” (X). I find this was a curious thought, and wonder whether there is any merit to

it.

In posing the question, I had anticipated a strong and consistent response that indicated more LCMS blogging would be a good thing. No, a wondrous thing. I was somewhat surprised by the candid responses from several pastors that were less enthusiastic.

One pastor stated the opinion that some of the LCMS blogging that already appears is hypercritical. If more pastors were blogging, “Some people would get mad. . . . You have got folks among the LCMS who are very critical of anyone who doesn’t hold the same opinions as they do. . . . If we had more people blogging we would have more people who would be making themselves open to criticism by the more extreme, conservative sides of our brotherhood” (I). I followed up that response with the question “Would there be any positive consequences?” The response was offered with humor, but was serious. “Well sure. Folks would find out that not everyone who’s a Missouri Synod Lutheran is a jerk” (I). He then related how he, as a Reserve chaplain in the armed forces has people who greet him warmly as a chaplain, but become defensive when they learn he is LCMS. “The conversation ends there, because they’ve run into enough of our brothers who don’t have a heart for anyone else” (I).

Another, less critical, participant responded, “I think there could be good and bad consequences. Among the good would be the more we share the Word, the promise that Isaiah voiced, that God’s Word would not return void, it will accomplish his purposes, more and more” (II). He included another benefit, “that for people that are not likely to step into a church . . . there’s this idea of a possibility of touching them” (II). The negative byproduct he cited was not linked to the LCMS, but to the digital medium itself, and the examples of televangelists. “The more that we use that impersonal, non-face-to-face, indirect form of ministry, are we encouraging them not to be gathering together in worship and actively participating in the local

congregation?”²⁸⁹ (II). Another pastor touched on this potential hazard, advising, “if you link your blog to your congregational website that might give people an idea of what your congregation values. . . . It would on the whole have a positive effect” (VIII).

Considering another cautious response, one pastor ventured the rather shocking response that “My personal opinion is that it would create even more pandemonium than we already have” (VII). He elaborated on his fears.

Actually, I entered into this with mixed feelings because there are some Lutheran blogs a kind of cult following. And several times a year there is usually a pretty good internet flap over a blog post here or there. . . . Knowing the sensationalism that occasionally comes out of sources like them, is frankly why I haven’t blogged before now. . . . I guess I have one more negative, and I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be a downer. This one is actually institutional in the LCMS. In that the LCMS does want to occasionally exercise control over social media and I am not convinced that . . . the staff of the International Center really are good at the use of blogs or other social media.

His response continued for some time and he concluded, “Sorry, I’ve got a lot of cynicism built up inside. I didn’t mean to save it all for today though” (VII).

One optimistic participant said blogging by more LCMS leaders “would be a wonderful thing because people would hear the free grace of the Gospel, unhindered, unearned and yet it is ours as a free gift. Even for the most despicable of sinners. . . . I think we can get that message out with such grace and joy, it blows my mind that we can get that the LCMS Lutheran presence isn’t well known out in the public sphere. . . . I think having more LCMS clergy blogging could

²⁸⁹ The recognition of the importance of connecting readers with *real* congregations has been noted at several points in this MAP research has validated the idea that some people regard the internet as a perfectly acceptable alternative to a local church. One researcher found a number of fundamentalist Christians content to fellowship with kindred believers online. “Believing that they were acting in a way much like ‘first-century Christians,’ one of my respondents told me that he and his wife used the Internet to enact their ‘ekklesia.’ Rejecting the need for religious institutions in favor of vernacular authority, he described how ‘it’s absolutely viable for the church, if you understand what I mean by that: the ekklesia; to meet on the Internet.’ Ritual deliberation is the primary form this ‘meeting’ takes in vernacular Christian fundamentalism, and that deliberation is an extension of the ancient Christian tradition of koinonia or ‘fellowship.’ This emphasis on fellowship has proved readily adaptable to the online environment.” Robert G. Howard, *Digital Jesus: The Making of a New Christian Fundamentalist Community*

only benefit the conversation” (VI).

All of the participants displayed fairly sophisticated and complex reasoning in their analysis of blogging as a ministry. They qualified many of their remarks, acknowledging that depending on countless variables outside of their control and awareness, results could vary. They recognized that their experiences were their own, and the contexts for pastoral blogging would be as singular as the uniqueness of every pastor. Yet, they were able to assess their experiences and studies to the point where they made many persuasive generalizations. This awareness of complexity is evident in the final comment we will consider in this chapter.

One pastor cited the fact that the words we write have the potential to spread widely, as something that could prove good or bad. His comments affirm one of the primary reasons I was moved to undertake this study—for the benefit of God’s kingdom and the individual people for whom Jesus offered up his life.

“Sometimes these things can go viral. So just trying to use logic here, if you have more people writing, you have a greater potential for more things to go viral. As long as they are not taking super extreme positions, ones that are in the gray areas of Scripture, that would be good. As long as they are focusing on things like justification, grace through faith, the *solas*, and all of that great stuff that would really be for Lutherans a bit mundane, it could actually get the truth of the Gospel to people who have never heard it communicated that way before. Whether it goes viral or just reaches two or three people, it would be good” (V).

A Final Consideration

At the outset of this research I noted two factors related to the limited demographic data garnered. One was the wide geographic spread of the participants. This was good to see, although geographic diffusion is arguably a less significant feature to find in the LCMS than it would be in a denomination with a polity that does not promote the idea of a single clergy roster

on the Internet (New York: New York University, 2011), 11.

that unites pastors wherever they serve. For example, in some bodies, pastors' primary association is through a diocese, district or geographic region. Although I have not read research on the subject, one would assume that this would promote regional identities or cultures for the pastors.²⁹⁰ This would presumably be exaggerated in the more loosely aligned or congregational organizations where pastors are left to find their own "vacancies" when they desire a new position. I have spoken to such clergy who bemoan the fact that it is difficult to even learn of other opportunities beyond their own field of vision. Perhaps in light of these factors, I was unable to identify any connection between the data and the location of the various ministries.

On the other hand, when examining the data by the second criterion—number of years since ordination—there was a modest correlation. We have noted that the group divided almost naturally into two pastoral experience groups, those serving ≤ 7 years (8) and those who have served ≥ 20 years (5). When viewing the responses between the two "groups," there were four potential findings. Since this MAP is a qualitative research project, there is not claim to statistical significance. It is interesting, however, to see a slight correlation between this factor and the responses of the participants to a pair of subjects. In addition, these are relatively unsurprising relationships we might naturally posit even without research.

When indicating confidence in their writing skills in the initial survey, it appeared that the experienced clergy were more confident in their writing skills. This is no surprise, since most skills increase over time and through practice. On the 1–7 rating scale, the mean for the younger

²⁹⁰ The parallel that exists to a debatable degree in the LCMS would be how certain districts gain different reputations for particular qualities, notably theological emphases such as the recent Synodical debates about lay ministry as exercised in the Lay Deacon program. It is possible that, over time, pastors with particular doctrinal positions might gravitate towards certain districts, but the ability to call any pastor on the clergy roster subtly works against a particular locale becoming ingrown. Similarly, the church's vicarage system normally exposes seminarians to contexts significantly different than that in which they were raised. Furthermore, the placement of pastors in their first calls by the Council of Presidents promotes a system where clergy frequently serve in locales far from their place of origin.

pastors was 4.25 while all five older pastors selected the number 5.

On the question of whether or not participants would find weekly feedback helpful, the older pastors were measurably more receptive to that prospect than the less experienced clergy. The mean response for the former was 4.75, while it was a quite strong 5.8 for the latter. I found it positive that after many years of parish ministry, clergy were so receptive to receiving advice and assistance with expanding their ministry.

On the question of whether blogging proved to be more or less difficult than the participants had expected, there were some more interesting results, in terms of revealing a difference between the two groups. The veteran pastors appear to have been much more realistic (and accurate) in their expectations. Sixty percent (3) said it was about as challenging as they anticipated. One found it harder, and one found it easier than they expected. (This was the sole response for “easier.”) The younger pastors, leaned more towards the opposite experience, with fifty percent (4) finding it comparable to expectations and half surprised to find it *more difficult* than they anticipated. While the reason for this is unknown, it could be due to the fact that being digital natives they expected it to be something they could fairly easily incorporate into their lives. Meanwhile, the digital immigrants assumed from the outset that it was not going to be a simple process.

The final comparison to be made between the two groups relates to the value they placed on the Handbook itself. Using the 1–7 rating scale, the mean for the newer pastors was 4.65. The senior group, with a mean of 5.4, apparently deemed the Handbook to be of greater value to them. This may be due, as well, to the greater familiarity with modern technology possessed by some of the younger clergy. This would be supported by some of their comments in the interview suggesting they needed to lean on it less because of preexisting familiarity with the

internet. One pastor, who chose the “neutral” 4 to assess the value of the Handbook, indicated this expressly in his interview. This was the pastor who shared it with his “older, retired” deacon. “The reason I said it was of moderate value is because a lot of stuff I already probably knew about getting started. So that material was of less value to me personally, but of major value to others. I can see firsthand how helpful it was to someone unfamiliar with the internet” (IX).

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I poured out praise to the Lord, because I am His own. . . .
Who can write the odes of the Lord; Or who can read them?
. . . Who can interpret the wonders of the Lord?
Though he who interprets should perish,
Yet that which was interpreted will remain.
Ode of Solomon 26:1, 8, 11.

Contributions to Ministry

One concrete consequence of this study is that there are now more LCMS pastors blogging than there would have been if it had not occurred. True, it is possible that several of them may have begun blogging without this incentive, but when the research ended, only one²⁹¹ said he had decided not to blog in the future, and eight (62%) stated their intention to continue writing their current blog. Since many pastors are collegial by nature, it will be natural for the consequences of their personal involvement to expand in concentric rings as they share about their blogging ministry with others. Several identified particular individuals with whom they had already interacted related to online writing. These relationships will continue to grow. I hope that sharing the Handbook will be one element of many of those interactions with other rostered persons in the months ahead.

In the broader context of participants' ministries, most found it challenging to *add* to their responsibilities. However, the majority indicated they experienced a positive impact on their

²⁹¹ This individual indicated at the outset that it would be "Highly Unlikely" (the only 1 on the 1–7 scale asking the question) to continue blogging when the research was completed. He also indicated that his sole reason for participating in the study was because "I want to support the research of a fellow pastor" (IX).

general ministry, from increasing their confidence in their writing, to learning novel skills, and to developing new friendships. No one, even those who decided to end their current blogging activities, considered the experience “a waste of time.” I have no reason to doubt that many pastors who are successfully encouraged to “experiment” with blogging will experience the same things. They will appreciate new skills they learn, and feel that overall the effort was worth it, even if they decide not to continue blogging.

This impulse to share the Gospel is deeply embedded in the LCMS pastoral DNA. It is one reason I devoted so much time earlier to consider the theological aspects of pastoral vocation. In proclaiming God’s Word—the primary theological concept we addressed at the outset of this MAP—we evangelize and catechize. And the internet allows us to “utter” these holy words with a global volume. To validate this online writing ministry in the eyes of some who are critical of it, we spent a significant amount of time validating the fact that the Gospel written is no less the good news that the Gospel preached. While the pastors of many traditions might consider it strange that this question might exist, the Lutheran emphasis on the *preaching* of the Word has tended to eclipse for some the value of the printed word. Luther epitomizes this dialectic. He thanks God for the miracle of the press and its providential development to further the Reformation. At the same time he declares unabashedly that we are a “mouth Church” where the Gospel appears to be most powerful communicated through oral proclamation. I have argued that writing not be considered a stepchild, but recognized as an equal partner when sanctified by God’s Word.

It is also my hope that our consideration of the concept of pastor and scholar has promoted recognition that we are both. The degree to which we exercise this will depend to great degree, of course, on our giftedness and our self-identity. Some clergy shun this connection, perhaps

rightly if for fear of personal pride. However, none should sever the two aspects of our ministry due to a lack of confidence. And I will continue to strive to encourage doubting pastors to believe in themselves, that they have a message to share with others (maybe even on the internet) that comes from the unique vantage point of their personal wisdom and insight. Personally, the research related to this subject validated my own understanding of my ministry. It was not an accident that I pursued my M.Th. during my very first years in the parish, and that I have always valued and promoted education.

Stepping back from the individual to the broader Synodical viewpoint, I believe this research has the potential to stimulate increased blogging by our pastors. With the dual Handbook and website tools, these individuals will be better equipped to be successful in the venture. My desire to intentionally connect our blogging ministries to our vocation as parish pastors moved me to invest time at the beginning of the paper discussing the doctrine of missions from the angle of ecclesiology. The last thing the world needs is to create more Lone Ranger Christians, disconnected from congregations. That is not the *missio Dei*. The inclination of LCMS pastors is to believe this and be cautious about a ministry such as online writing that is detached from the congregation. However, by acknowledging this weakness of the medium, I hope I have offered suggestions on how to compensate to some degree.

Stepping even farther back, to consider any possible impact on the broader Christian Church, the results remain a bit hazier. After all, the resources I have produced are intentionally designed for the rostered ministers of our own communion. This MAP has not caused me to waiver in that plan. Still, when contemplating wider implications, it is possible that I might find it good, right and salutary to create a modified edition tailored to the needs of other Christian clergy. However, I will only do so if I believe the project could promote the spread of the

Gospel. In this sense, the previous discussion of developing a biblical approach to apologetics occupied some of our time earlier in this paper. Being faithful to Christ, it is certainly praiseworthy when any disciple of Jesus not only lifts up our Lord as Savior, but also provides a Christian defense of the many truths now under attack, such as the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage as God established it in Eden.

My research has covered new ground, but it has also overlapped with some of the previous research discussed earlier in this dissertation. As I have shown, while this MAP stands alone in terms of studying blogging pastors, there has been significant study of a wide range of religious concerns. In that sense, some might view this MAP as a subset or microcosm of larger studies of Christians which did not consider ordination status. It seems to me, however, that clergy are a distinctive enough population to *require* focused study in order to learn anything worth knowing about pastoral blogging. In other words, knowing that self-identified generic Christians feel this way or that, possesses precious little value for someone curious about how Christian pastors, much less LCMS pastors, feel about the same.

Contributions to Personal and Professional Growth

I enjoyed this project. That does not, of course, mean that I did not find it challenging or stressful. I learned many things during the course of this MAP. My readings in the Reformation and early Lutheranism were particularly insightful, since they had been inadequately emphasized during my seminary studies. Reflecting on the theological underpinnings of pastoral writing similarly opened my mind to many new thoughts. It is probably because I found the material so personally rewarding that I dug so deeply into the theological and historical dimensions of this MAP.

One reason for walking so attentively through history is because I am strongly convinced

that history is, apart from our Lord himself, our best teacher. This has always been true. As Marcus Tullius Cicero writes, “To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?”²⁹² And, I suspect Paul was not referring to Scripture alone when he wrote, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction . . .” (Romans 15:4).

But I am persuaded that the significance of history has never been more important for Christians. We live in an age shaken daily by tempestuous changes. And as I’ve stated before, we are moving at a rapid pace towards a world that more closely resembles the pagan environment of the early martyrs than the world of our grandparents.

I did not expect to learn very much new about online writing per se. After all, I’ve been fairly immersed in its currents for some time. Although I gained few new insights into blogging itself through my historical research, I learned a great deal about how this cadre of clergy approached the task of communicating the good news to both receptive and unreceptive audiences. And I believe I am now better equipped to encourage pastors to blog. Additional historical material has, I believe, made the Handbook a more useful tool to those who wonder how their decision about blogging may fit into a historical context. In fact, the “final” copy of the Handbook is subject to continuing improvement, and I look forward to feedback on how to improve the online blogging website once it is released to the rostered members of the Missouri Synod. I am eager to continuing shepherding both of these ministry support tools, and have no intention of leaving either untended.

²⁹² Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Brutus. Orator*, trans. H.M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library 342 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939), 395. The quotation is found in *Brutus*, chapter 34, section 120.

There is also the matter of further research. Having tasted formal qualitative research, I believe I may have developed a hunger for more. One logical example would be to see if this Handbook, which includes a significant amount of introductory material, would be perceived as possessing value for LCMS pastors who are already underway with their blogs. Even as I write these words, my mind is racing as to how I might use interviews to gather that data and simultaneously add to the information I have already explored such as the LCMS bloggers' perception of the similarities of the efforts to their non-LCMS peers, and thoughts of our pastors regarding the effect generated by having more LCMS clergy blogging. And, since I remain extremely active in military chaplaincy matters, I think it could prove valuable to explore the subject of blogging by active duty military chaplains.

I have already contemplated other possible avenues to pursue once I have completed my DMin studies. There are actually two researchers I intend to contact about some possible overlapping interests we may share. These would be two of the more prominent researchers exploring religion on the internet, and especially in the blogging context. While neither has published anything focused on ministerial blogging, and neither is a theologian, I am interested in inquiring whether I might be able to partner with them in some future project(s). We will see what eventually comes of this new interest, but it was born while I conducted this research.

Recommendations

This research has reinforced my conviction that every pastor should be encouraged to consider blogging as a part of their ministry. Moreover, his consideration should not be a once and for all time thing. Just like a good pastor should periodically consider prayerfully needs on the foreign mission field, so too he should occasionally reconsider whether the moment has arrived to enter the blogosphere. I hope that the availability of this Pastoral Blogging Enchiridion

is used by God both to encourage new bloggers and to aid or encourage current online writers. One of the participants expressed in just a few words what I would hope to hear echoed by more Missouri Synod pastors. “It was easier and more enjoyable than I thought it would be” (II).

In addition to commending the Handbook to pastors, I also recommend that it be used by other rostered workers in our church. These servants are also well educated and vetted to speak as representatives of our Synod. While not all of the pastors in this study may agree with me, I remain convinced that the vast majority of men and women on our ministry rosters would bring a fresh and anointed Gospel voice to the world wide web. I encourage them to do so, and am already contemplating ways to communicate that invitation and challenge to them once this MAP has been approved.

I commend our Synod leadership for increasing their online presence, and recommend that this be expanded. Likewise, our seminaries, colleges and other related ministries continue to increase their digital footprints. To the degree that we fail to venture into the digital realm, we surrender that “battlefield” to the mundane and even to those who are conscious disciples of the Adversary. As the participants in this research project indicated, it is vital that we proclaim the Gospel in this violently contested domain, because where the Light shines, the power of darkness is dispelled (John 1:5).

I would also suggest that we continue to conduct research related to various facets of pastoral blogging, including how different religious communities employ it. I am personally very interested in exploring the medium’s use for apologetic purposes. In the post-Christian West, as we return to a position in society similar to that of our earliest brothers and sisters around the pagan Mediterranean, our voice will continue to be suppressed in the public arena. The internet, because of the nature of its inherent freedoms, may be of increasing importance to a Church

experiencing various levels of persecution.

These are my modest suggestions, and God-willing, I will be able to continue offering my encouragement so they may come to pass.

APPENDIX ONE

INITIAL INVITATION AND GUIDELINES

The following items were used to explain the parameters of the research involved in this MAP to those who expressed interest in the project. The first item is a two page document that provides a detailed “Introduction to the Study.” The second is the formal “Recruitment Statement for Research Participation,” which is formatted in accordance with institutional requirements. The third is a letter which was sent at the close of the three month blogging period and provided directions for offering their comments at the “Conclusion of the Study.”



Concordia
Seminary

Introduction to the Study

Thank you very much for volunteering to consider participating in this research project intended to promote blogging by clergy. In this document, you will find details to enable your informed decision about whether you wish to proceed. If you have any unanswered questions, please send them at your earliest convenience to data@fastmail.com.

First, you should verify that you meet both participant requirements. The current study is restricted to LCMS clergy. And, although every type of call is worthwhile and serves the Church, participants in this study need to be serving primarily as congregational pastors. (*Additional* commitments, such as National Guard or Reserve chaplaincy, are not a factor in determining eligibility).

If you meet both criteria, please read on. If you do not, but desire a gratis copy of the Pastoral Blogging ebook when it is finalized, simply send me an email to that effect.

Commitment of Participants

As the accompanying document clarifies, the identity of all participants will remain completely confidential. The data collected will be used in a way that never threatens your privacy.

Research participants must be willing to commit to the following. Naturally, unanticipated emergencies may affect completion of all elements, but in order to maximize the validity of the study, please try your best to engage fully in the process.

Participants will:

1. Confirm their desire to participate, and verify their receipt of the seminary's "Recruitment Statement for Research Participation," by email.
2. Participate in a brief (< twenty minute) questionnaire prior to receiving the digital resources and beginning to blog.
3. Read any portion or all of the draft version of the Pastoral Blogging Handbook. It will be provided in PDF, which can be read on any computer with Acrobat's free software, as well in Kindle and [iBooks](#) programs.
4. Start a (free) personal blog on Wordpress. (While there are a variety of different hosting alternatives, for research consistency all participants will use WordPress.)
5. "Publish" at least two posts—of any length—each week for three months. Aside from the targeted frequency of posts, *all matters* (e.g. theme, layout) are left to the choice of the participant.
6. Complete a short (< thirty minute) questionnaire about the experience.

7. Participate in an online interview (approximately thirty minutes) using a program such as Skype or FaceTime.

Timeline for the Research

The active duration of the study involves three months (ninety days) of blogging. Prior to the outset of the effort, some time will be required to read orientation material such as this letter, and to participate in the Intake Questionnaire.

After the blogging period, participants will complete a questionnaire similar to that filled out at the outset of the study. The final personal interview will take place in early August.



Coordination During the Research

I remain ready to answer questions or provide advice once the project begins. However, since measuring the independent value of the Pastoral Blogging Handbook is a primary goal of the research, it is hoped these contacts can be kept to a minimum.

This may seem a bit ironic, since one of the suggestions you will read in the guide is to seek a blogging mentor. Experienced online writers are often happy to answer questions and offer advice. Aside from the constraints of conducting academic research, I would be honored to serve as such. Nevertheless, for the duration of the study, it is requested participants seek such counsel elsewhere.

Once you have set up your blog, please send me its address. I will “subscribe” to it, so that I receive notifications when you publish a post. I will not, however, comment on your posts since I do not want to influence the course of your blog’s development in any way. There is no single “right” way to blog, and the Handbook is merely a resource with advice you can use or dismiss as suits your purpose and personality.

Thank you again for your willingness to consider being a part of this study. All volunteers will receive a copy of the final version of the Handbook. Interested participants may also obtain a summary of the research findings.

If you desire to be a participant in this research, at your convenience log onto the brief survey at <https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/JmyLIR>. Enter the password “clergy” when prompted.

Yours in Christ,

Robert Stroud
Robert C. Stroud



Recruitment Statement for Research Participation

1. Rev. Robert Stroud (Chaplain, LtCol, USAF, Retired) invites you to participate in this research study.
2. The title of this study is LCMS Pastoral Blogging Study. The purpose of this study is to explore the value of a resource tailored to the perspectives of Lutheran pastors which can benefit clergy in expanding their ministry to the internet. It anticipates that, with adequate advice and encouragement, LCMS pastors can dramatically expand the scope of their ministries.
3. Your participation in this study will involve beginning a new blog and maintaining it for three months. Active maintenance will be determined by the simple criterion of posting at least twice each week during the study. (Length of each post is at the sole discretion of the individual.) There will be no cost associated with the project, as the blog site and all supporting documents (in digital format) are available for free. | Volunteers will complete a very brief online questionnaire. Those selected to participate in the study will blog as described above. At the end of that period, each will be personally interviewed (online) by Rev. Stroud.
4. The risks to you as a participant are minimal. These may include feeling anxiety about the publishing schedule or the possibility of posting something the writer later regrets. While neither of these issues are foreign to traditional pastoral ministry, specific advice will be provided to participants to avoid these problems.
5. The results of this study may be published in scientific research journals or presented at professional conferences. However, your name and identity will not be revealed and your record will remain confidential. All participants and data related to their blogs will be referred to by number. Quotations from posts will be kept to a minimum, since search engines can readily trace them to their original source. If used, they will not be associated with the “identifying” blog (i.e. the number associated with that specific blog) so as not to allow readers to correlate any research findings to a particular website.
6. Participation in this study will benefit you by expanding your ministry to a global pulpit. While the blog theme does not need to be “religious” in nature, you are well aware of how you can convey your Christian worldview through whatever subject you choose to discuss. In addition to the supporting booklet you will receive, you will benefit from the support and encouragement of the researcher, an experienced writer and blogger. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod will also benefit through your participation, since the revised resource book to which your comments will contribute, will be offered gratis to all of the rostered ministers in our church.

7. Participation is, of course, fully voluntary. If you volunteer to participate, you remain free to withdraw from this study at any time.
8. If you have questions about this research study, you can call or email Rob Stroud at 360-830-4408 or data@fastmail.com, respectively. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Rev. Dr. Anthony Cook at Concordia Seminary, 314-505-7774 or cooka@csl.edu.



Concordia
Seminary

Conclusion of the Study

Thank you very much for participating in this research project intended to support effective blogging by clergy. Even if you were not able to meet the initial goal for posting frequency, *your involvement in the final phase of the study remains essential*. We need your input to determine the potential value of a blogging resource such as the Handbook you received at the beginning of the study.

The **final step** in this study is to complete another brief online questionnaire similar to one you filled out several months ago. As you have already been assured, all data will remain confidential.

**Please log onto the brief survey at <https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/dICNKU>
Enter the password "Luther" when prompted.**

When you have completed the survey, you have fulfilled your commitment. There is, however, an interview which will involve several participants. As described in your initial mailing, it will involve a one-on-one personal interview about your experience. It will be conducted at your convenience via Skype, FaceTime, or another medium of your preference.

If you are willing to participate in the brief personal interview, please indicate that fact in the appropriate block on the online survey.

You have another, optional, opportunity to submit any written suggestions you may have related to the draft *Pastoral Blogging Handbook*. If you have any suggestions at all—for additions, deletions, elaboration, clarification, etc.—I welcome them.

Post-Research Partnership

At the outset of the study, I stated my communication with you during the research would be minimal. Once the final interview has been completed, however, I would be happy to correspond with you about your writing ministry. If you would like some collegial advice, or simply have some questions, I welcome them.

Once again, thank you *very much* for participating. In the future you can anticipate receiving a finalized copy of the *Pastoral Blogging Handbook*. If you would be interested in reading a copy of the final dissertation, I would be happy to accommodate you once it has been approved. (Your prayers in that regard are humbly solicited.) If you have any unanswered questions, please send them at your earliest convenience to data@fastmail.com.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Stroud".

Robert C. Stroud

APPENDIX TWO

QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN THE ASSESSMENTS

Three instruments were used during the course of the study. All thirteen research participants completed all three. The first was an online survey designed to gather basic demographic information and assess the writing experience levels of the pastors involved. The second was a similarly structured online survey that followed up on issues raised in the initial tool and added questions directly related to the participants' use of the Pastoral Blogging Handbook. The final tool was a personal interview conducted individually with the participants. A number of the questions for each interview were tailored to the individuals' responses to questions on the second survey. For the purposes of illustrating the tailoring of the Interview Questions example included in this appendix, the applicable portions are highlighted in a red font. In the interview script attached as an example of this, Question Six is presented in this manner: "You identified your *greatest positive surprise* as 'hearing from others who had gained some sense of care or insight from what was written.' Were there any other unexpected aspects of blogging that you found *positive*?"

Online Survey One [Fourteen Questions]

Question One: “Demographics.”

Text Boxes: First Name, Last Name, City, State, Phone, Email Address.

Question Two: “Do you wish to participate in the Pastoral Blogging Study being conducted by Robert Stroud under the oversight of Concordia Seminary?”

Multiple Choice: Yes – No.

Question Three: “Do you understand your confidentiality will be fully protected and you may end your participation at any time?”

Multiple Choice: Yes – No.

Question Four: “How many years have you been ordained?”

Text Box.

Question Five: “If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?”

Text Box.

Question Six: “Why are you interested in this study?”

Multiple Choice, Multiple Answers Allowed:

I think blogging will be fun.

I have been encouraged by others to blog.

I think it may offer a means of increasing my income.

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

I think blogging will be a good discipline.

I hope blogging will help me improve my writing.

I am curious about whether blogging is a good fit for me.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I believe this effort can support the Synod's ministry.

I someday hope to write a book and this may help me.

I am bored and have nothing better to do.

Other (Please Specify).

Question Seven: "What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?"

Multiple Choice:

I never gave it any thought.

I could not see any potential benefits.

I lacked the time.

I lacked the confidence to try it.

I consider writing to be difficult or unenjoyable.

I thought it might distract from my ministry.

I worried my parishioners might think it detracted from my ministry to them.

I thought blogging was a passing fad.

Other (Please Specify).

Question Eight: "What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog? (This is tentative, and does not limit your choice.)"

Multiple Choice:

Apologetics, Catechesis, Devotions, Eclectic, Evangelism, Exegesis, History,

Hobby, Humor, Literature, Ministry, Polemics, Politics, Sermons, Sports,

Other (Please Specify).

Question Nine: "How confident are you in your writing skills?"

Rating Scale, 1-7:

1: I know the alphabet.

7: I am ready for my Pulitzer.

Question Ten: “How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?”

Rating Scale, 1–7:

1: I dread putting pen to paper.

7: It is my favorite avocation.

Question Eleven: “Have you written anything that has been published?”

Multiple Choice, Multiple Answers Allowed:

Yes, in my congregation’s newsletter.

I have had a “Letter to the Editor” published.

I have had an article or poem published in a traditional magazine or journal.

I have self-published a book.

I have had a book published by a traditional press.

I have authored a bestseller and/or major biblical commentary series.

Other (Please Specify).

Question Twelve: “What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?”

Multiple Choice:

Setting up the blogging account.

Writing the first post (column).

Mastering the fundamentals.

Coming up with ideas to write about.

The actual writing itself.

Maintaining the minimum pace of two posts per week.

Promoting the blog site to gain new readers.

Responding to readers' comments.

Addressing faith issues.

Other (Please Specify).

Question Thirteen: "Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research."

Ranking, 1–5:

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be pleased that I have made a few new friends.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

Question Fourteen: "How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?"

Rating Scale, 1–7:

1: Highly unlikely.

7: Almost certain.

Online Survey Two [Fifteen Questions]

Question One: "Demographics."

Text Boxes: First Name – Last Name.

Question Two: "What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?"

Multiple Choice:

Apologetics, Catechesis, Devotions, Eclectic, Evangelism, Exegesis, History,
Hobby, Humor, Literature, Ministry, Polemics, Politics, Sermons, Sports,
Other (Please Specify).

Question Three: “Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?”

Multiple Choice:

- 1: Simpler than I anticipated.
- 2: Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.
- 3: More difficult that I suspected.

Question Four: “What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?”

Multiple Choice:

- Finding the time blog.
- Setting up the blogging account.
- Coming up with ideas for subjects to address.
- The writing of the posts themselves.
- Trying to promote or publicize your blog site.
- Responding to readers’ comments.
- Addressing faith issues.
- Dealing with discouragement due to lack of comments.
- Other (Please Specify).

Question Five: “What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?”

Text box.

Question Six: “What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?”

Text box.

Question Seven: “Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?”

Multiple Choice: Yes – No – I skimmed it.

Question Eight: “If you did not read through the Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?”

Multiple Choice: Yes – No – N/A.

Question Nine: “How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?”

Rating Scale, 1–7:

1: Utterly useless.

7: Invaluable.

Question Ten: “Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful? Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?”

Text box.

Question Eleven: “Please mark any of the following statements that are true.”

Multiple Choice: Multiple Answers Allowed.

I have greater confidence in my writing.

I have made a few new friends.

I consider it to have been a waste of time.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

I told everyone I met about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

Question Twelve: “Did you receive any assistance with your blog?”

Multiple Choice:

No, I did not discuss it with others.

Yes, I had someone proofread most of my posts before they were published.

Yes, I discussed potential subjects with others.

Yes, I have other writers with whom I share my work in progress.

No, but I wish I had someone to dialog with about my blog site.

Question Thirteen: “How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?”

Rating Scale, 1–7:

1: Of negative value.

7: Extremely beneficial.

Question Fourteen: “Do you intend to continue blogging?”

Multiple Choice: Yes – No – Not at the present time.

Question Fifteen: “Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?”

Multiple Choice: Yes – No.

Personal Interview [Nineteen Questions Plus Follow-ups]

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a personal interview related to this research project. This study should help us better understand some of the dynamics of pastoral blogging, so we can improve skills and expand the positive impact of online writing by pastors in our Synod.

As you will recall from the introduction to both of the online surveys, all of the findings will be presented anonymously, including all comments made during this interview. I would like your permission to tape the interview, to ensure its accuracy. Following transcription of the interview, a digital copy will be provided to you, so you can verify its accuracy. Do you agree?

The interview consists of seventeen open-ended questions, which you are free to answer at any length. The more detailed your responses, the more informative they will be. The final question will provide an opportunity to share any additional comments you wish to make.

Thank you for supporting this research by completing the online surveys and volunteering to participate in this interview. Are you willing to have this interview recorded?

1. Was your congregation aware that you were blogging?
 - a. *Follow-up, if yes:* Were they supportive of your blogging ministry?
 - b. *Follow-up, if no:* Is there a specific reason why you did not share the fact you were blogging with the congregation?

2. What relationships, if any, do you see between your preaching and your online writing ministries?

3. You indicated the primary subject for your blogging was “evangelism.” Why did you chose this approach?
 - Would you choose the same subject if you had it to do over again?

4. You indicated being *adequately confident* in your writing skills, and having *ambivalent feelings* about the writing process itself. How did this affect your blogging experience?

5. You indicated that the *most challenging* aspect of blogging was “finding the time to blog.” Could you elaborate on that, and describe some of the other challenges you experienced?

6. You identified your *greatest positive surprise* as “hearing from others who had gained some sense of care or insight from what was written.” Were there any other unexpected aspects of blogging that you found *positive*?

7. You indicated that the *most negative surprise* of blogging was “the difficulty of carving out the time to write twice a week.” Were there any other unexpected aspects of blogging you found *negative*?

8. What did you learn during the course of the experience, that you would have benefited from knowing at the outset?

9. [Two Parts] Contrasting your identity as an LCMS pastor with clergy of other Christian denominations...
 - a. In what ways, might you expect your blogging ministries to be similar?
 - b. In what ways do you think the two ministries might differ?

10. What might be the results of having more members of the LCMS writing online?

11. What strategies do you think are the most productive for pastors sharing the gospel online?

12. In *addition* to the Pastoral Blogging Handbook, did you look at any other printed or online resources about blogging?
 - a. *Follow-up, if answered negatively:* Why not?
 - b. *Follow-up, if answered positively:* In what ways did they influence your blogging experience?

13. You indicated that you *read* the Handbook before beginning. How do you think your blogging experience might have differed if you had only skimmed the Handbook before starting?

14. You indicated that the Pastoral Blogging Handbook was of *moderate* value in your blogging. What modifications might possibly have made it more useful to you?

15. You did not cite any subjects that were confusing or unhelpful in the Handbook. After further reflection, can you think of anything it contained that might be counterproductive?

16. How did the presence of the biographical illustrations influence your impression of the Handbook?

17. What additional material might make the Handbook a more valuable resource?

18. What advice would you offer to a fellow pastor who was considering beginning a blog?

19. Is there anything else you would like to share before we conclude the interview?

Thank you, once again, for your time. God's continued blessings to you in your ministry.

APPENDIX THREE

SURVEY RESPONSES BY PARTICIPANT

Included here are all of the responses of the participants to the first two, online surveys. They are arranged so that the correlated questions align. For example, their personal expectations were aligned in a parallel format to their actual experience.

Participant I

Individual Online Survey Responses Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

New York

How many years have you been ordained?

5

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

ENFJ

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I think blogging will be a good discipline.

I hope blogging will help me improve my writing.

I am curious about whether blogging is a good fit for me.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I someday hope to write a book and this may help me.

I have been praying about opportunities to sharpen my writing skills. I also believe that there are many who may read a blog and hear the words the Holy Spirit leads me to share who may never come into the Chapel for worship.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

Not writing a newsletter or submitting devotions to local paper any longer.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

I have had a "Letter to the Editor" published.

I have had an article or poem published in a traditional magazine or journal.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Trauma Recovery, Care for those Suffering

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Promoting the blog site to gain new readers.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Evangelism

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

you anticipated it would be?

More Difficult than I Suspected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

Hearing from others that they had gained some sense of care or insight from what was written.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

Difficulty to carve out the time to write twice a week.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have made a few new friends.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, I did not discuss it with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – **7**
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

Future groups would benefit from a table with themes and possible topics for “starter” ideas.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant II

Individual Online Survey Responses Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Texas

How many years have you been ordained?

35

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

[Left Blank]

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

I am curious about whether blogging is a good fit for me.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I thought blogging was a passing fad.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

I have had a "Letter to the Editor" published.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Setting up the blogging account.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.
I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Simpler than I Suspected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Trying to promote or publicize your blog site.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

It was easier and more enjoyable than I thought it would be.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

The feeling that no one would be reading what I wrote.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have a greater confidence in my writing.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

Yes, I had someone proofread most of my posts before they were published.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

It was a very good guide.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant III

Individual Online Survey Responses Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

California

How many years have you been ordained?

2

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

[Left Blank]

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I think blogging will be fun.

I have been encouraged by others to blog.

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

I think blogging will be a good discipline.

I hope blogging will help me improve my writing.

I believe this effort can support the Synod's

ministry.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I lacked the time.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

I have had an article or poem published in an online periodical.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Devotions

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Promoting the blog site to gain new readers.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Sermons

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

A poem I posted received 7 likes and also yielded two new followers. This was above and beyond all my other entries. It was encouraging to receive some positive reception.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

Simply that you cannot rely on your own friends to read your blog.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, I did not discuss it with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – **7**
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – **7**
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

I skimmed it.

If you did not read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?

Yes.

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

I thought the handbook was very useful.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant IV
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Texas

How many years have you been ordained?

20

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

ENFJ

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I think blogging will be fun.

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I haven't taken the time to start one. This project is a great impetus to expand to this type of ministry.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation’s newsletter.

I was briefly published by Concordia University – Portland.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Ministry

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Writing the first post (column).

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Devotions

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

For the few followers that I received, their feedback; especially when that feedback came from unexpected places.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

Time ... blogging takes so much more time than I anticipated and, like any virtual medium, an inactive site is a dead site. The greatest challenge is to keep blogging so that the site is considered "living" and therefore will continue to garner interest and readership.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

I told everyone I met about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

Yes, I discussed potential subjects with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - **7**
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - **5** - 6 - 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - **5** - 6 - 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

The Handbook was rather complete in its information.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant V
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

New Jersey

How many years have you been ordained?

3

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

[Left Blank]

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I consider writing to be difficult or unenjoyable.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing

skills?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

I had a single devotion published at Seminary for Lent.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

The actual writing itself.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will see that blogging is not for me.
I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Ministry

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

More Difficult than I Suspected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Coming up with ideas for subjects to address.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

Honestly, before I stopped, I didn't have any positive surprises.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

My own uncreativity and the amount of time and energy it took for me to actually write something

that was okay.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

[Left Blank]

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

[Left Blank]

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 - **2** - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

Do you intend to continue blogging?

No

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 - 2 - 3 - **4** - 5 - 6 - 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

I skimmed it.

If you did not read the Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?

[Left Blank]

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 - 2 - **3** - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

Copyright images. I got most frustrated with not

being able to find a good image that wasn't under copyright. I suspect that others who used pictures didn't bother much with thinking about if they could use the images they used or not.

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

[Left Blank]

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant VI

Individual Online Survey Responses Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Michigan

How many years have you been ordained?

7

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

INFP

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I have been encouraged by others to blog.

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

I am curious about whether blogging is a good fit for me.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

What is the primary reason why you have not

written a blog in the past?

I lacked the confidence to try it.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Coming up with ideas to write about.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

Feedback and how far reaching some posts got.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

None

I will see that blogging is not for me.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have greater confidence in my writing.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, but I wish I had someone to dialog with about my blog site.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

Not that I can think of.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant VII

Individual Online Survey Responses Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Illinois

How many years have you been ordained?

4

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

[Left Blank]

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I think blogging will be fun.

I have been encouraged by others to blog.

I think blogging will be a good discipline.

I hope blogging will help me improve my writing.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I want to blog to benefit my congregation.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I thought it might detract from my ministry.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

I have had a "Letter to the Editor" published.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Catechesis

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Promoting the blog site to gain new readers.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Catechesis

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

More Difficult than I Suspected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

greatest positive surprise?

The focus of getting my thoughts out in a new way.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

The desire to be creative and fresh – it fed my desire to be a people pleaser and my pride.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have greater confidence in my writing.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

Yes, I discussed potential subjects with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – **2** – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook

that were confusing or unhelpful?

The advice that spoke about keeping the blog simple was not exactly helpful. There is a time when it is appropriate to use jargon and complicated concepts within a blog. This is a long form approach to media that isn't limited to the short posts of social media. If it's appropriate for one's intended audience, it can be appropriate when used well.

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

[Left Blank]

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant VIII
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Wisconsin

How many years have you been ordained?

5

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

[Left Blank]

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

I think blogging will be a good discipline.

I hope blogging will help me improve my writing.

I am curious about whether blogging is a good fit for me.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I believe this effort can support the Synod's

ministry.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I lacked the confidence to try it.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

[Left Blank]

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Coming up with ideas to write about.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be pleased that I made a few new

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Eclectic

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

More Difficult than I Suspected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

I feel like I quickly got behind on the number of posts and then felt guilty about agreeing to participate in the project.

friends.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

[Left Blank]

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

Difficulty to carve out the time to write twice a week.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

[Left Blank]

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, I did not discuss it with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Not at the present time.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

I skimmed it.

If you did not read the Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?

Yes.

How useful was the Handbook in your

blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

[Left Blank]

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant IX
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Washington

How many years have you been ordained?

4

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

ISTJ

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I feel blogs tear down rather than build up. They have been harmful to people's ministries and reputations.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing

skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

I have had an article or poem published in an online periodical.

I have had an article or poem published in a traditional magazine or journal.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Life

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

The actual writing itself.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Sermons

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

The ability to schedule posts out into the future.

What aspect of your experience provided the

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

greatest negative surprise?

The amount of time it would take.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

[No response]

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, I did not discuss it with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Not at the present time.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

I skimmed it.

If you did not read the Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?

Yes.

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – **4** – 5 – 6 – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

The handbook was very inclusive. I consider myself quite tech savvy, so most of it was things I understood. I passed it along to my deacon, who was interested in starting a blog. He found it invaluable to get a blog set up.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant X
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Oklahoma

How many years have you been ordained?

33

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

ISTJ

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I never blogged before. Why not try it?

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I could not see any potential benefits.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing

skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

Doctoral Dissertation.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Ministry

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

To not get paranoid that whatever is written is "out there" permanently.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Ministry

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

Once I was able to carve out some time to blog, I found it was almost an exhilarating experience. I enjoyed the opportunity to express myself.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

Just finding the time to blog. In a busy pastorate

there were times when I needed to make a choice – Do I blog or do I take some time with my wife? Do I blog or do I do that shut-in visit I've been needing to take care of? There was a definite need for time to think and write.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have a greater confidence in my writing.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, I did not discuss it with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Not at the present time.

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – **2** – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

The Handbook led me very well since this was my first experience at blogging. I was a neophyte and the Handbook had all the answers I needed, not only to get me started, but to continue in the mission.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant XI
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Missouri

How many years have you been ordained?

3

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

INTJ

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I have been encouraged by others to blog.

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

I hope blogging will help me improve my writing.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I believe this effort can support the Synod's ministry.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I lacked the time.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation's newsletter.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Catechesis

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Maintaining the minimum pace of two posts per week.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be pleased that I made a few new

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Catechesis

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

How quickly the post could spread through social

friends.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

media.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

Personal frustration of not having more time to devote to this. Feeling torn between the people I minister to in face-to-face relationships and people I might be able to help/connect from a distance.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have greater confidence in my writing.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

Yes, I had someone proofread most of my posts before they were published.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

I skimmed it.

If you did not read the Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?

Yes.

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

It was very thorough.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

Participant XII
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Minnesota

How many years have you been ordained?

28

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

INFP

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I believe blogging can expand my ministry.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I lacked the time.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing

skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation’s newsletter.

I have had a “Letter to the Editor” published.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Polemics

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Maintaining the minimum pace of two posts per week.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Polemics

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

Almost exactly as challenging as I expected.

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Hesitating due to concern over results of posting.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

That blogging is so open and available for anyone.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

That experienced bloggers tend to stay away from

topics that might be misunderstood and instead develop areas that will interest followers.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have made a few new friends.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

Yes, I discussed potential subjects with others.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – **7**
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Yes

How likely do you anticipate it is that you will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – **6** – 7
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

I skimmed it.

If you did not read the Handbook prior to writing your first post, did you read through it at a later time?

Yes.

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – **3** – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

The handbook had suggested use any online blog; then highly recommended Wordpress. If Wordpress is the best tool for blogging, the handbook should be clear about why use Wordpress.

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

[Left Blank]

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

No

Participant XIII
Individual Online Survey Responses
Aligned to Compare Correlations

ONLINE SURVEY AT OUTSET

ONLINE SURVEY AT CONCLUSION

PERMISSIONS

Concurrence with study parameters and awareness of confidentiality.

Yes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name and other identifying demographic details masked.

Ministry location (state only).

Missouri

How many years have you been ordained?

25

If you are aware of your Myers-Briggs personality type, what is it?

[Left Blank]

INITIAL MOTIVATIONS

Why are you interested in participating in this study?

I have been encouraged by others to blog.

I want to support the research of a fellow pastor.

I believe this effort can support the Synod's ministry.

I am interested in opening up more public dialogue about the unique ministry situations that exist as multiple and dual parishes and the concerns unique to them.

What is the primary reason why you have not written a blog in the past?

I thought blogging was a passing fad.

PRIOR WRITING EXPERIENCE

How confident are you in your writing skills?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Know Alphabet.....Ready for Pulitzer

How much do you enjoy the writing process itself?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Dread It.....Favorite Avocation

Have you written anything that has been published?

Yes, in my congregation’s newsletter.

I have had a “Letter to the Editor” published.

I have had an article or poem published in an online periodical.

I have had an article or poem published in a traditional magazine or journal.

Numerous papers, and now a D.Min. Thesis.

EXPECTATIONS

What is the most likely focus or subject for your blog?

Rural, smaller churches and rural, small town ministry

What do you anticipate will be the greatest challenge as you participate in this research?

Promoting the blog site to gain new readers.

ACTUAL EXPERIENCE DURING RESEARCH

What was the primary focus or subject for your blog?

Multiple parish settings of ministry

Was blogging simpler or more difficult than you anticipated it would be?

More Difficult than I Suspected.

Please rank the following in terms of how you expect to feel at the conclusion of the research.

I will appreciate having access to a new ministry tool.

I will be pleased that I made a few new friends.

I will see that blogging is not for me.

I will feel more confident about my writing.

I will be telling everyone about my blog with the enthusiasm of a new convert.

How likely do you anticipate it is that you

What was the most challenging aspect of blogging?

Finding the time to blog.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest positive surprise?

I now know this can be done, and what a unique niche I seek to address. I have a boatload of topics from my D.Min. dissertation and all the other “fallout” that gathered as I worked, and believe it can be of use to bless and encourage my brethren (and their members) serving in multiple parish settings. I also know that this must be a matter about which I must “carve” time, as it will not happen by accident; the pastor’s plate is full enough as it is.

What aspect of your experience provided the greatest negative surprise?

How high a priority it must become to blog, or it will get left behind by the other duties of ministry.

Please mark any of the following statements that are true.

I have greater confidence in my writing.

I have learned new skills with benefits beyond blogging.

Did you receive any assistance with your blog?

No, I did not discuss it with others.

No, but I wish I had someone to dialog with about my blog site.

How would receiving weekly feedback from an experienced blogger have affected you?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – **5** – 6 – 7
Negative Value.....Extremely Beneficial

will continue blogging once the research is completed?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – **7**
Highly Unlikely.....Almost Certain

Do you intend to continue blogging?

Not at the present time.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO HANDBOOK

Did you read the Pastoral Blogging Handbook prior to beginning your blog?

Yes

How useful was the Handbook in your blogging experience?

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – **7**
Useless.....Invaluable

Were there any elements of the Handbook that were confusing or unhelpful?

[Left Blank]

Were there any missing subjects that should have been included?

I was pleased with how well matters were covered.

QUERY REGARDING INTERVIEW

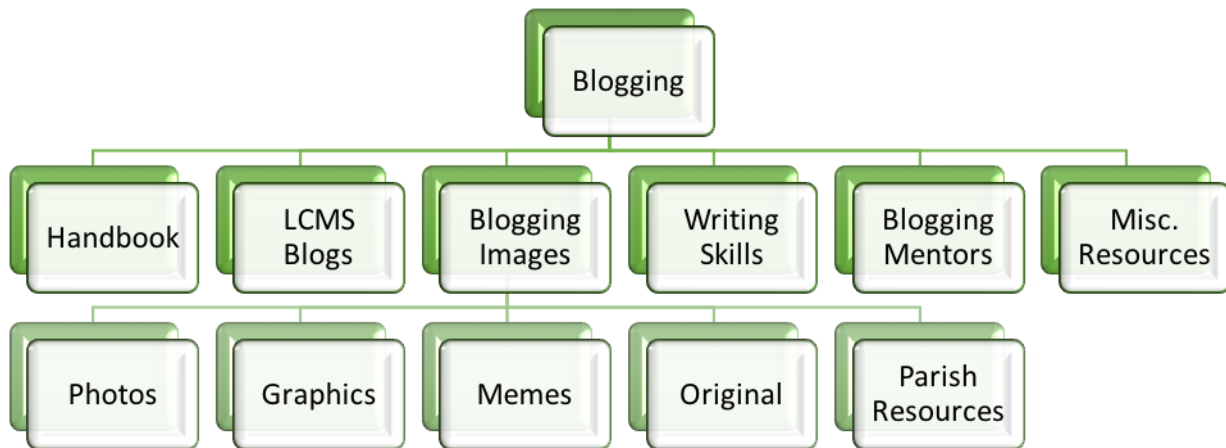
Would you be willing to participate in a short personal interview about your experience?

Yes

APPENDIX FOUR

PASTORAL BLOGGING WEBSITE

This attachment includes graphic images of the website which was created for use by rostered ministers of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a result of this study. Since the pages are simply graphics, the hyperlinks are not enabled. The chart on the first page provides a site map of the twelve linked pages which constitute the website in its initial iteration. (As a dynamic document, it will almost certainly be modified and adjusted to better meet the needs of those who use it.) Each page offers brief information and most include links to additional resources.



This chart displays the structure of the LCMS blogging website created as a result of this MAP. It will be “enabled” for use, once the project has received final approval. The pages which follow illustrate the web pages as they will appear on the internet. They comprise three levels, with the Blogging page at the top, and only the Blogging Images page having its own subordinate pages. To avoid confusion, the images are arranged in the following order: Blogging, Handbook, LCMS Blogs, Writing Skills, Blogging Mentors, Miscellaneous Resources, Blogging Images, Photos, Graphics, Memes, Original Images, Parish Resources. Please note that the Memes page will show on the internet as a single page, but requires two pages to reproduce in this appendix. Also note that the first word in the title of the page, “Protected,” refers to the fact that a password will be required to access it; this word will not appear on the html page as it is viewed by a visitor.

Protected: Blogging



Ministry leaders of the LCMS can find a few resources that may help them start or grow an online writing ministry on the following pages.

No offense to others, but access to this modest resource is limited to *rostered* members of the church. Exceptions can be made for those *currently in training* for service as pastors, deaconesses, teachers, lay ministers, DCEs, DCOs, etc.

Oh, and spouses of rostered workers are also welcome to request the password to the site to support their blogging ministries. We take literally Jesus' words that you "are no longer two but one flesh" (Matthew 19:6).

The resources here are intended to *supplement* the Lutheran blogging handbook, *Digital Enchiridion: A Lutheran Resource for Pastoral Blogging*. That ebook is available for free download on the first page below.

God-willing, the links on the following pages will help you start, or improve, your online writing ministry.

If you would like access to these resources, send an email with your name and ministry position/congregation to chaplainstroud@gmail.com

It should also be acknowledged here that this is *not an official website* of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. It is merely a gift to the church from several of her pastors, in the hope that we can continue to expand the church's global ministry.

[Digital Enchiridion \(Handbook\)](#)

[Current LCMS Blogs](#)

[Finding the Perfect Image](#)

[Improving Your Writing Skills](#)

[Potential Blogging Mentors](#)

[Miscellaneous Considerations](#)

Protected: Pastoral Blogging Handbook

enchiridion

Syllabification: en·chi·rid·i·on

Pronunciation: /,eNGkə'ridēən/ /,enkī-/

Noun (plural enchiridions or enchiridia- 'ridēə)

Definition of *enchiridion* in English:

1. A handbook; manual.
2. A book containing essential information on a subject.

Origin

Late Middle English: via late Latin from Greek *enkheiridion*, from *en-* "within" + *kheir* "hand" + the diminutive suffix *-idion*.

This is the place where you can download your free copy of *Digital Enchiridion: A Lutheran Resource for Pastoral Blogging*.

This handbook is available in PDF, which can be read by many different software programs.

By downloading this ebook, you acknowledge that it is copyrighted material provided for your personal use. Two parts to that, i.e. (1) it's copyrighted so you cannot

reproduce any of it, and (2) it is for your use, so you cannot distribute it to others.

This handbook is written expressly for the men and women on the ministry rosters of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. If you have completed 50% of your training in anticipation of just such a ministry, you are also welcome to download the enchiridion.

Even though all rostered workers are welcome to use the handbook and this modest website, it is possible some readers may find the *passim* references to pastors distracting. This is due to the fact that the Enchiridion was originally composed as part of a DMin project designed to motivate novice pastoral bloggers. If you overlook that terminology, you will find that nearly everything in the enchiridion is applicable to all of those entrusted with ministry responsibilities.

Handbooks are of varying value to users, depending on a wide range of factors. Even popular bestsellers only appeal to a limited number of readers.

I have attempted to offer something for everyone in the book. In doing so, I fully recognize that various elements will appear superfluous to some readers.

The heart of the book, however, consists of specific suggestions shaped to help the typical blogger both succeed and produce a quality product.

You can get your personal copy of this handbook by clicking on the button below. May our Lord richly blessing your online writing ministry.



Protected: Current LCMS Blogs



It is often easier to learn by *seeing* something done well than by having the process described to you.

Because of that, we are providing a list of Lutheran blogs that provide great examples of different aspects of online writing.

When you check them out—and we encourage you to “subscribe” to them when you visit—you will discover effective ways of sharing the gospel via the internet.

Feel free to copy any of the approaches or techniques you encounter that you find especially good.

This page is maintained by Pastor Peter Ill.

And if you know of a great Lutheran blog that you think should be added to the list, contact him at pastorpeterill@gmail.com.

Exceptional Lutheran Blogs

[LCMS Leader Blog](#)

[Reformation 2017](#)

[Cranach: The Blog of Veith](#)

[Stet \(Let It Stand\)](#)

[Pastoral Meanderings](#)

[Meet, Write, and Salutory](#)

Protected: Improving Your Writing Skills



Writing for the internet is far different than the homiletic and academic writing in which most pastors excel.

Increasing your impact as a blogger involves (1) *learning* about writing for this unique environment, and (2) *practicing* what you've learned. Both are necessary.

The good news is that you don't need to stumble around in the dark seeking help.

And, as beneficial as the living, breathing members of a local writing group and individual mentors are . . . they are not the only source of helpful advice.

The links below offer a wealth of valuable information about writing. Check them out.

[Confession: I added the last one simply for its entertainment value.]

Online Writing Resources

[Creativity Portal](#)

[Writer Unboxed](#)

[Writing Questions Answered](#)

[Christian Writers](#)

[Faith Writers](#)

[Quotery](#)

[Bullwer-Lytton Fiction Contest](#)

Protected: Blogging Mentors



Apprenticeships exist because experienced workers make great teachers.

If you are a journeyman or master blogger, and you would be willing to advise others on improving their online ministries, please contact us.

We will add your website to this list so newer Lutheran bloggers can see if you write in a style they might like to emulate.

Caveats:

Don't expect this list to grow long. Most rostered ministers are too busy to devote additional time to their blogging efforts.

Don't expect people on this list to serve as proofreaders. General suggestions and answers to specific questions are fair game, but respect their time.

Bloggers who are willing to advise others:

The illustration above is a woodcut from the 1550 Frankfurt edition of Luther's *Small Catechism*. This portrayal of Christ teaching the disciples the Lord's Prayer was created by Hans Brosamer.

Protected: Congregational Resources



What we're referring to here is not the office computer or fax. We're talking about the people.

Every congregation has a wealth of people with untapped knowledge and skills. Your members and friends—especially the “younger” ones—know plenty about social media, search engines and graphic manipulation.

Just ask for some help and it will come. And the opportunity to offer their pastor a hand in this ministry may well build a bridge to deeper bonds.

So, when you encounter a technical problem that isn't addressed by the Handbook, follow these simple steps (in any order that you choose).

1. Do a quick online search.
2. Ask a friend who blogs about it.
3. Seek out a blogging mentor. (You may well already count some exceptional bloggers among your existing acquaintances.)
4. Make an announcement at church (in the bulletin or on your social media page) saying you could use a little help with a particular activity.

Protected: Blogging Images



Many bloggers seem to think that finding graphics is far more difficult than it actually is. Below you will find general advice and links to good sources for free images you can use. Keep in mind that the links are the tip of the iceberg, and simple online searches will reveal scores of sources for “free web graphics.”

For those who desire, there are many commercial sites that offer images, but the services linked here are those that offer their images gratis.

There are many types of images which can enhance your website. A good graphic foreshadows your message, and can tell a story in its own right. The following pages briefly discuss some categories of images. We offer a sampling of the unlimited resources available, and if you have a suggestion for a site to add, by all means share it with us.

[Photographs](#)

[Graphic Images](#)

[Memes & Online Generators](#)

[Original Artwork](#)

[Congregational Resources](#)

The photograph above is a representation of Toby Rosenthal’s “Sleeping Cardinal.”

Protected: Photographs



First off, don't overlook the possibility of using your *own* photos on your website. The quality of the cameras we enjoy on today's phones is quite adequate for producing startling images.

Just as the passing years have carried many literary classics into the "public domain," so too many historic images are available for your free use.

There are some normal procedures that allow nonprofit bloggers some leeway in having formal permission for the use of

images. First of all, there are some images so simple and commonplace as to be essentially valueless. You would never be able to track down their creator even if you devoted the rest of your life to that purpose.

Then there are images that the owners would almost pay you to use. Think in terms of commercial products, like the one pictured above. You may question the good taste of this brewery's name choice for their chocolate peanut butter porter, but if you use their image, it's highly unlikely they would complain.

If you are linking within your blog text to an outside resource, it is normally considered "fair use" to replicate an image from that location. It's possible they could ask you to remove it from your site, but highly unlikely, since you are directing "traffic" to their own site. As long as you aren't attempting to deceive or gain some kind of profit from the image, you should be on safe ground.

Here are some places to start when seeking a photograph for your post. Some are not copyrighted at all, and others have many images that are governed by the Creative Commons guidelines. You can learn about the various rights that artists on sites like Flickr are retaining [here](#).

Library of Congress

Flickr

Wikipedia

Protected: Free Vector Graphics



You can do a search for vector graphics (which expand without loss of detail), and find a number of websites where they offer a significant number of useful graphics for free. They offer them for free, of course, to entice you to purchase their expanded services; but there is no requirement to do so. Here are a few spots, with a couple of examples from each, to get you started.

You can use any graphic program to crop (cut) any of these images. It's simple, fast, and the basic programs are already loaded on your computer. With more sophisticated graphics software (some of it freeware), you'll be shocked at what you can do.

The image above comes from Vecteezy, and the one below is from Freepik. Oh, and Freepik *also* offers royalty free *photos*!

[Pixabay](#)

[Vecteezy](#)

[Freepik](#)



Protected: Memes and Online Generators



You don't need to surf the web very long before you begin to recognize some recurring images. Oh, the text on them frequently varies, but it's pretty clear they come from a common source. Well, now you will learn where a couple of those sources can be found.

The image above is from an online [word cloud generator](#). You can enter any words you would like . . . or simply cut and paste a selection from any source to see a visual display of word frequency.

The links below will take you to the sources of all of the images found on this page (and many more). All you need to do is enter your own text and save the resulting image. You are free to use it any way you wish.

The general understanding about copyrighted images (let's say, TV's "The Simpsons") is that if you alter the image for satirical purposes and you are not overdoing it, you are safe under the "Fair Use" provisions of United States Trademark Law. (Of course, I'm not a lawyer, and I don't pretend to understand the complexities of the judicial system.)

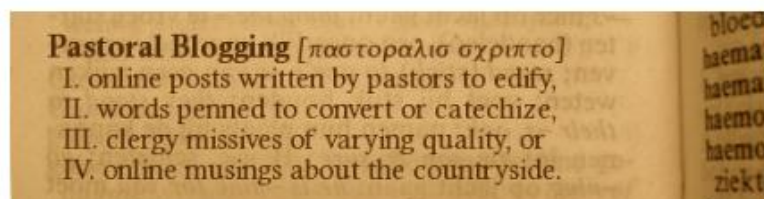
Remember, this is the smallest sampling of online generation tools. Oh, one caution, it is quite simple to overdo these little things . . . just as we have done below.

My personal favorite is the (de)motivational poster generator at the bottom of the page.

Gain attention by editing classic images.



Creatively define any word or phrase you desire.



Add a personalized touch to common visuals.



"Immortalize" someone with a star of their own.

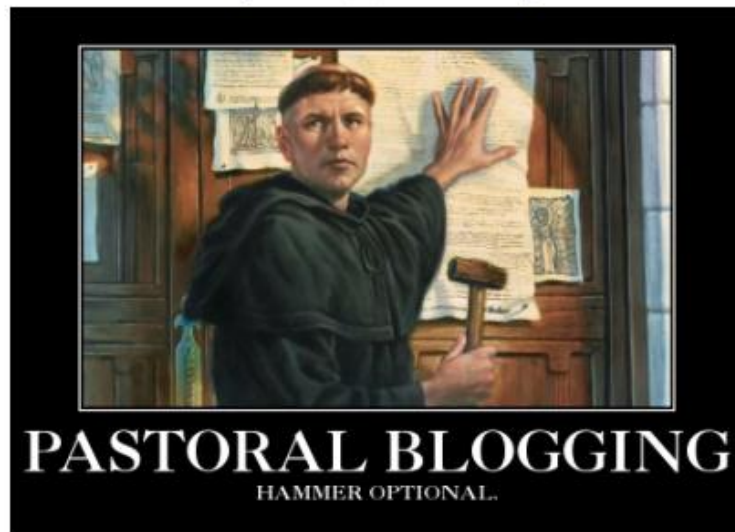


Gain attention with highly provocative images.



Or, My Personal Favorite

Visualize your own (de)motivational posters.



Protected: Original Artwork

You might be blessed to have members of your congregation who are delighted to share their original artwork with you! (You won't know if you don't ask.) Or, perhaps you have family members who would love to have their compositions featured on your site?

All it takes is a scanner to transform the original drawing, painting, or whatever into a digital form. If they created the original digitally, you don't even need to go to that effort.

If so, be sure to protect their creations by clearly labeling them as being copyrighted by a given individual and used with their permission.

I do not consider myself any sort of artist, but I have enjoyed using basic graphic programs to create some graphics for use on my Mere Inkling blog site. For example, I enjoy using historical images and adding thought or word balloons, like those below.

Two share a common theme, revealing the way in which C.S. Lewis and another literary figure regarded one another's work (George Orwell and Ayn Rand). The third example draws together quotations from Stephen King and C.S. Lewis that I consider to share a common insight.

By the way, adding text to photographs in this manner is *extremely* easy to do . . .



Protected: Miscellaneous Resources



No pastor has ever complained about having an empty email inbox. But there are some websites that periodically disseminate helpful advice at no charge. Don't be reluctant to sign up, since "unsubscribing" has never been easier, should you decide the information isn't as useful as you thought.

Most of these are provided by businesses, but they never nag you about purchasing services. On the contrary, they provide a wide array of data and suggestions that get your own creative juices flowing.

As a bonus . . . most purveyors of blogging information offer free ebooks as an enticement to subscribe to their mailing lists.

[Copyright & Fair Use Laws](#)

[Easy WordPress Guide](#)

[WordPress University](#)

[Inbound Hub](#)

[Web Design Library](#)

[Usabilla Blog](#)

APPENDIX FIVE

PASTORAL BLOGGING HANDBOOK

This attachment includes the Handbook as finalized after incorporating suggestions from the research participants. It is distributed in a PDF format which allows for use on a wide range of e-readers, as well as all basic computers. It is formatted to a standard book size of six by nine inches, which allows it to be reproduced in this appendix with two pages, side by side. This does require a modest reduction in size, but it does not limit accessibility for our current purpose. The Handbook is preceded by a detailed description of the changes made between the draft and finalized editions.

Revisions to Handbook

The version of the *Pastoral Blogging Handbook* which follows, is a finalized version that differs in a number of significant ways from the first draft of the resource which was used by the participants of the study. The initial draft was intended to be precisely that, a first draft that would be modified. It was anticipated that participants would provide suggestions for additions, revisions and perhaps even deletions. In the end, additions and revisions (clarifications) were made. No suggestions were made to delete any of the material. Thus, all of the contents of the first draft are still present in the final version. To eliminate the need to include that draft in an appendix, a detailed listing of the changes follows.

The expansion of the book from forty-seven to one hundred and fourteen pages resulted from several considerations. Some suggestions for more “advice” arose from the research participants. These were supplemented by ideas arising from my own continuing research and reflection. A common literary element, in the form of a preface, was added. Finally, two chapters offering the thoughts of Christian writers were added, for the benefit of those who would find a simple collection of suggestions lacking.

1. *Change in title* from “Handbook” to “Enchiridion.” During my recent review of foundational Reformation writings, I was reminded of how many of these works are enchiridia. Since the two words share the same meaning, I decided to change the title of the manual for two reasons. First, “enchiridion” is a word familiar to Lutheran clergy, which harkens back to the aforementioned documents and emphasizes my desire that the current work contribute in some small way to that ongoing legacy. Secondly, while the word “handbook” is mundane and connotes images of a simple instruction manual, its Latin counterpart carries an air of gravitas, suggesting that a ministry of online writing is a serious matter.
2. *Edited Introduction* to reflect the revised elements of the final version of the Enchiridion.
3. *Addition of Quick Start page* “for Impatient Online Authors.” Based on the preference of some pastors to skim the handbook seeking just enough information to get started, I added a page outlining three expedited approaches to using the enchiridion.
4. *Addition of a Preface* which similarly shows a continuity between our Lutheran theological roots and this contemporary literary ministry. Originally written by Martin Luther 479 years ago, its pertinence to our own pastoral ministries is striking.
5. *Restructured framework* for the enchiridion. I made changes to clarify the material and enhance its usefulness. These improvements included combining the first two sections and dividing the final section to emphasize the importance of periodically evaluating one’s blogging ministry.
6. *Addition of suggested topics.* I incorporated all of the recommendations of research participants for improving the Handbook.
7. *Expansion of advice* derived from my continuing personal experience and research.
8. *Inclusion of additional graphics.* This enhancement was not simply aesthetic, although that is worthy of consideration since poor layout or presentation often undermines the effect of even stellar content. Six new historical exemplars remind readers of the importance of the written word for conveying the gospel.

9. *Addition of C.F.W. Walther's* advice for faithful pastoral authorship. His careful treatment of the sermon manuscript includes the awareness that the words may not only be preached from the pulpit, but may also be proclaimed "in print."
10. *Addition of writing advice* from one of the twentieth century's preeminent Christian apologists. C.S. Lewis wrote to a Western culture well on the slippery descent made unavoidable by its rejection of the Christian faith.
11. *Addition of suggestions for getting ideas* inspired by Lewis' fellow Inkling, J.R.R. Tolkien.

Digital Enchiridion



A Lutheran Resource For Pastoral Blogging

Robert C. Stroud

A Resource for LCMS Pastors

Digital Enchiridion

A Lutheran Resource for Pastoral Blogging

by Robert C. Stroud

IMPRIMI POTEST: ✠ Ἀθανάσιος Ἀλέξανδρείας
NIHIL OBSTAT: ✠ Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis
IMPRIMATUR: Martinus Luther

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This book is not to be distributed, transmitted or stored without the express, written permission of the author. It is intended for the use of Lutheran Church Missouri Synod pastors and other rostered church workers. Although focused on ordained readers, this enchiridion is offered without cost to all rostered LCMS ministers with that proviso. Soli Deo gloria.

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Preface

Martin Luther of Wittenberg (1536)

In times past, many wondrous manifestations have occurred in the Christian Church: some comforting, some terrifying, as the ancient histories and books testify. However, in my opinion, if there were a diligent writer in our own time (such as there were in the time of the Greeks and the Romans) who would set forth the events that have occurred daily since then, one would truly also read and hear about various wonders, even as a powerful example from the events of our own time is described here . . .

For through much practice, I have come to the point (God be praised) that I am just now really beginning to believe that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. Everyone now and at all times understands, has understood, and will understand this text all too well—except for myself alone and a few poor sinners and fools, like Moses, David, Isaiah, and such people (among whom I can only boastfully place myself by saying: *Nos poma natamus* [“I am floating along with the other apples”]—[that is,] like horse dung among apples). These people consider God to be a man of wonders and say that His creation is nothing but wondrous works. Yet very few see God's wondrous works, though everyone sees His creation and cannot help but grasp and feel it, as St. Paul says in Acts 17.

However, I, too, am one of the coarse fellows who do not yet comprehend His creation, and (as I said) I have just begun to believe this, so that, as an old student and a doctor now almost at the end of my days, I must rightly wonder at how the people in our time know everything that the Holy Spirit knows as soon as they have so much as sniffed at a book.

Yet they go off on their way and see nothing of the things God does daily before our eyes, which are both terrifying and comforting. They give it no heed, as if it were all a charlatan's trick. Through Adam's sin human nature has fallen so far from God and His image—that is, from knowing Him—that we also do not understand our own body and life, how wonderfully these are daily created, granted, and preserved by God. Therefore, is it any wonder if we are obstinate, stubborn, utterly blind, and [insensible] logs toward His other wondrous works, which He reveals to us in all creatures, besides our own body and life?

In summary, this life is useless. God is too utterly despised and unknown. Ingratitude is too great. Come, death, and slay all wicked scoundrels, and may Christ bring us into His kingdom! There is nothing good here . . .

Yet God does not cease from His kindness and continues to work wonder upon wonder, sign after sign. Some of these are so powerful and palpable that nothing like them has ever been heard or seen before, so that He might thereby humble our impenitent, proud hearts . . . For the very same God who is working wonders now is the one who has worked wonders in the past and must always work wonders, except that we regard the former and ancient miracles (because we did not see them but read and hear about them) more highly than the present ones, which we do see

and hear.

And our descendants (if the history of our time should reach them by means of books or otherwise) will regard what we now do and suffer much more highly than we do ourselves, who are involved and are in some measure playing the game ourselves. Thus God is always despised when He is present. However, when He is absent, one searches for Him and inquires about Him but does not find Him, as He says, "You will seek Me, and you will not find Me."

That will eventually also happen to the account written down in this book. Many will read it, but it will soon be forgotten . . .

Yet, it is not too late for diligent writers in our own time, just as in times past, to set forth the miraculous events occurring daily. If the lost were allowed to read and hear about various wonders, perhaps they might come to the point where they really begin to believe that God is the Creator of heaven and earth.



Except for the final paragraph, this Preface comes verbatim from Luther's Preface to *The Twenty-Ninth Psalm, on the Power of the Voice of God in the Air* by Ambrosius Moibanus which was published in 1536. The closing paragraph represents an editing of Luther's thoughts in this preface to contextualize it for the present Enchiridion.

Acknowledgments

Four elements of this handbook were created by pastors other than the author. It is important that I identify their unique contributions. The first is the Preface by Doctor Martin Luther. It was written 480 years ago. Only the final paragraph has been modified, using much of Luther's terminology and maintaining the spirit of the text.

The second is the volume's initial illustration, "Updating the 95 Theses." It is the handiwork of the Reverend Mike Morgan. Pastor Morgan is the creator of the *For Heaven's Sake* a popular comic strip, which has been published since 1991. For more of his ecclesiastical humor, visit <https://www.creators.com/comics/for-heavens-sake-about.html>.

The next is the final illustration in the handbook. "Beware of Theological Jargon," comes from the pen of Father Luke Dingman. It originally appeared, untitled, in *Again* magazine. Today Father Dingman devotes his artistic talents primarily to the creation of Byzantine icons. You can view some of his inspiring masterpieces at <http://www.lukedingman.com>.

The last item coming from another source is chapter four, "The Pastoral Author." I have taken the liberty of editing a lecture on preaching by Rev. C.F.W. Walther. I have modified it to apply to a written rather than preached presentation of God's truths.

As indicated in the text, Pastor Morgan and Father Dingman each hold the copyright to their anointed artwork. Walther's presentation, in its edited form as it appears here, is covered by the copyright of this handbook. Luther's Preface is the translation of Kurt K. Hendel, as it appears in volume sixty of *Luther's Works*.

A final word of thanks is extended to the thirteen courageous pastors who participated in the research project which resulted in this resource. They bear no responsibility for its shortcomings, and much credit for any usefulness it possesses.

Introduction

Each person approaches a “manual” in their own way, and some prefer to dispense with introductory comments and get started right away. If you are one of these, turn to page xiii now.

A blogging pastor may well reach more people online in a single year, than he does from his physical pulpit over the course of a decade. The use of the adjective “physical” is intentional. Those who have eyes to see, recognize a pastor’s online platform constitutes a *digital pulpit* in its own right.

Martin Luther’s tracts, correspondence, treatises, and published homilies reached far beyond the range of his voice as he preached from his pulpit in Wittenberg’s *Stadtkirche*. Similarly, the online ministry of a pastor carries his words—literally—around the globe.

Moreover, that internet audience will include men and women of diverse beliefs who reside at the “ends of the earth.”

Adding blogging to your ministry is simpler than you imagine. Amazingly, it is possible to set up your account and be ready to publish your first post in less than half an hour.

This booklet will not only tell you *how* to do that . . . but it will offer advice on how to do it *well*. By design, the suggestions are

offered here in brief fashion. Each could readily be expanded upon, but most readers today (including clergy) prefer a fast-paced presentation of the facts with minimal digression.

Should you desire to investigate any of the issues raised here further, you can simply access various conversations on the internet. If you have specific questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact the author at chaplainstroud@gmail.com.

While this handbook has been prepared with the novice blogger in mind, it is hoped that it will include material that will be helpful even to pastors who have been blogging for some time.

The process of blogging involves a number of interwoven elements. Several steps do need to be taken in a particular order. Most, however, are optional. But it is precisely your attention to these secondary considerations that set your work apart. They represent the practices of the most successful online writers.

The handbook is organized in five chapters. The first provides a brief discussion of writing online, and moves to a fast track checklist for setting up an account where you can begin writing online *right now*. While having your first post online an hour from now may offer a flush of accomplishment, it is advisable that you temper your enthusiasm and first read more of the advice that follows.

Various analogies can readily be applied to blogging, but the familiar biblical image of agriculture commends itself. The second chapter follows a farming template. Advice is grouped in these categories or stages: preparing, plowing, planting, pruning, cultivating, harvesting and renewing. Most novice bloggers will

greatly benefit from at least skimming the material in the first four steps before writing their first post.

Chapter three offers some suggestions directed at those in the ministry. While most of the material in the previous chapter applies to online writers in general, the subjects addressed here relate expressly to those who are called to preach the good news. The recommendations are not to be regarded as laws, since each pastor must be faithful to God's unique leading in their ministry. Nevertheless, thoughtful readers should recognize value in consciously considering the issues raised, even when the Holy Spirit leads them to follow a different path.

The next chapter reveals some timeless wisdom about proclaiming the gospel. It is a familiar lecture given by C.F.W. Walther on how to prepare a sermon. With very minor editing, it has been revised to provide advice to pastoral bloggers. It may surprise some just how applicable Walther's counsel is for this twenty-first century technology.

It is hoped that the penultimate chapter be valuable to many pastors. It is offered because of the author's conviction that having a model to emulate is beneficial. Not only can we follow their positive example, we can avoid some of the hazards to which they may have succumbed. While there are countless excellent mentors available in the church's history—the illustrations found in this volume identify only a few—many writers have experienced C.S. Lewis to be a great source of inspiration.

Arguably the most noteworthy apologist of the twentieth century, Lewis approached the task by focusing on the core of the faith,

“mere Christianity,” as he identified it. Unless God *leads* one to do otherwise and attend in depth to secondary doctrines, and he certainly may do so, it is wise to not stray far from Lewis' example, knowing nothing except “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Please note that the epistle with which the chapter begins was not written by Lewis, but is a homage to *The Screwtape Letters*.

The final chapter is included in direct response to the requests of several research participants. It offers some modest suggestions for how to come up with sufficient ideas to keep a blog running . . . and interesting.

May our God bless and lead you as you contemplate embarking on this new ministry. And, should you embrace the opportunity, may the seeds you sow through your writing bring forth an abundant harvest . . . to his glory.



Quick Start

for Impatient Online Authors

- Turn to this **Quick Start** page.

Congratulations, you're here. There are three recommended options for those who prefer not to read the entire handbook.

- Option 1:** Skip to the WordPress directions.

That's all you need to read, if you're in a hurry. If you desire some advice about beginning...

- Option 2:** Turn to Chapter Two & Read Steps One & Two before starting.

For those who want to consider the entire scope of the blogging experience...

- Option 3:** In Chapters Two and Three & Read all of the suggestions before writing.

The rest of the material, is purely optional. It is included for the benefit of those who are interested in these supplemental subjects.



Chapter I

A Blogging Primer

“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

1 Peter 2:1-3



A Blogging Primer

This first chapter provides enough basic information to allow a pastor—especially one who has already given the subject some thought—to begin blogging. It is recommended, however, that you at least skim the rest of the handbook before beginning.

“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”
(2 Corinthians 9:10).

Most pastors are acquainted with the concept of blogging, if only in a fleeting way. However, since the internet hosts an almost infinite array of “literary” expressions, it is helpful to begin with a brief orientation.

A blog is essentially a website that is compiled in the fashion of a journal, i.e. chronologically. At the same time, blogs are equipped to allow for organization by topics and word searches. Each post is like its own page, in a sense, since it can be linked to directly. Normally, the general website takes a visitor to the most recent post, with available links to previous columns.

As the author (administrator) of your blog, you own it. You are free to add to it or to delete from it any time you please. This is true of any comments that you have allowed to be added to the site. You should always keep in mind, however, that with a few

exceptions (such as password restrictions) once something has been added to the internet a digital copy will exist of it elsewhere.

Nevertheless, this copying (caching) of internet sites does not infringe on your copyright to your own work. It cannot legally be reproduced in any form other than your original presentation without your permission. Of course, what is legal and what is practiced are not necessarily the same.

You possess full creative rights for your website. You can make it as dynamic—or as passive—as you desire. You choose the topics or themes you address, and are free to make a 180 shift in the blog any time you choose.

While there are a number of common aspects of blogging, there is little restraint on your own ingenuity. While most blog sites begin sharing generic similarities, many evolve into distinctive creations as authors place their unique fingerprints on them. This is natural. When changes are not arbitrary or overdone, they are a mark of a healthy blog.

Why Should You Blog?

There are many reasons for blogging. It is possible to make money if you build a large audience and have a worthwhile product. Revenue-generating websites are the small minority though.

Most people blog for far more personal reasons. They are not pandering to potential customers, but simply seeking contact with other human beings who share their interests or are willing to engage in a conversation.

Clergy likewise blog for a wide range of reasons. Some do so to proclaim the Gospel or to advocate for particular understandings of God's work in our world.

Some write online because of congregational expectations or a sense of duty. It is far more energizing to approach blogging with personal enthusiasm. Still, good and growth result even from imperfect motivations. And, even an obligatory web presence can allow for an enjoyable and fruitful experience.

It would be a mistake to assume that blogs written by pastors need to (or even should) be religious. Writing about sports, hobbies, politics, family, sightseeing, media and nearly ever other subject can be rewarding. And, there are few topics that would not afford clergy who desire to raise faith questions an opportunity to do so.

Why blog? Some blog because it will be of benefit to others. Others blog primarily because of benefits writing online offer to them. I believe Christian bloggers experience both consequences.

How Do You blog?

Blogging often seems difficult to the outsider. Once you have joined the ranks of online writers, you will be amazed at how simple it actually is.

There are numerous free websites and ebooks offering advice about blogging. You can also pay money for the advice. Truth is, much of it is rehashed, and it is surprising how little you need to become a good online journalist.

The logistics are less confusing than they appear on the surface. Free blogging hosts, such as WordPress and Blogger, walk you through the simple process. You can purchase optional features if you desire, but you need not consider that until after you have embarked on the adventure. Everything you need to be successful is free.

Success boils down to two elements. First, and most important, is writing well. This does not simply mean writing something "interesting," despite the fact that with the hundreds of millions of web surfers, an audience will exist for even the most arcane of topics. It means communicating clearly, and avoiding distracting errors. Your particular style (called "voice" by literary types) will be your own. That is as it should be. But there are some writing fundamentals that apply to everyone, and you will see some advice in this booklet related to these common practices.

The second element is a bit more nuanced, and requires experience as a blogger. That is learning how to capitalize on the unique aspects of online writing. This includes skills like formatting for online reading and the use of (hyper)links. You can start blogging without understanding any of these options, but the advice in the pages that follow offers pastors a head start.

Some bloggers will immediately click with the technological elements. For others, they will not come naturally, and related actions will require more deliberation and study. That is natural, and nothing to be intimidated by.

What you read above is true: once you have begun blogging "you will be amazed at how simple it actually is" to create an attractive and welcoming site.

The blogging glossary at the end of this handbook will assist with deciphering what may seem foreign, but for those who have mastered Greek and Hebrew, blogtalk poses little challenge.

Just Like Martin Luther

Luther attributed the advent of the printing press—with its unforeseen ability to disseminate the Gospel—to God’s providence. If he were alive today, as we approach the quincentenary of the Reformation, it is easy to imagine him proclaiming the same thing about the internet. The words he wrote about Gutenberg’s marvel sound much like the modern wonder to which you have access this very moment. Follow in Luther’s footsteps and harness the potential of the internet for a holy purpose.



Illustration 1: Updating the 95 Theses. © 2014 by Mike Morgan. Used with permission.

Blogging on WordPress

This is a very simple process, and you can do it right now. Still, reading the first several sections of this booklet is recommended before signing up for your site.

The steps for using an alternative blogging tool are similar, but none of them (e.g. Blogger, Movable Type, Tumblr, LinkedIn, etc.) offer the versatility, reliability and collegial creative community that WordPress boasts. This includes an easy way to shift from a “hosted” approach to one where you operate from your personally owned domain.

You are free, of course, to use any blogging platform. You may wish to read a few of the many online reviews comparing them before making your decision. Should you opt for WordPress, you can follow these simple directions:

1. Go to WordPress.com and sign up for a free account.
2. Create the account with your username, password and email address.
3. Select your blog title.

Congratulations. Your account is active and your blog title (domain) belongs to you—forever.

4. Go to your “dashboard” from which you control all the features of your website.
5. Choose a theme (layout) for your blog. There are many free templates available. (You can easily change your theme whenever you desire something fresh.) Most themes allow you to add a useful subtitle (tagline) to your blog’s formal name.
6. Personalize your layout with different features of your own choice, called “widgets.” (You do not need to use any as you begin.)
7. Write your very first post. (You can save your draft at any time and return to it later.)
8. Hit the publish button (after you have proofread it).

Getting started is truly as simple as this. If you have written your first post in advance, it is quite possible to have it posted on the internet within twenty minutes of your signing up for the blog domain name you desire.

Later, as you grow more familiar with the sophisticated options within WordPress, you will learn to refine or customize your new global pulpit. And international it will be. WordPress will automatically track the nations from which your readers come!

Should the day arrive when you decide to set WordPress up on your own domain, that’s free too. And you can find a wealth of advice on how to make that transition smoothly. As mentioned above, there are alternatives to using WordPress for your

blogging. Some pastors may wish to consider online arguments written by their advocates.



These words “are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Yochanan Ben Zaydai

The Apostle: John

Published Works (Extant):

- A holy Gospel of the Life of our Lord Jesus.
- An apocalyptic Revelation of the future fate of the human race.
- Several pieces of correspondence to encourage believers.

The Apostle’s Literary Message:

- John reveals the lasting value of the written word.
- John, like Paul, shows correspondence can cross boundaries of place and time.
- John reminds us God is present in all of life, from the beginning to the end.
- John declares that the wonders of God’s gracious activity could not be contained by all the books in the world.
- Most especially, John celebrates the wonder that Jesus is the Logos.

Following John’s Example:

- We recognize the Incarnate Word has the power to sanctify our words, which are written to his glory.
- We can properly describe anything in the whole of creation in terms of God’s handiwork and purpose.
- We can follow John’s example of writing in different genres to the glory of our Lord.
- We can celebrate the Lamb of God in all we think, do and write.

Illustration 2: The example of the Apostle John.

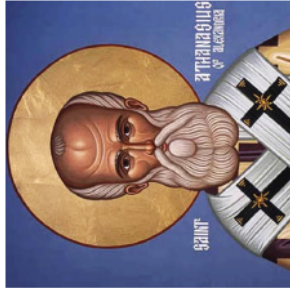
Chapter II

Advice for Pastoral Bloggers

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose . . .”

Isaiah 55:10-11





"For the searching and right understanding of the Scriptures there is need of a good life and a pure soul, and for Christian virtue to guide the mind to grasp, so far as human nature can, the truth concerning God the Word."

Athanasius of Alexandria

The Bishop: Athanasius

Published Works (Extant):

- Doctrinal Treatises such as "On the Incarnation."
- Apologetic works against the lies of Arius and the Pagans.
- Biography of the desert father, Anthony.
- Biblical commentaries.
- Pastoral correspondence with clergy, monks, and laity.
- Correspondence with government officials defending the Church.

The Bishop's Literary Message:

- All doctrine should be based on the truth of the Scriptures.
- Leaders in the Christian Church should be able to persuasively argue, without compromise, for the Truth.
- Christian leaders are called to promote and defend the Gospel in both sacred and secular environs.
- Mutual encouragement of the saints is vital to the Church's health.
- The lives of the saints provide encouragement and models for holy living.

Following Athanasius' Example:

- In addition to addressing biblical and doctrinal matters, we can serve the Church by writing devotional and inspirational works.
- We should bow to neither false teachers nor anti-Christian state.

Illustration 3: The example of Athanasius of Alexandria.

Step 1 Preparing

Nothing worth doing should be approached cavalierly, without preparation. This is never truer than when we embark on ventures that relate to the sharing of the good news. Whether you recognize it at this moment or not, *your* humble blog has every potential to be the instrument God uses to change someone's eternal destiny.

"You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited, the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard."
(Deuteronomy 28:9).

Don't read this manual legalistically. What you will find here in the encliridion are simply *suggestions*, which it is hoped will help you discover what works for *you*.

Pray that God will guide you in your online writing efforts. That is the proper place for all worthwhile endeavors to begin.

Consider your motivation for blogging. There is a significant difference in how you approach something you consider a ministry as contrasted with recreational or financial pursuits.

Prioritize the purposes of your website. This can be beneficial in helping stay on track amidst distractions. Is your goal primarily to teach, witness, inspire, entertain, or . . . ?

Choose the overarching theme for your writing. Determine what general subject interests you enough to keep you writing.

Reflect on your own tastes. Consciously think about the elements you like and dislike as you read on the internet.

Explore your niche. Once you have chosen a theme, look online to see how many other bloggers may be addressing similar subjects. This can help you sharpen your focus.

Consider names for your blog. Something short and catchy, with a connection to your theme, is ideal for your blog site. (Likewise, for each of it's posts).

Think about your profile photo. It will identify you when you comment on other websites, and offers a unique opportunity for personal expression. (Remember, it can be *any* image you desire to have represent you.)

Plan your writing schedule. A pace of two to three posts each week is the frequency recommended by most experts. However, your personal tastes and depth of treatment will determine this.

Discover your rhythm. It will take some time to learn what sort of writing and publishing schedule works best for you.

Simplicity beats complexity. You will have plenty of time to embellish your blog later, so it is smart to start out with something fairly modest.

Consider allowing personal contact. Including an email address or online contact form is optional . . . but if you hope to use your blog for ministry, you should seriously think about including at least one of these options.

Take risks. After all, following Christ is for the courageous, not the cowardly.

Set specific goals. Beyond determining the pace of your writing, there may be other personal goals you would like to reach, such as gaining an international audience.

Read copiously. Successful writers universally recommend reading as the surest foundation for strengthening effective writing skills.

Read broadly. Avoid the deep ruts some fall into when they limit their reading to a small complement of authors or publications. Some of your best ideas will spring from unexpected sources.

Pursue your interests. Nothing will keep you better motivated in your writing ministry than blogging about subjects that genuinely interest you.

Remember the weak. Avoid columns that will cause the immature to stumble and perhaps lose their way altogether.

Borrow freely. It's not plagiarism to copy ephemeral elements like layout, style and tone from the blog sites that you admire.

Your audience is a mystery. Unless you restrict your blog site with passwords, your potential audience includes everyone in the world with access to the internet.

Don't be intimidated. Truth be told, most *extremely successful* bloggers are far less intelligent, talented, dedicated and wise than you are. So, press on!

Give blogging a try. You won't know whether any reservations you may have are valid until you invest a little time in online writing. You have no obligation to continue writing if you don't find it worthwhile.

Consider "branding" your blog. If you want to unite your multiple "identities" across various media (e.g. Facebook, a blog, LinkedIn), consider creating a personal logo that can be used across disparate media.



"When you begin to read or listen to the Holy Scriptures pray to God thus: 'Lord Jesus Christ, open the ears and eyes of my heart so that I may hear thy words and understand them...' that he might illumine your mind and open to you the power of his words."

Ephraim of Syria

The Monk: Ephraim

Published Works (extant):

- Exegetical commentaries on the Old and New Testaments.
- Apologetic works heretics and pagans such as the Gnostic philosopher Bardaisan.
- Hymns (more than 400 of which survive).
- Poetry and Beatitudes.
- Homilies.
- Ascetic literature.

The Monk's Literary Message:

- Humanity's chief purpose is to glorify God.
- Christian writers must do battle with the purveyors of religious lies.
- Self-denial results in rich spiritual dividends.
- Vigilance is required to live with Christian discipline.

Following Ephraim's Example:

- Our writings should bring glory to God.
- The source of our message should flow from God's Word.
- If we are called to write, we need to devote ourselves to that purpose and not succumb to lethargy or timidity.
- We should explore our fluency in different genres for communicating the Gospel.

Illustration 4: Example of the Monk: Ephraim.

Step 2 Plowing

The following logistical considerations should be considered as you begin writing online. These preliminary considerations are similar to those a farmer ponders as he chooses his crops and determines how to lay out his fields.

“For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.’” (Jeremiah 4:3)

Select a good name for your “domain” address. Extra points awarded for titles that are short and catchy.

Decide where you want your blog hosted. There are a variety of options, but it is difficult to beat WordPress for cost, extensive support network, versatility and reputation.

Choose your site’s layout. These packaged formats are called “themes.” WordPress offers a considerable range of options without charge.

Use a “responsive” option. You definitely need a theme that is responsive, meaning it automatically adjusts how it displays on computers, laptops and mobile devices.

Tweak your theme to suit your tastes. Most blog themes include a number of options (such as colors) that you can adjust to help your site stand out from others using similar formats.

Pick your fonts intentionally. You need not be a fontaholic to recognize that the typeface you use matters. For example, ponder this: serif fonts (with the extra strokes that make letters more distinctive) are easier to read than sans serif fonts.

An additional font factor. Material presented in serif fonts is actually viewed as more trustworthy.

Embellish your site to welcome likely readers. You can easily add a unique banner or images that will appeal to those interested in your site’s general theme or topic.

Include sharing buttons. These allow your readers to pass your words on (intact) to the readers or their own blogs or twitter accounts.

Do not confuse pages with posts. Pages stand independently and can be arranged hierarchically like traditional websites. The posts are actually the essence of blogs, and are similar to journal entries.

Compose your “About” page. This is a stand alone “document” where you can describe yourself and your goals for the many readers who are interested in such matters.

Make navigation simple. As your site grows, in addition to the search function, explore additional options (such as “categories”) for helping visitors find their way around will become more important.

Capture your ideas. Jot down column ideas whenever you think of them, rather than relying on your fleeting memory.

Use a bedside tablet. Many people receive some of their most creative insights when they are hovering on the edge of sleep, but without some way to record them, they often elude recovery.

Compile your ideas. Whether in computer files or manila folders, keep track of writing ideas in a secure place.

Create a graphics folder on your computer. Toss in interesting images that may, or may not find themselves on your website in the future.

Compile a list of future blogging topics. Periodically brainstorming topics for future columns is helpful. Inviting others to make suggestions can also be fruitful.

Add media beyond text. In addition to graphics, your site can host audio, video and other types of files. Think beyond the written word . . . but don't get carried away with this freedom.

“Syndicate” your columns. It is possible to have your blog posts automatically published to your Facebook, LinkedIn, and other online accounts. And, you don't need to “tweet” even once to open a free Twitter account.

Keep it simple. Tools like Gravatar allow you to use a single avatar for numerous different sites that would otherwise require individual accounts for accessing or making comments.

Improve your writing skills. Practice makes perfect, almost. A little bit of study can also carry one a great distance.

Consider joining a writer's group. If your community does not already have a literary fellowship like the Inklings of Oxford, consider starting one.

Emulate what you like. When you see blogs with layouts or other traits you enjoy, do not hesitate to model yours after them. (Bookmark them for future reference.)

Seek a mentor. If you know someone whose online ministry you respect, consider asking them for advice and feedback.

Draft an editorial calendar. Establishing a pliant plan for publishing posts (perhaps taking into consideration the church year) can provide cohesion to your online ministry.

Introduce your site. Do not rely on simply telling your relatives and your congregation about your blog site. Spread the word to anyone who might be interested in the topics you address.

Trust your preaching skills. Many of the same skills that characterize good preaching translate directly into exceptional writing.

Select your seeds. If you are blessed with an overabundance of ideas that merit a column, prioritize what you plant by its urgency and time-sensitivity. (Prayerfully, of course.)



“The Holy Scriptures were not given to us that we should enclose them in books, but that we should engrave them upon our hearts.”

John Chrysostom

The Patriarch: Chrysostom

Published Works (extant):

- Numerous homilies (as befits one known as “Golden-mouthed.”)
- Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (the most commonly used order of worship for Orthodox Christians).
- Exegetical writings, theological and pastoral treatises.
- Letters.

The Patriarch’s Literary Message:

- The clear meaning of the Scriptures is to be preferred over allegorical interpretations.
- The Word of God does not submit to the will of the rulers of this world.
- The praise of this world is fleeting and dangerous in its allure.
- Be faithful in your proclamation of the Gospel despite the attacks of pagans on one side and civil religionists on the other.

Following Chrysostom’s Example:

- We should never lose sight of the simple and clear meaning of God’s Word.
- Hearers (and readers) appreciate clear and practical application of the Scriptures.
- Faithfulness, not success as determined by the world’s standards, should be our sole desire.

Illustration 5: Example of the Patriarch: John Chrysostom.

Step 3 Planting

Planting healthy seed in well-turned soil is the key to farming. Likewise, choosing the right words to clearly communicate your message is vital to all writing—and especially online, where you are competing with millions of other voices for readers’ attention. Specifically “pastoral” considerations will be addressed in Chapter III.

“Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.” (Hosea 10:12).

Write. Successful writers are unanimous in saying this is the key to improving your literary skills.

Write well. A writing ministry demands your best effort. If you don’t consider writing strong columns worth your time, chances are prospective readers will share your opinion of your posts.

Write regularly. Post on a regular basis, two to three times a week being the most common recommendation. Consistency is the key to building an ongoing audience.

Reach beyond your sermons. Posting sermons meets the technical requirement of blogging, and ministers to some, but

only a handful of people surf the web on a quest seeking homilies to read.

Write, copy and paste. Use your word processor of choice to compose your articles; typing directly into an online form can be somewhat awkward and distracting.

Invest time in crafting great titles. Like the cover of a book, a good title is essential for creating a first impression that transforms passersby into readers.

Write captivating ledes. The beginning of your column, journalistically called a lede, determines whether visitors will read on.

Use first person plural. This is especially important when describing the human condition in a negative way.

Be transparent. Not in the false political sense, but in identifying with the same struggles and imperfections in life that your readers experience.

Share personal stories. If you are willing to offer glimpses into your own life (and they need not be intimate), you will bolster your readers' bond with you.

Protect sensitive details. Avoid sharing the kind of details (birthday, bank accounts, street address) that identity thieves scour the internet in search of.

Respect people's privacy. Some preachers are comfortable using the experiences of family members in their sermons. This should be approached with caution in the digital world.

Protect your own privacy. As mentioned above, once revealed, any details you share will never be private again. You may delete your website, but the data is archived until the eschaton.

Structure short paragraphs. Old lessons about paragraphs requiring topics, body and conclusions are passé as far as the web is concerned.

Write as much as you need to. Let your subject matter and personal style determine your posts' lengths. But minimize frequent shifts since readers typically prefer consistency in the blogs they follow.

Remember the muse is fickle. Waiting for inspiration to strike can result in a paucity of posts.

Do not fear white space. It adds to the aesthetics and serves to highlight the text you place on the page.

Use the font variations available to you. There are no audible cues to help your readers understand your intended tone, so take advantage of the tools the writer does have for communicating emphases and "inflections."

Highlight with italics. Use **boldface** too. Just avoid underlining, which is a throwback to the typewriter era before other means of highlighting text were accessible without a personal printing press.

Know your audience. Even if you write with a Christian readership in mind, numerous adherents of other faiths (including secularism) will stumble upon your site.

Remember Niebuhr's axiom. Keep in mind most visitors will be Americans who believe "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

Consider your international audience. Most online columns receive a surprising number of foreign visitors. Respectfully mentioning other nations is genuinely appreciated by global readers.

Sharp headlines are critical. Do not underestimate the value of pithy, inviting and even provocative headlines. Yes, you've already read that here, but *repetitio est mater studiorum* (repetition is the mother of learning).

Use subheadings. If a column is more than a handful of paragraphs, consider including a section heading or two to divide it into more palatable bites.

Include numbers. The occasional use of statistics and other data instills confidence in your columns and is appreciated by most readers.

Readers like lists. Whether bullets or numbers, if you have material that commends itself to lists, use them. Web surfers find lists familiar and accessible.

Resist seeking popularity. Rather than trying to write something you think will be "popular," write what interests you and inspires your best effort.

Mute distractions. If intruding sounds or interruptions distract you from the task of writing, make every effort to minimize their effect.

Attempt to avoid wandering. Sticking with a single point typically leaves online readers more satisfied. You can still chase an occasional rabbit if you bring the message home at its conclusion.

Include tags on your posts. Adding a few keyword tags to your columns makes far them easier for your fellow WordPress bloggers to find.

Categories shape your blog. This is an optional method of organizing your posts in a hierarchical structure. Think "filing system." (Pages can provide similar structure.)

Do not fudge the facts. Maintain your integrity, even when tempted to follow the world's common practice of being loose with details.

Avoid rants. Unless you want to restrict your readership to a small audience of like-minded cunnudgeons.

Impolite words alienate readers. Naturally Christians should avoid vulgarity, but the (mis)perception that you are inconsiderate will also discredit your message.

Educate your audience. This applies to everything, not just catechesis. People love learning something new when they read your posts.

Never write in anger. It's like administering discipline, the ire will contaminate the whole and cause results contrary to those you desire.

Consider writing from home. Some congregations may feel slighted if their pastor uses "their" time to offer a ministry for which they don't recognize a local need.

Don't fudge facts. As tempting as it may be to exaggerate statistics (or other data) to support your point, it is never worth jeopardizing your credibility.

Consecrate your words. Prayerfully offer them to the Lord for his glory and trust him to use them toward that end.

Write with an audience in mind. Despite the anonymous nature of your actual readership, it is wise to compose your messages with a general target audience in mind, whether it be your congregation, other Christians, or unbelievers.

Consider your voice. A writer's "voice" is their unique style of communicating, including a complex blend of vocabulary, pace, syntax, and various other elements. It includes many facets, some of which are in minor flux.

Explore your voice. Give some thought to the tone and "spirit" you wish to run throughout your blog. Whether you write in a pedagogical, parental, humorous, or curmudgeonly manners far less than being consistent and somewhat predictable.

Be true to your voice. Forcing yourself to write in a manner foreign to what is natural for you can be challenging and reduce the joy you experience in writing.

Celebrate diversity. Not the politically correct version of the word, but the approach to addressing a variety of subjects and issues to keep things interesting. This does not, however, mean you are randomly shifting your "voice."

Guard your copyrights. You do not need to use a © symbol. Your unique arrangement of words is protected by law as soon as you compose it. Do not forget to mark your original graphics with clear copyright notices, since they are more vulnerable to "intellectual" theft.

Honor copyrights & trademarks. The laws about public domain and fair use can be convoluted. If you are uncertain, pause and do some research.

Don't fear using quotations. Fair use laws allow for the balanced citation of copyrighted works, especially in nonprofit contexts.

Avoid plagiarism. Claiming another person's work as their own has decimated some very prominent reputations. It is deadly.

Do not hesitate to borrow ideas. Feel free to run with an idea you found in someone else's work, even if there is some reason you do not wish to cite the source. (*Ideas* cannot be copyrighted in the United States, only the unique manner in which they are expressed.) Besides, as Ecclesiastes reminds us, originality is exaggerated for "there is nothing new under the sun."

Mine quotation collections. The shortcut a pithy quote provides may seem like cheating, but many readers honestly enjoy pertinent citations. Plus, they can inspire new insights in your unique observations.

Write in English. Unless you are a missionary intentionally writing in another language, make your column accessible for readers by always translating Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and other non-English words.

Err on the side of over-explaining. Saying *too much* is rarely a good thing, but it is better than leaving readers confused.

Define the unfamiliar. If you are not confident that nearly all readers will recognize a reference or allusion, invest a moment in ensuring it is understood.

Explain the unknown. Assume that most readers will not be attuned to a Christian interpretations of even common concepts such as “peace” and “grace.”

Write conversationally. Most blogs benefit from having a relaxed and friendly tone.

Write with passion. Your sincere convictions will become evident and your presentation more persuasive.

Do not write while angry. It is tempting to write when something raises your ire, but the wise man never actually *posts* his cathartic words until he has slept on them.

Approach topics obliquely. Looking at familiar things from a new angle can be interesting and persuasive.

Write boldly. In the cacophony of the digital Areopagus, the timid voice will be lost in the clamor.

Strive for relevance. While readers enjoy encountering things that are simply interesting or entertaining, if you can contextualize them in a way that truly connects with their lives, you have a winning formula.

Avoid hyperbole. Exaggeration undermines arguments. Unless, of course, it is satirical.

Use satire cautiously. Readers don’t have visual or aural clues to your intent, and may think you are serious (especially when they are not yet familiar with your writing style).

Beware of serving as the Devil’s Advocate. Because not all readers are adept at discerning satire, be cautious when writing in the spirit of *The Screwtape Letters*.

Avoid emoticons. Do not violate this rule unless it is absolutely necessary . . . a situation which is nearly inconceivable. The inability to avoid using an expressive face 😊 might simply reflect your personal style 😊 in which case I recommend you consider *not* blogging. 😊

Avoid monotony. Just as people cannot listen for long to a monotone voice, they quickly lose interest in a blog that rehashes the same points.

Consider including listicles.

- They are familiar to most modern readers.
- They accommodate short attention spans.
- They can effectively communicate information.
- Martin Luther endorses them: “I wish we’d had listicles in the sixteenth century!”

Consider the lectionary. Even if you are primarily writing about secular matters, you may find timely and inspiring thoughts arise from reflecting on the church year.

Mine your devotions. Consider personal insights from your own devotional life for worthwhile blogging matter.

Contemplate the saints. Our brothers and sisters in Christ who have lived before us have much to teach us today—and so many aspects of their lives are simply fascinating, even to unbelieving readers.

Do not neglect contemporary Christian witnesses. Just as the story of disciples from the past inspire today, highlighting modern examples of sacrifice and moral courage provide engaging content.

Include humor. Unless you are dour by nature, and deem that an attractive trait, actively pursue opportunities to show the Christian life is fun.

Limit complexities. Blogs are ill-suited to discussing convoluted subjects in sharp detail and the more definition that is required, the greater the potential confusion.

Time travel. Do not limit yourself to current events or to the distant past. Readers appreciate seeing how the theme of your site is inspired by timeless truths.

Write to a friend. Your blog is on the right track when you think of it like sharing a personal conversation with a friend.

Embrace authority. Without bragging or being dismissive, mention at appropriate moments your credentials for what you say. If done with humility it builds confidence in your words.

Acknowledge your limits. Don't leave readers with the impression you consider yourself an expert on everything (even if you genuinely *do*).

Make clear your boundaries. Definitely avoid giving readers the idea that you are an official spokesman for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

Remember your readers come first. Without fostering their interest, your blog is destined to ultimately “serve” an audience of one.

Write words to last. Digital publication is the closest thing to writing your words on stone. Write messages that will not embarrass you in the future. Occasional profundity is welcome too.



"If you feel and are inclined to think you have made it, flattering yourself with your own little books, teaching, or writing . . . then take yourself by the ears, and if you do this in the right way you will find a beautiful pair of big, long, shaggy donkey ears."
Martin Luther

The Reformer: Martin

Published Works:

- Theological treatises and catechetical resources.
- Disputations and gospel apologetics.
- Sermons and hymns.
- Translations.
- Correspondence.
- Theses and tracts.

The Reformer's Literary Message:

- God's Word is preeminent in all, as is the Gospel of Christ.
- Teaching the saints is a noble and vital calling.
- The Holy Spirit blesses the efforts of faithful pastors.
- Humor can be a formidable tool in proclaiming the truth.
- Polemical writing is important, but a minefield.

Following Luther's Example:

- We stand on the truth of God's Word.
- We can harness modern technologies in the service of the gospel.
- Nothing is more important than lifting up the Lamb of God.
- We can boldly challenge the lies of the enemies of God.
- Our indiscreet words will last and be used by our adversaries to discredit our Gospel message.

Illustration 6: The example of Martin Luther.

Step 4 Pruning

Putting the words down on the page (or up on the screen) is only the first step. Your words need to be reread, reconsidered and sometimes edited, in order to ensure you are offering readers the best quality you can.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." (John 15:1-2).

Use spellcheck. This is your first line of defense in shielding you from embarrassment.

Do not trust spellcheck. Even the best dictionary is incomplete. And spellcheck is clueless when it comes to context. That is why there is no substitute for human proofreading.

Proofread. No matter how rushed you feel, pausing for the time it takes to edit your words before posting them is always a good practice.

Seek additional eyes. Writers do not make the best proofreaders of their own work. If you can secure another person or two to proof your columns, you will not regret it.

Invite suggestions. If you are fortunate enough to have a proofreader who can also offer advice on how to improve your column, count yourself doubly blessed.

Read the column aloud. Your ear can often perceive flaws in your writing that the eye overlooks.

Preview before you publish. Even though you have already had your work proofread, using the “preview” feature ensures the layout appears as you intended, and that your links work.

Open new windows. When adding hyperlinks to your post, ensure they open in a *new window*. That way they won’t divert readers away from your page, as it will remain open in their browser.

Reconsider elaborating. If you opted earlier not to explain some less familiar concepts, consider again before publishing whether more explanation would be beneficial.

Consider “footnoting” your links. To even more strongly guarantee your readers continue reading to the conclusion of your column, move the links themselves to the bottom of your post. They can still be referenced in the text itself, with the notation it is “linked below.”

Don’t broadcast sensitive info. For example, sharing a great idea for a book is unwise, since your *ideas* can’t be copyrighted.

Ignore distracting awards. Well-wishers may submit your site for various blogging awards. These are seldom worth the effort that some require. Still, express appreciation for the affirmation.

Correct your errors. Admit mistakes, add addenda, and when appropriate delete material (remembering that it still exists in digital archives). As an example, I wrote a column entitled “Cosby Redux” following a pre-scandal post praising his contributions to family values.

Minimize risks. If something *might* cause offense, it most likely *will* alienate some readers.

Scuttle your sarcasm. You may find it effective in certain conversations, but it almost never translates well in writing.

Don’t strive to win arguments. Effective witnessing to Christ is seldom accomplished in argument, although vigorous debate can often be effective.

Quickly correct your errors. Even skilled proofreaders sometimes let mistakes slip through. Editing already published pages and posts is a quick and simple process.

Double check your facts. Take the time to verify that anything you describe as true really is.

Offer a take-away. Leaving your reader with some new piece of knowledge or maxim for life reinforces the likelihood they will revisit your column.

Optimize your columns for search engines. There are a variety of techniques for maximizing your visibility on the internet, including the presence of links to external sites embedded in your posts.

Think twice about including polls. The ability to easily add a poll has led novice bloggers to include one despite the fact very few readers respond to them.

Issue calls to action. Occasionally encouraging readers to make positive choices that benefit themselves or others is generally well received.

Use contemporary illuminations. Just as medieval copyists illustrated their finest works with engaging images, you should capitalize on the appeal of visual elements.

Beware of political issues. There are enough nonnegotiable matters such as the sanctity of life that it is foolish to risk alienating readers by creating unnecessary controversy. Unless, of course, political advocacy or controversy are the actual *theme* of your blog.

Refine your voice. Remaining faithful to your personal style of communicating does not mean that you should not work to improve it in terms of clarity and quality. As we noted earlier, it is natural for some aspects to be shifting as we grow as writers.

Delete the vitriol. If someone is merely vulgar or disruptive, do not hesitate to hit delete. (The WordPress default is to require *approval* of initial comments from individuals.)

Feel free to correct typos. It's okay to correct a slip of the keyboard in someone's comment made on your website, but you should obviously never change the meaning of their words.

Remember the purpose of your writing. If you believe whatsoever you write should be to the glory of God, you will want to measure your words according to that standard.



"We must seek the truth, love it, defend it, and hand it down uncorrupted to our posterity."
Philipp Melancthon

The Preceptor: Melancthon

Published Works:

- Confessions and Apologies.
- Theological treatises including systematic theology.
- Disputations.
- Linguistic textbook.
- Pedagogy tools.
- Correspondence.

The Pedagogue's Literary Message:

- God's Word is preeminent in all theology.
- Clarity in doctrine and its defense are of utmost importance.
- The faithful training of pastors is vital to the Church.
- Attempting to be too conciliatory can undermine the truth.
- Writing in partnership with a steadfast ally brings out the best in one's own efforts.

Following Melancthon's Example:

- We should avoid using God's Word as a bludgeon.
- We need to discern between respecting those voicing contrary opinions and compromising fundamental doctrines.
- Our ministry benefits greatly from partnering with other pastors who share our devotion to Christ.

Illustration 7: Example of the Preceptor: Philipp Melancthon.

Step 5 Cultivating

Once you have posted your columns online, your work is not necessarily done. There are still some things you can do to increase the likelihood they will produce a rich harvest.

"For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God." (Hebrews 6:7)

Comment on other blogs. An entertaining or insightful comment on a similarly themed blogs may encourage readers of those sites to visit your blog.

Allow "likes" on your site. Many more people will affirm your work and "connect" with you in this manner, than will make a formal comment. Liking articles reinforces readers' connection with your blog.

Comment on your comments. Those who take the time to write a reaction to your thoughts like not only knowing you read their comment, but appreciated their point.

Do not expect readers to discover you accidentally. While it is certainly possible for God to sovereignly bring someone to your site, most readers find you through less miraculous means.

Tell others about your blog. Make sure the people who know you are aware of the fact that you are blogging and provide them with the address, since the written url will remind them to check it out.

Review your settings. You may want to adjust some of your initial blog settings, such as whether your site opens to a static welcome page or a list of your most recent posts.

Consider posting some material “privately.” If you have material you want to make available to certain individuals, WordPress allows you to publish any post in a way that only allows those you provide with the URL to view it.

Establish a coherent organization. During the posting process, you added tags and categories to your columns. Review your consistency and structure so visitors can easily find what they may be searching for.

Build a network. Reach out to other bloggers who write about subjects that interest you. Follow them (subscribe to their blogs). Even if they are not especially interested in the subject of your site, they may choose to follow you in turn.

Exercise your extrovert traits. Wherever you naturally fall on the spectrum, leaning into your “outgoing” traits can increase the measurable success of your columns.

Resist false modesty. When promoting your writing, you should recognize the value of honestly commending it to others, just as you might invite them to hear you preach.

Ask questions. Including a survey or poll on your site is quite easy, although getting a significant percentage of your readers to participate may not be quite as simple.

Avoid discouraging comparisons. Don’t expect your blog, especially when you first begin, to measure up to the caliber of the blogs you admire.

Do not hesitate to change. If you have a brilliant idea for changing gears with your blog, feel free to do it. After all, you are author, editor and publisher. Still, seeking advice is often wise.

Stretch your genres. Take an occasional risk experimenting with poetry, fiction, or some other genre outside of your comfort zone.

Consider offering gifts. Free downloads like desktop artwork or ebooklets are appreciated by many internet surfers and may encourage some sites to link to your blog. (It is not bribery . . . at least not in the legal sense.)

Support the efforts of others. You do not need to “subscribe” to the blogs of everyone who visits yours, but making time to read a couple of the posts of those who comment on yours will leave a positive impression.

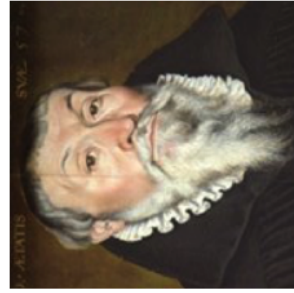
Likes cost little. It requires trifling effort to “like” someone else’s post, but it often reaps a true reward. However, be sure you read the entire post before giving it your imprimatur. Some writers slip in elements you may not approve of.

Translate your columns. If you’re fluent in different languages, make your encouragement more accessible by translating your posts accordingly.

Connect with other bloggers. One of the best places to discover faithful readers of your blog comes from visiting sites of others who write about similar subjects. Leaving a comment can initiate a genuine friendship.

Partner with others in swapping “guest posts.” These blogging exchanges generally benefit both parties, and acquaint new readers with your writing.

Repost worthwhile columns you discover. Most websites are more than happy to have you reblog material they have already published—with permission and proper citation, of course.



“Therefore we examine with considerable diligence the consensus of the true, learned, and purer antiquity, and we love and praise the testimonies of the fathers which agree with the Scripture.”

Martin Chemnitz

The Superintendent: Chemnitz

Published Works:

- Doctrinal Confessions.
- Theological treatises
- Doctrinal disputations.
- Catechetical resources.
- Sermons and devotional materials.
- Correspondence.

The Overseer’s Literary Message:

- Controversy and division within the church serve only the cause of the Adversary.
- The Father’s of the early church have much wisdom to share.
- All teaching must be measured against the truth of Scripture.
- The rich essence of the pastoral vocation is clearly expounded in God’s Word.

Following Chemnitz’ Example:

- We treasure the written words of the saints who have gone before us, insofar as they are in harmony with God’s Word.
- We strive to promote concord and faithful consensus within the Church.
- We can exercise our pastoral vocations even when serving God in roles other than as a parish pastor.

Illustration 8: Example of the Superintendent: Martin Chemnitz.

Step 6 Harvesting

Occasionally there are moments when you have the privilege of receiving feedback about how your writing ministry has positively touched individual lives. At other times you will experience the blessing of being invited into conversations with those who remain uncertain about their own beliefs.

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the
treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the
mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills
shall flow with it.” (Amos 9:13)*

Do not allow lack of feedback to discourage you. The fact is the vast majority of people who enjoy your efforts will never leave a comment. That does not diminish their appreciation.

Purge the spam. WordPress has built in tools for filtering out spam comments, but they are not infallible and you have an opportunity to make the final determination about what is genuine or not.

Anticipate some negative feedback. Do not be surprised when you receive occasional criticism or even imprecations. They are inevitable, especially when discussing sensitive subjects.

Provide a means of personal contact. Most online writers avoid sharing an email address. However, if you don't allow individuals to contact you privately, you will stifle many ministry opportunities.

Respond quickly. People gauge the veracity of your words by how genuinely concerned with your readers they perceive you to be.

Avoid altar calls. Encouraging introspection and prayer are great. Commending a wise course also. Even calling for “decisions” can be fine, when they are infrequent and Spirit-inspired.

Never pass the plate. Most readers are turned off by requests for “support” of a blog. By contrast, promoting independent charities (and including their links) is quite appropriate.

Direct readers to positive influences. This may include books, films, other web sites or congregations in their own locale.

Actively invite suggestions for improvement. Do not be afraid of “pressing” readers you know personally to help you make your website better.

Review your progress “in moderation.” Resist the temptation to track your readers on a daily basis. Weekly or monthly visitor counts will prove more accurate (and, probably, less stressful).

Consider your connections. Think about how the links listed on your site reflect on you, since people are known by the “company” they keep.

Be patient. Do not expect immediate results. Like Simeon and Anna, God's servants often need to *wait* for the "consolation" of the Lord.

Link to your own columns. It is quite appropriate to include links in your current post to past efforts that address various aspects of the current topic.

Devise a promotional plan. Most pastors find getting the word out about their blog is more challenging than the writing itself. But, time invested in learning how to promote your work is well spent.

Expand your social media identity. Integrating Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Tumblr, etc. may seem a waste of time, but each can contribute in a small way to expanding the reach of your words.

Track your successes. This is not intended to inflate your pride, but to reinforce the value of your ministry, something especially valuable during seasons of disappointment.

Beware of your ego. If the accolades you receive from blogging start to go to your head, consider taking a hiatus.

Feel free to weed. Without usurping God's role in separating the wheat from the tares, don't hesitate to delete comments or even your own posts that you longer wish to keep online. (Remember, though, that they are still cached in obscure digital archives "forever.")

Thank God. Any good that results from your online ministry, most of which will remain invisible to you, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Soli Deo Gloria!



"The multitude of apocryphal writings that heretics have spread under the venerable names of the evangelists and apostles teach us about the devil's great hatred against the sacred writing, who has intended in various ways to gain canonical authority for apocryphal fables...."

Johann Gerhard

The Theologian: Gerhard

Published Works (Extant):

- A comprehensive, nine-volume dogmatic compendium.
- A four-volume polemical work contending that Evangelical doctrine represents the genuine Catholic faith.
- An influential devotional manual, *Sacred Meditations*
- *School of Godliness* which offered a Scripture-based piety in contrast to mystical alternatives that sometimes strayed from the Word.
- Various sermons.

The Theologian's Literary Message:

- Doctrine is important, and Justification is the doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls.
- The Scriptures need to be the source and rule of all doctrine.
- Christianity is not an abstract intellectual religion, but a wholistic faith that encompasses our full human nature.

Following Johann's Example:

- Christian unity is not found in ignoring theological differences, but in recognizing the Catholic nature of the Evangelical faith.
- Passing on the faith entrusted to us should be our highest goal.
- The reach of our ministry is not limited by our vocational locale.
- We should explore a variety of modes (e.g. dogmatic, apologetic and devotional) for sharing the hope that is within us.

Illustration 9: Example of the Theologian: Johann Gerhard.

Step 7 Renewing

You should be open to ongoing revision of your blogging ministry whenever new ideas arise and the Spirit leads. It is also beneficial to periodically pause for an intentional evaluation of your writing ministry.

"Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear . . .'" (Mark 4:26-28).

Remember to pray. Just as you began this ministry in prayer, and continued it actively seeking God's leading, it's important to analyze your writing ministry in the same attitude.

Review your ministry annually. You can choose whatever timeframe works best for you, but WordPress automatically provides you with an annual report that can be quite useful in the process.

Maintain some records. It may be difficult to imagine when you are penning your original posts, but someday without dedicated records, it will become difficult to remember details about

subjects addressed, commenters, etc. once you have written a hundred.

Evaluate the effectiveness of your ministry. In addition to comments, WordPress offers a variety of tools for measuring your impact.

Strategize on how you might improve your site. Internet technology changes rapidly, and nothing is ever perfect. Combine these two facts and you should remain open to changing your site when you discover a way to enhance it.

Periodically review your purpose. It can be helpful to prayerfully consider the direction of your blog every few months, recognizing you are free to adjust your goals as the Spirit leads.

Reassess your readership. The audience that you have gathered may not resemble too closely the one you anticipated. That's good to know.

Do not become discouraged. If you lose the desire to continue a particular blog, do not despair. End it with a parting note to offer closure, take a breather, and start fresh later with a topic that energizes you.

Recharge your literary batteries. Prayer and getting sufficient rest help, but don't forget the importance of wide reading as well.

Improve your blogging skills. Just as you can improve your writing skills via study and practice, the same is true for blogging itself.

Examine your blogging from the ground up. Consider everything. Superficial things like changing or tweaking the theme template you are using are important. More significant are questions about content, frequency, and the like.

Seek the advice of others. Your annual review affords a perfect opportunity to ask some of your regular readers for their comments and specific suggestions. The more candid you can get them to be, the more useful you will find their comments.

Consider adding another blog. After you have mastered online writing, you may want to write a second column on a different subject.

Do not rush to add a second blog. Writers who experience an adrenalin rush of inspiration occasionally expand their blogging reach earlier than they should.

Analyze your work. As you compile a blogging corpus, invest some time analyzing frequencies of themes, comments, etc.

Determine what works. What combinations of topics, graphics, styles of writing elicit the strongest response of the type you seek?

Dismiss any guilt. If you set goals for your blogging that you have failed to reach, don't worry about it. You can always post tomorrow.

Expand your boundaries. Attempt to write in engaging ways that may stretch your skills. For example, poetry or fiction might open new doors for your literary ministry.

Beware of addiction. Those who find blogging to be a “chore” may find it odd that some pastors enjoy it so much it they become obsessed with the process.

Remember the vision. If you have become discouraged, reflect on what originally motivated you to begin blogging.

Shape a new vision. If your original motivation is no longer pertinent to your ministry, consider other reasons or directions to continue blogging.

Restart if you want to. There is no shame in ending a blog and pursuing a new avenue for your online (or offline) ministry.

Maintain your voice. Previously we noted that every writer has a voice. Readers come to know yours, and you should only dramatically alter or depart from it consciously. Your audience, after all, has been built around the blog as it already exists.

Redesign your site. If you feel it has become stale, a new theme might refresh you and your readers alike.

Consider going green. There is nothing wrong with *recycling ideas or topics* when you approach them from slightly different angles.

Do not hesitate to change. Never forget, unless you are actually blogging on your congregation’s website, your blog belongs to you. You are free to make any changes you want, whenever you choose . . . not that frequent changes, done on a whim, are a good thing.

Do a little surfing. Your periodic review allows you a chance to intentionally survey other sites for elements that you may want to reproduce on your own site. This is true of content and approach, as well as aesthetics.

Take time to study. Make the time to skim some of the websites that specialize in advising bloggers. Some of them are self-serving and others genuinely useful; it’s easy to tell the difference. There is a very good chance that you can learn something helpful.

Remember why you are blogging. Reflect on what first moved you to begin sharing your thoughts with anonymous reader around the globe.

Explore adding personalized illustrations. If you know an artist, or enjoy using graphic software, add a unique touch to your site. Just be sure to clearly *copyright* anything precious. (You can embed a copyright notice in the illustration itself.)

Consider compiling your columns. Many of the ebooks finding their way to online bookstores began as posts to a blog. Gathering your best work that shares a common theme may expand your digital ministry.

Blog a book. If you outline your book in advance, it’s quite possible to write the chapters as independent posts. Not only does this provide your blog with good content, at the end you have something even more substantial to show for your effort.

Don’t advertise you’re blogging a book. That rough outline can readily supply a series of standalone posts, but don’t tell people it is intended to become a book or new readers may be reluctant to join it “in progress.”

Stockpile back-ups. Having a few prewritten columns saved as “drafts” and ready to go will prove a relief during hectic weeks or creative dry spells.

Consider a sabbatical. There is no crime in taking a break from your posting. While you sacrifice some continuity and momentum allowing your blog to lie fallow for a season, returning to the task reinvigorated can be well worth it.

Keep your readers informed. If you anticipate any disruptions in your posting, it is good form to mention to your subscribers that you will be “away” for a while, including your planned return date if you have one.

Reorganize your blog. Your blogging tool (WordPress) offers amazing versatility which allows you to completely reorganize all of your posts, including quickly sweeping away any “clutter” you no longer wish to keep online. This is especially useful if you wish to completely change the direction of your blog. (It is even simpler to start a new blog, but then you would need to rebuild your subscriber list.)

Explore your plug-in options. There are a dizzying number of choices (many of them free) available to extend the features and functionality of your blog.

Become a mentor. When you have achieved a certain level of skill and confidence, you may want to share your expertise by offering encouragement to others.

End gracefully. When the season arrives for your blog to conclude, say goodbye graciously, remembering the words you write today may well outlive you.

Chapter III

Planting God’s Word

“He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.

So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.”

Matthew 25:16-18





"Ah King so mighty, mighty in all ages, how may I fitly thy devotion publish? No human heart could ever now imagine what it should give thee. I cannot with my reason ever fathom to what indeed thy mercy may be likened. How can I then the acts of thy compassion in deed repay thee?"

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Composer: Bach

Published Works (Extant):

- While few were published during his lifetime, and hundreds have been lost, a large and diverse corpus of his work remains.
- He wrote books consisting of collected preludes and fugues.
- He excelled in composing sacred and secular music.

The Musician's Literary Message:

- The proverb (attributed to Augustine and Martin Luther) is correct in saying "he who sings prays twice."
- The Holy Spirit inspires art as readily as the written word.
- A devout mind and spirit can shine through not only when exploring sacred themes, but with secular concerns as well.
- A good library is a beneficial thing. His estate included more than fifty "sacred books," spanning from Luther to Josephus.
- *Soli Deo Gloria* marked his music, and his life.

Following Johann's Example:

- We need not limit ourselves to "religious" themes.
- Our creative energies are best fueled by the study of God's Word.
- We should explore how a variety of creative disciplines can complement our own ministries.

Illustration 10: Example of the Composer: Johann Sebastian Bach.

Planting the Word

Most of what you have already read is advice that could benefit any new blogger. What elements distinguish the *pastoral* blogger from the online cacophony? In this chapter you will find suggestions that will hopefully help answer that question. Writing does not produce fruit *ex opere operato*. Blogging pastors should strive to conscientiously those aspects they can control . . . while always recognizing only the Lord alone gives life.

"In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good." (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

Do not write a religious blog. The last thing this fallen world needs is more "religion."

Remember your witness. Unless you blog under a pseudonym or anonymously, *everything* you write reflects not only on you, but also our Lord.

Bring faith to your topics. It would be challenging to find a subject so "secular" as to prevent a Christian from bringing a unique perspective to the conversation.

Do not be ashamed of the gospel. Speak the name of Jesus freely, but beware of overusing “religious” language. Jargon is a definite turn-off to those you most want to reach.

Okay, use some jargon. When appropriate, and defined by its context, jargon can sometimes enhance a post.

Cite God’s word. As with the name of Jesus, readers will be comfortable and appreciative with appropriate applications of the Scriptures (e.g. not as a hammer).

Avoid using Marcion’s eraser. Approach biblical texts conscientiously, without distorting their context (proof texting).

Assume biblical illiteracy. View the opportunity to teach people some of these elementary Bible stories and principles as opportunities rather than burdens.

Apply the Scriptures. Don’t be satisfied with pure exegesis. Readers are eager to hear how God’s word related to everyday life.

Advocate decompartmentalization. Unlike people in most of the world, folks in the West are prone to compartmentalizing matters of religion. That is an enemy always worth battling.

Be an encourager. Most people experience more than their share of discouragement, and they appreciate an affirming word. (Learning something new is a bonus, and a smile or laugh comes to them as a welcome surprise.)

Focus on Christianity’s core. Unless your intention is to explore Lutheran dogmatics, C.S. Lewis’ model of concentrating on

“mere Christianity” provides an ideal model for effective apologetics.

Mention Lutheran distinctives sensitively. Most readers genuinely enjoy learning about other faith traditions, especially when they see how they relate to biblical truth. But excessive denominational pronouncements will narrow your audience.

Write respectfully about other beliefs. Rather than weakening your argument, you will increase readers’ receptivity to it.

Spurn denominational elitism. Even *inferring* that our own theological stance is perfect leaves an unpleasant taste in the mouth of many readers, and alienates some who might otherwise find your message persuasive.

Remember your audience is diverse. It includes Christians (mature and infantile), followers of other faiths (curious and defensive), and unbelievers (open-minded and belligerent). Fortunately, the defensive and belligerent folks are outnumbered by the receptive.

Represent Confessional Lutheranism well. Dispel misconceptions and prejudices. Offer a warm invitation to learn more about the genuinely “evangelical” theological tradition.

Correct your mistakes. And, apologize when appropriate. Good manners are important for everyone; essential for spiritual leaders.

Do not provide digital therapy. Establish a rapport online and refer to a local pastor if counseling would be beneficial.

Avoid condescension. Despite the aforementioned illiteracy, consciously avoid any tone that would imply looking down on those who cannot distinguish between Moses, Job, Noah and Nebuchadnezzar.

Promote virtue. Not everything we write needs to be “religious,” since society benefits from even unbelievers living more virtuously.

Combat the culture of death. Actively seek opportunities to affirm the value of every person for whom Christ died, including the unborn.

Let your light shine. Resist the temptation to revel in events or “conversations” that may dim your witness to the cross.

Avoid displays of *schadenfreude*. Expressing delight at the misfortune of others (even when abundantly deserved) may rightly alienate your readers.

Do not surrender any ground. If the Lord leads you to address a sensitive subject, remember there is no subject too taboo for the truth to dispel the lie.

Promote wholeness. Most people, including many churchgoers, have a compartmentalized view of how “religion” fits into their lives. This misconception demands redress.

Acknowledge your humanity. Blogs are a poor venue for public contrition, but speaking to others as a brother also in need of forgiveness imbues our words with power (as Augustine exemplified in his *Confessions*.)

Stay off the throne. No matter how accomplished you may be, resist any temptation you may encounter to assume too “authoritarian” a posture.

Exorcize your demons. Beware of your personal sins or weaknesses which may have a way of creeping into your writing.

Forgive yourself. Do not become too critical of yourself for inevitable slips or disappointments.

Avoid flame wars. On your site (where you have the power to extinguish them) or other websites, it is always wise to avoid arguing with idiots.

Emphasize solutions. Whenever discussing problems or tribulations, offer as much hope as possible in a fallen world.

Affirm the value of your readers. Your blog may be the only voice that tells them they are precious, and loved by God.

Affirm humanity’s value. Just as you remind each reader of God’s love for *them*, teach them that *each life* is treasured by the Lord.

Recognize your elevated danger. We know the Adversary targets clergy, and the larger your sphere of ministry, the more focused the attacks may become.

Expand your vision. Most pastoral bloggers should not be writing for the typical member of their congregation. Most people who visit your site will bear little resemblance to them, particularly in terms of their faith journey.

Be charitable. Avoid defensiveness and place the best construction on comments and correspondence.

Don't give the enemy succor. Satan doesn't need any support derived from public attacks on Christians by their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Preserve confidentiality. In our faith tradition we recognize this as a fundamental pastoral pledge.

Do not sin boldly. Despite Luther's advice to Melancthon, be cautious about sharing your personal fallenness in ways that some might misinterpret as admiring sin.

Acknowledge suffering. Your posts about grief and hope will resonate more deeply with your readers than anything else you publish. Since we preach a theology of the cross, this recognition of suffering typically flows naturally into our writing.

Respond gently to criticism. Do not delete all critical comments, but consider how you can promote honest conversation with a respectful response.

Err on the side of grace. As Luther taught, consistent with the greatest quality of holiness being love (1 Corinthians 13:13), the Gospel takes precedence over the Law. There is a vast gulf between projecting a tone of judgment and one of mercy.

Chapter IV

The Pastoral Author

*“Charge them before God not to quarrel about words,
which does no good, but only ruins the hearers
Do your best to present yourself to God as one
approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed,
rightly handling the word of truth.
But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people
into more and more ungodliness . . .”*

2 Timothy 2:14-16





“...since the beginning of the world, it has been impossible to discover the Gospel. It became known only through an act of the Holy Spirit, who inspired sanctified men to write His message.”
Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther

The Preacher: Walther

Published Works:

- Doctrinal treatises.
- Sermons.
- Catechetical lectures.
- Pastoral correspondence.
- Diaries.
- Poetry.

The Pastor’s Literary Message:

- Faithfulness to God’s Word is non-negotiable.
- Prayer is the first duty of the preacher and writer.
- Our proclamation of the Gospel requires us to “approach this task with fear and trembling,” lest we mangle the message.

Following Walther’s Example:

- We remain vigilant as to the theological veracity of what we write.
- We look to the Scriptures and the fathers of the Reformation for counsel.
- We can follow John’s example of writing in different genres to the glory of our Lord.
- We never confuse Law & Gospel.

Illustration 11: The example of the Preacher: C. F. W. Walther.

The Pastoral Author Insights from C.F.W. Walther

The following chapter is a revision of a lecture delivered by Rev. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther to the students of Concordia Seminary and local congregational leaders on May 15, 1885. The subject of this address was “Sermon Preparation.”

For the purposes of showing how many of the very same principles can be applied to writing for publication on the internet, I have taken the liberty of substituting a number of words to apply to that context. (For example, the word “message” has replaced “sermon.”) None of the points made by Walther have been altered.

The lectures compiled in Law and Gospel were delivered in German, and edited from detailed notes. Ironically, as the collection was published a decade after his death, its author never saw the work in print. If the lecture had been restricted to its aural form, it would not be able to bless readers today.



Every time a pastor is preparing to write a message that he will publish, he should approach this task with fear and trembling, that is, with the reverent concern that he would write nothing contrary to the Word of God. He must examine everything he has written down most carefully to see whether it is in harmony with

the Word of God and the experience of Christians. Every time he should weigh everything that he is to write for the public, using the holy scales of the temple to weigh the true gold content, as it were. He should see whether it agrees with the writings of the apostles and prophets.

But after writing a few paragraphs, a pastor could become impressed: "Now, that is beautiful. Oh, you really got it that time! Now that will make an impression!" Do not be fooled. One more time he ought to go over carefully the very passages that seem so beautiful to him to see whether they might contain anything that is false or that has been expressed in such a manner as to be misunderstood, and which could awaken false impressions in his listeners.

As soon as he sees a problem, he must be stern—even cruel—toward himself and draw a thick black line through those sentences, even if he has invested much time and work on them. Even though those sentences are lost effort, they were merely the product of his genius—not of a clear knowledge drawn from the Word of God.

Indeed, a pastor may discover to his horror that an entire section of his message—or even the entire message—has turned out completely wrong. For God's sake, he should not think: "Should I let all this effort go to waste? Should I let all this worthless drudgery come to nothing? Will I let this whole message that took so much time and effort just go up in smoke? Ah, but the whole thing is just a sloppy mess that has gone wrong, all wrong!" Listen, the whole thing must be cashiered, deposited in the round file! It would be better for him to write off the cuff than to

publish that original message—even though it had cost him so much time and effort.

What if an otherwise careful minister has had the misfortune of putting something into his manuscript that was wrong and has even placed those incorrect things in print? If he notices his mistake swiftly, he must then immediately correct himself: "My dear readers, I wrote such-and-such, but here is what I really meant."

If he notices his mistake later, and if the matter is very important, he must make the correction later, so that his readers might not be led completely astray. In fact, he may not only have to correct his wrong statement but also solemnly revoke it. That will not lower him in the esteem of his readers. On the contrary, the people will say all the more: "Now there is a reliable writer; he is really accurate."

But the pastor must not think: "Oh, my readers will already get the right idea and muddle through whatever it is that I messed up." Rather, he must write in such a way that the people will not misunderstand his words.

For this reason the apostle warns all pastors: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5:6). False teaching is a leaven. Yes, one might even call it a toxin that, even in the smallest dose, will course through every artery, poison, and kill a person. Daily experience teaches this. Yes, everyday life tells us that even a tiny bit of poison can have the most horrible effects. If someone were to eat a whole piece of arsenic and it became entirely coated in mucus, that might not kill him; however, a little poison can kill the entire person.

You can cause unspeakably great damage in only one incorrect sentence in a message. For instance, a pastor might be rebuking people incorrectly. Godly, diligent Christians, full of concern for their souls, trying to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, could read that rebuke. It can easily happen that these dear souls become uncertain of their state of grace and dare not believe that they will be saved. For what they apply to themselves to make their faith uncertain would be what the pastor had rebuked incorrectly.

If the pastor notices this, he must not think: "Oh, on another day I will write about the same topic in a completely different way, so as to make everything good again." For the more confident his readers are that the author is an orthodox man and a faithful, experienced Christian, the more difficult it will be for them to pull out the arrow that he had shot into their heart in the first place with his baseless rebuke.

In a similar way, on another occasion, when he should have administered a rebuke, he may have offered false comfort, to the delight of all false Christians, who would then disregard the remainder of his message and say to themselves, "Ah, now you just hang on to that part right there! You really are a good Christian!" Oh, the horror! This is an awful situation when a carnally secure person thinks he is a good Christian but indeed he behaves himself quite differently—to remain in spiritual blindness until he passes away and is damned forever.

Mistakes such as these can happen even to a sincere pastor. In a moment of carelessness, when he is not on his guard and not praying while writing his message, God may let it happen and say to him, "You do not need Me, that is obvious. You do not call on

Me. You are relying on your own strength. Fine, go figure it out yourself!" Imagine the anguish of a minister who has himself to blame when he sees a reader of his work walking down a wrong path! Just think: "It is your fault that so-and-so is straying. That is why!"

Every one of your messages must be the product of heartfelt prayer. When you sit down to the task of writing your message and feel that you are distracted, cold, and dead, you must not think: "I cannot help it. I must fill this page." No, lay your pen aside. Call earnestly upon your Father in heaven to lift you out of your miserable state of mind, to give you a passionate heart, to overcome everything in you that is not godly, to let the breath of His Holy Spirit enter your heart. And you will be able to do more than merely write down words of comfort, which you do not feel yourself and which leave your own heart cheerless. Then you will not think: "All I have to do is simply write about everything that I see there in the Bible. It is all good." No, you cannot say that it is all good. When you prepare your message, your entire effort must be to answer: "Now, how do I begin, in order that I get the best possible catch using the net of the Gospel?"

Pastors sin in this area more often than you might imagine. Some of them waste a lot of time during the week—occupied not with godless affairs, to be sure, yet not with the one thing needful. Then the appointed day rolls around, and there they are, sitting at their keyboard, unprepared to give their readers the best that is in them. Their readers get the impression the pastor is merely scribbling something because he has to, regardless of whether the message actually helps anyone. That is a horrible situation!

The forty-five minutes that you spend writing your essay is most valuable time. It may help determine the present and eternal salvation of many thousands of people. Woe to the pastor who does not redeem that time by offering his readers the very best he is able to give. And if he is not in tribulation, he thinks: "This is what I want to write! I know for a fact that—unless someone is rejecting the Holy Spirit—they will read the testimony of the Holy Spirit and certainly get something out of that. And that is the truth!" But if he does not have confidence in his own message, how can he accomplish this with his writing?

I said, "If he is not in tribulation." When he is in tribulation himself, a faithful pastor will be tempted to rip up the manuscript he has written. In these tough exceptions God intends to humble him by using painful experiences such as these. But normally—after struggling and wrestling with God during the preparation of his message—a pastor is confident. He is certain that he has a message to offer that will bring souls to Christ as surely as the proper fishhook of a skilled fisherman will catch fish.

But if a pastor writes without a plan and purpose, he need not wonder that he is not achieving his goal. Shame on pastors and students preparing for the ministry who go to work in a sloppy and careless manner, jotting down and publishing anything that comes to mind, anything that flows into their pen! As a rule, that is what happens when a pastor writes off the cuff. What I mean here is not only pastors who have plagiarized their entire message but also those who have not adequately meditated upon the subject they intend to present to their readers. But after thoroughly meditating on it, their flow of words is much better.

There is also a difference between good judgment and genius. I am even inclined to say that a pastor must gradually wean himself of his preconceived intentions and thus give the Holy Spirit a chance to lay hold of him and suggest thoughts and words to him that had not come to him previously.

This is why the apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." Thus the main point in a both writing and preaching is to rightly distinguish Law and Gospel.

Chapter V

Emboldened to Write

*“In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,
always being prepared to make a defense to anyone
who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you,
yet do it with gentleness and respect,
having a good conscience . . .”*

1 Peter 3:14-16



*“Some people write heavily,
some write lightly. I prefer
the light approach because
I believe there is a great
deal of false reverence
about. There is too much
solemnity and intensity in
dealing with sacred
matters; too much speaking
in holy tones.”*

Clive Staples Lewis

The Apologist: Lewis

Published Works (Extant):

- Various academic texts and literary criticism.
- A presentation of the essential core of Christian faith.
- Defenses of Christian doctrines.
- Numerous essays on a wide range of subjects.
- Poetry & fiction (for both adults and children).
- Correspondence with friends and fans across many decades.

The Professor’s Literary Message:

- God works through various approaches to reach the lost.
- Respect your readers and do not speak down to them.
- Always beware of pride.
- Speak the truth in a variety of ways (including fiction), so all can hear the good news in the way best suited to their needs.

Following Lewis’ Example:

- Do not restrict yourself to a single mode of writing.
- Confession that you do not have all the answers can be a powerful tool in encouraging the lost to seek answers in God’s Word.
- Being a gracious and respectful messenger of the King will improve the receptivity of your readers.
- Faithfulness to the Truth will invite the scorn of the atheistic elite.

Illustration 12: The example of the Apologist: C.S. Lewis.

Emboldened to Write Insights from C.S. Lewis

Prelude: A Demonic Epistle

My dear Perjuretongue,

Accept my condolences. It goes without saying you will be disciplined for allowing your patient to begin taking his faith seriously. It was bad enough that he had been raised by Christian parents. We had succeeded in lulling him into that glorious state of taking the Enemy's love for granted and becoming wonderfully tepid, or as the Enemy describes it, "lukewarm."

But you have failed to maintain him in that safe condition—despite all the world's tools at hand! Not only has he become, in his limited vocabulary, "serious" about his faith . . . he desires to share it with others.

Fortunately for you, we are sometimes able to twist even the so-called "serious" disciples of the Enemy. As you are quite aware, whenever a tempter causes one such human to topple, especially if he has risen to some recognition in religious circles, exceeding joy echoes throughout the brimstone chambers of Hell.

And to think you so recently bragged about how you had diverted your patient's attention to the labyrinth called the internet. "I

have skillfully snared him in the sticky strands of the worldwide web," you wrote. There's no denying it; I have the letter in front of me. Clearly, you were not only overly optimistic, you must have barely passed your composition courses at the Tempters' Training College. "Sticky strands," ugh. Your writing is painful to endure, and not in the good way. Trust me, you do not wish to return to the College for remedial coursework.

So, you write that your patient has been bitten by a literary bug? That may prove good, or ill. If he develops even modest skill, and uses it to support the advances of the Enemy's kingdom, you will suffer. However, if you can influence him to squander his talents, or allow them to lay fallow, you will be rewarded.

It is in regard to your patient's twin interests in writing and the internet, that I perceive particular potential for disaster. The esteemed strategists in the Hall of Temptations have not yet mastered the best tactics for harnessing the practice of blogging to the purposes of Our Father Below. Suppressing holy blogs while magnifying malevolent sites remains a challenge. If your patient ventures into this arena—over which our dark brothers are even now waging violent spiritual warfare against the Enemy's retreating forces—it can be dangerous.

While the vast majority of these online writings languish unnoticed, the Enemy has a mysterious way of guiding vulnerable souls to some of these spiritual websites. And this is their unique threat. While we've accomplished much by geographically isolating millions of people from the Enemy's missionaries, the reach of the internet is too vast. We can bar an inquisitive school teacher in Yemen from ever meeting a

Christian. But we cannot prevent them from stumbling across some rambling ode in praise of the Enemy online.

As for writing being a part of his pretentiously-called “ministry,” there are both opportunities and dangers. Opportunities come with the fact that once something is written, it may be forgotten with the passage of time, but is always available to be pulled out at the most embarrassing or awkward moment. Encourage him as a novice writer to hasty and deleterious work.

Keep this in mind, should your patient ever become successful in disseminating the Enemy’s message. You can always play the pride card. It is capable of trumping their very efforts on His behalf. Clergy of every era remain especially susceptible to vanity. And worldly accomplishment in terms of becoming a “published author”—oh, how those mortal grubs relish that title—makes pastors who are writers doubly vulnerable.

I close with a piece of advice from the esteemed A bysmal Sublimity Under Secretary Screwtape. One of his junior tempters had allowed a patient to repent of his downward course. I offer this infernal wisdom because it reminds us that the *act* of writing itself is not the danger to Our Father Below’s plans.

It remains to consider how we can retrieve this disaster. The great thing is to prevent his doing anything. As long as he does not convert it into action, it does not matter how much he thinks about this new repentance. Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him, if he has any bent that way, write a book about it; that is often an excellent way of sterilising the seeds which the Enemy plants in a human soul. Let him do anything but act. No amount of piety in his imagination and

affections will harm us if we can keep it out of his will.

If your patient deigns to write, encourage him to compose worthless tripe or esoteric nonsense. By all means persuade him to avoid topics that might equip the Enemy’s followers for battle. And, should his work become popular, fan the embers of pride and arrogance that so naturally follow.

Your affectionate uncle,
Venomquill

One of Many

A Lutheran pastor seeking a successful writer to emulate, has many options.

The Scriptures themselves, the work of a single Author, come to us through the quills of many anointed individuals. And, in the Lord’s providence, each of them brought their own God-given gifts to the task.

Outside of the canonical works, we are blessed to still possess many precious patristic works. These include many sermons that had they not been transferred to the page, would have ceased to bless others once their original congregations had ended their days. The medieval period, with its not-completely-dark period offers a number of exemplars worthy of emulation as well.

The Reformation era is extremely well documented, due primarily to Gutenberg’s inventions for which Martin Luther praised God. During the intervening centuries books have multiplied to the point where the Apostle John’s statement is all

the more stunning—that if *everything* Jesus did and said were “to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25, ESV).

The praise of God and the good news of his grace continues to be expounded from pulpit and press today. All pastors are well acquainted with the former, and I wish to do my small part to encourage them to explore the latter.

This literary realm of ministry has never been simpler to enter than it is today. The birth of the internet has transformed communication in a way that those living a century ago could never have dreamed. One can almost hear the echo of Luther’s accolades for the press being applied to the ever-expanding realms of digital communication. It is accessible, global, nearly instantaneous, and offers online translation tools that were once the stuff of science fiction. It is possible for *your words* to be read this very day by someone who has never had the opportunity to meet a disciple of Jesus in the flesh.

Every pastor is capable of writing online. Obviously, however, not all will be called to do so. Nevertheless, all Christians should pray about whether or not they should venture into this ripe field. Too many, I fear, are deterred by misconceptions about how challenging writing online is. The shocking truth is that it does not require very much skill, or even anything of value to say, as thousands of websites readily attest. Yet, here we sit, with the most precious message in the world, and we fail to avail ourselves of this remarkable medium.

I have written this handbook to encourage pastors to consider writing online. I also hope to aid them in creating worthwhile and successful sites. All to the glory of God.

A sterile book, however, lacks the power of a living person to encourage. As the book suggests, successful writers will seek the mutual encouragement of the saints. They will benefit as well by discovering a mentor whose own work inspires them. If that mentor is alive, and available to offer personal advice, all the better. But—and we return now to the premise of this chapter—even if that writer has already departed this life, they still have much to teach.

My own writing mentor is C.S. Lewis, and I commend his example for your own consideration. Yes, he was an imperfect man . . . just like Luther, you, and me. His imperfections do not disqualify him from offering a wise and temperate example. He is only one of a multitude of writers you might consider, and your own personality may resonate far better with a different author. Still, there are many lessons Lewis teaches so well, and all Christians can profit from considering those which follow.

Lewis published widely, and most of his works remain in print. His *Chronicles of Narnia* remain bestsellers. Yet, this Oxford and Cambridge professor excelled in many genres—including poetry, memoir, correspondence, academic essays, allegory, literary criticism, theological reflection, fantasy, radio scripts, and historical fiction.

The influence of his defense against modern heresies such as scientism is illustrated by the fact that the most recent report of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Commission on Theology

and Church Relations cites no fewer than *nine* of his works. The first quotation is particularly apropos for pastors contemplating blogging as a way to encourage “Christian laity whose faith is being attacked as an unscientific relic of the past.”

To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. (“On Learning in War-Time”).

Timeless Writing Advice

Most aspects of writing are intrinsic, and change little from medium to medium, or age to age. Lewis, by nature resistant to fads, abides primarily in this realm of proven and effectual communication. Indeed, his most famous words on the subject of writing are sound, traditional maxims.

In a letter to a child who requested advice about writing, he praised the examples she forwarded and offered suggestions about keeping her word choice simple.

There are no right or wrong answers about language in the sense in which there are right and wrong answers in Arithmetic. “Good English” is whatever educated people talk; so that what is good in one place or time would not be so in another. . . . Always prefer the plain direct word to the long, vague one. Don’t *implement* promises, but *keep* them. . . . Don’t use words too big for the subject. Don’t say “infinitely” when you mean “very”; otherwise you’ll have no word left

when you want to talk about something *really* infinite.

Lewis’ works are like mountains filled with veins of rich ore ready to be mined for wisdom about how to share the Gospel through the written word.

Lewisian Principles for Christian Writers

The following concepts provide a small taste of the wisdom that can be gleaned from a thorough reading of C.S. Lewis’ writings. They have been selected because they are particularly worthy of consideration for pastoral bloggers. Individually, they are not unique to Lewis, but few have mastered them in an equal manner.

Read widely. Few are blessed with Lewis’ ability to analyze and recall so much of what we read. However, successful authors are virtually universal in affirming a healthy appetite for reading as invaluable for writers. Lewis particularly valued books of lasting worth. “It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones.” (“On the Reading of Old Books”).

Minimize distractions. The first maxim Lewis provided to one aspiring writer was “Turn off the radio.” It is frustrating to be enjoying a moment when the words are readily flowing from us, only to have that flow dammed by an intrusion. And some of those disruptions are within our ability to avoid. Music, as an example, may be a distractor for some and an aid for others. I personally enjoy listening to music and select albums that help me get in a suitable frame of mind depending on what I am

writing. Some days it is Bach or Gregorian Chant. Others it can be Larry Norman or the soundtrack of *Lord of the Rings*.

Choose words intentionally. Lewis offered much counsel related to vocabulary. In addition to the principles addressed in the letter cited above, he advised, “Take great pains to be *clear*. Remember that though you start by knowing what you mean, the reader doesn’t, and a single ill-chosen word may lead him to a total misunderstanding. . . . Be sure you know the meaning (or meanings) of every word you use.”

Know your audience. Lewis was a highly respected academic writer. Yet he also possessed a rare ability to speak to the common man or woman in a way that bore no condescension. He simplified complex subjects without compromising the truth. He skillfully used images and analogies that connected with readers from all walks of life. This vivid image comes from a letter written to a regular correspondence when his literary responsibilities were particularly exhausting: “The pen has become to me what the oar is to a galley slave.”

Be responsive. Lewis was attentive to his readers, faithfully responding to every piece of correspondence sent his way. He did this not simply because of his genuine compassion for them as God’s handiwork. The author also recognized that since he had publicly identified himself as a disciple of Jesus, a higher standard of consideration and courtesy was rightfully expected of him. That does not mean he welcomed the demands, and during the absence of his brother who assisted him with it, he wrote to a friend, “The daily letter writing without Wannie to help me is appalling—an hour and a half or two hours every morning before

I can get to my own work.” Count your blessings in never having nearly so many fans to respond to.

Write respectfully. In addition to avoiding arrogance and condescension, Lewis consistently conveyed to the reader a genuine respect and concern for them. The following account reveals his comprehension of Jesus’ message that “the last will be first, and the first last.”

When I first became a Christian . . . I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and I wouldn’t go to the churches and Gospel Halls. . . . I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the great merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off.

I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren’t fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.

Avoid digression. Aside from rare examples in correspondence, Lewis did an outstanding job of keeping his words focused on the argument at hand. He recognized that distractions weakened an argument, and carefully stayed on course with the primary thesis of each of his nonfiction works. The importance of this skill is amplified with the brief attention spans of blog readers. As one scholar writes, “Lewis’s worst digressions are still better than

most authors' clearly and cogently stated themes." (Bruce Edwards, *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works and Legacy*).

Do not force the humor. Lewis was described by an interviewer as writing about "heavy theological themes" with "a light touch." He responded saying, "I believe this is a matter of temperament. However, I was helped in achieving this attitude by my studies of the literary men of the Middle Ages, and by the writings of G.K. Chesterton. Chesterton, for example, was not afraid to combine serious Christian themes with buffoonery." When asked whether Christian writers should "attempt to be funny," he said, "No. I think that forced jocularities on spiritual subjects are an abomination, and the attempts of some religious writers to be humorous are simply appalling. Some people write heavily, some write lightly. I prefer the light approach because I believe there is a great deal of false reverence about. There is too much solemnity and intensity in dealing with sacred matters; too much speaking in holy tones."

Read your work aloud. Lewis recognized in inseparable nature between the written and spoken word. Most pastors understand this intuitively. Lewis offered the following advice to a young writer seeking his counsel. "Always write (and read) with the ear, not the eye. You should hear every sentence you write as if it was being read aloud or spoken. If it does not sound nice, try again." This practice was so deeply engrained in the classical authors that Augustine relates how surprised he was to come upon Ambrose, who was reading *silently!*

Recognize your limitations. C.S. Lewis was brilliant. He was intelligent enough, in fact, to have a keen awareness of what he did *not* know. Unlike clergy, who sometimes feel compelled to

present themselves as experts in all religious subjects, Lewis avoided addressing controversial matters of "high Theology," writing "I should have been out of my depth in such waters" (*Mere Christianity*). Similarly, we may be experts in pastoral care, but merely sufficient in our exegetical skills . . . or skillful preachers whose grasp of church history has centuries-long lacunae. Never labor under the pretense of knowing everything.

Do not constrict your writing. Some Christian writers feel the need to confine their reflections to "religious" themes. This is a mistake. In a letter he gently corrects a woman who thinks that her own efforts at writing should follow this course. "We must not of course write anything that will flatter lust, pride or ambition. But we needn't all write patently moral or theological work. Indeed, work whose Christianity is latent may do quite as much good and may reach some whom the more obvious religious work would scare away."

Do not pigeonhole yourself. Another way we expand our writing ministry is by experimenting with new genres. There is no reason a gifted homilist cannot also be a respected poet or satirist. Lewis' lifelong desire to be known for his poetry was disappointed. He wrote some fine poetry, but subject as that genre is to the subjective tastes of the age, it would not be the basis for his reputation. Fortunately for the world, he also wrote in a wide range of literary fields. Pastors are susceptible to viewing their literary skills narrowly, typically as homilists or catechists. Experimenting with fiction, poetry, memoir, etc. can prove satisfying and perhaps even revelatory.

Be vulnerable. The pastor who is able to acknowledge his own struggles and imperfections is likeliest to be seen as trustworthy

by his readers. Lewis spoke about his own doubts and acknowledged temptations to which he was particularly susceptible. It is this naked humanity that makes his conversion story and the raw account of his grieving after the death of his wife so moving. This lack of pretense permeates all of Lewis' Christian writings. He once wrote, apologizing for his delay in fulfilling a responsibility: "Nothing else was responsible for it except the perpetual labour of writing and (lest I should seem to exonerate myself too much) a certain Accidia [sloth], an evil disease and, I believe, of the Seven Deadly Sins that one which in me is the strongest."

Write the truth about the Truth. When asked shortly before his death in 1963 about much of the religious writing at the time, he offered a stinging rebuke of liberal clergy. "A great deal of what is being published by writers in the religious tradition is a scandal and is actually turning people away from the church. The liberal writers who are continually accommodating and whittling down the truth of the Gospel are responsible. I cannot understand how a man can appear in print claiming to disbelieve everything that he presupposes when he puts on the surplice. I feel it is a form of prostitution."

Write words to last. There is nothing wrong with playing with words and writing frivolous passages. Indeed, these exercises help sharpen our skills and may expand our audience for more serious matters. At the very least, they may provide recreation. However, if we never address matters of eternal significance, perhaps writing is merely a hobby and not a vocation. Lasting words need not be deep or profound, but they must be true. As

Lewis observed, "All that is not eternal is eternally out of date." (*The Four Loves*).

Remain steadfast. Lewis recognized that being respectful did not require compromise or, as modern acolytes of holy Tolerance demand, surrender. In a 1963 interview he said: "As Christians we are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the faith. We give in too much. Now, I don't mean that we should run the risk of making a nuisance of ourselves by witnessing at improper times, but there comes a time when we must show that we disagree. We must show our Christian colors, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent or concede everything away."

Avoid Bible thumping. Lewis was thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures and frequently referred to biblical passages. However, seeking to persuade his readers of God's truths, he never appealed to the written Word as the final authority in a fundamentalist fashion. Instead, he appealed to reason as well as revelation, and strove to reach those who would have dismissed appeals to biblical authority on their surface. Critiquing the concept of praising the Bible as uninspired "literature," Lewis wrote: "I cannot help suspecting, if I may make an Irish bull, that those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible." ("The Literary Impact of the Authorized Version").

Trust the Church. Lewis loved his Creator and knew Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life. He had confidence in the written Word. Lewis also possessed a high regard for the consensus of Church teaching as found in the ecumenical councils. He trusted in the concept of the Vincentian Canon: "That Faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all." Here too he

communicated quite simply extremely profound truths.

“Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God.” (*Mere Christianity*).

Address Christian divisions judiciously. In the same volume, Lewis argues that unbelievers who are already confused by the divisions within the Body of Christ, do not need another reason to dismiss the good news. “I think we must admit that the discussion of these disputed points has no tendency at all to bring an outsider into the Christian fold. So long as we write and talk about them we are much more likely to deter him from entering any Christian communion than to draw him into our own. Our divisions should never be discussed except in the presence of those who have already come to believe that there is one God and that Jesus Christ is His only Son.”

Seek the counsel of other writers. For many years, C.S. Lewis met twice a week with colleagues in a group they named the Inklings. They would read works in progress and invite discussion. Despite their divergent writing styles and goals, they all found this beneficial. Their literary synergy made each of them a far finer author than they would have been, left to their own devices. J.R.R. Tolkien was candid about the fact without Lewis’ encouragement, *The Lord of the Rings* would never have been completed. After his death, Tolkien wrote, “The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not ‘influence’ as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my ‘stuff’ could be more than a private hobby. But for his interest and

unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought The L. of the R. to a conclusion.”

Consider using an editor. Like every other writer, Lewis had mixed regard for editors. Still, he understood they possessed their own expertise. Writing to a publisher collecting his essays for publication in America, Lewis wrote: “You will of course remove all the sub divisions and silly little sub-headings which editors introduce and print each essay as continuous prose?” In today’s print-on-demand world pastors may be tempted to circumvent unrequired editorial processes, it is still beneficial to secure the assistance of a skilled editor. Editors can help pastors avoid another of the pitfalls Lewis warns about.

Do not publish everything you write. The unvarnished truth is that not everything that flows from pastors’ pens or fingertips merits publication (or, for that matter, preaching). Technology’s recent removal of editorial gatekeepers allows weak material to proliferate. At the same time, Lewis advised holding onto work that was not ready for publication. Perhaps in the future they will find a place in another project. “When you give up a bit of work don’t (unless it is hopelessly bad) throw it away. Put it in a drawer. It may come in useful later. Much of my best work, or what I think my best, is the re-writing of things begun and abandoned years earlier.”

Maintain perspective. It is easy to become discouraged as a writer. Even in these days when publication comes so much easier, most writers long to reach more readers than they do. Lewis reminds us that literary disappointments and rejections are not true suffering. Writing as a young man to a close friend, he commiserated about their shared initial lack of success as writers.

With a maturity beyond his years he offered the following counsel.

I feel that I have some right to talk to you as a man in the same boat. Suffering of the sort that you are now feeling is my special subject, my profession, my long suit, the thing I claim to be an expert in: and if I were not writing to a man still smarting under the novelty of the blow I should point out at length how absurd it is to dignify such disappointment with the name of suffering in a world like this. (There is a woman lives in our road who is sinking into creeping paralysis and going blind: and for the last three nights she has been awake, and crying, all night, with neuritis. She says 'I feel as if my blood was boiling in my arms.')

¶ This side of the question you cannot yet be ready to feel: it would be more than human if you did. I only mention it because otherwise I would be ashamed, in speaking of myself, to use the noble word 'suffering.'

Remain true to yourself. You have your own vision and a unique literary voice. Trying to be something you are not is invariably recognized as disingenuous. C.S. Lewis' dear friend, and fellow Inklings, J.R.R. Tolkien, possessed an undisguised dislike for *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Comparing these children's books with Tolkien's Lord of the Rings masterpiece clearly reveals how far apart the realms of Narnia and Middle Earth lay. Tolkien wrote, he was saddened that "Narnia and all that part of C.S.L.'s work should remain outside the range of my sympathy." Yet, despite the criticism Lewis received from his trusted colleague, Lewis wrote his *own* well-received masterpieces.

Pay the price. C.S. Lewis suffered for his faith. He endured the scorn of his atheist peers. Because of his defense of Christianity, he was never granted a full professorship at Oxford, and only received that deserved honor at Cambridge University. Pastors face little threat to their livelihood by writing about religious matters. But the prospect of experiencing communal or digital stigma for addressing controversial subjects grows every day. Lewis described, in a letter to a Roman Catholic priest with whom he corresponded, that one of the ways God redeems our suffering is by uniting us to our fellow Christians. "Those who suffer the same things from the same people for the same Person can scarcely not love each other."

A Final Consideration

Pastors who are familiar with Lewis' writings can easily add to the list above. This is especially true if one considers his comments about fiction and the wonder of "story." As frequently as Lewis encouraged other writers, one might think that he developed a doctrinaire view of the subject. On the contrary, he consistently resisted the invitation to provide a set canon of formal rules. He knew full well that the God of infinite creativity would never impose so rigid a mandate upon those he fashioned in his own image. The following words from Lewis' final interview touch upon the author's thoughts about writing at the close of his life.

Professor Lewis, if you had a young friend with some interest in writing on Christian subjects, how would you advise him to prepare himself?

“I would say if a man is going to write on chemistry, he learns chemistry. The same is true of Christianity. But to speak of the craft itself, I would not know how to advise a man how to write. It is a matter of talent and interest. I believe he must be strongly moved if he is to become a writer. Writing is like a ‘lust,’ or like ‘scratching when you itch.’ Writing comes as a result of a very strong impulse, and when it does come, I for one must get it out.”

Can you suggest an approach that would spark the creation of a body of Christian literature strong enough to influence our generation?

“There is no formula in these matters. I have no recipe, no tablets. Writers are trained in so many individual ways that it is not for us to prescribe. Scripture itself is not systematic; the New Testament shows the greatest variety. God has shown us that he can use any instrument. Balaam’s ass, you remember, preached a very effective sermon in the midst of his ‘hee-haws.’”

Lewis humbly suggested he had no single prescription for becoming a good Christian writer. Yet, although he never compiled his advice on the subject, he did offer many worthwhile suggestions. Finding a more worthy model to follow in our own pastoral writing is a challenge. Yet, this is a subjective matter, and there may be another Christian author whose example better suits your own personality and literary voice. Lewis suits me well. His warnings about pride are invaluable during rare moments of

success when vanity assails. Likewise his words of encouragement are just the right medicine when Venomquill’s ilk capitalize on a disappointment or failure to turn me away from this promising field of ministry. It never hurts, after all, to be reminded that our Lord could even use a pagan prophet’s donkey to faithfully deliver his words.

Chapter VI

Capturing Elusive Ideas

*“On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.”*

Psalm 145:5



“I usually type, since my hand tends to start fair and rapidly fall away into picturesque inscrutability... and my dream is of suddenly finding myself rich enough to have an electric typewriter built to my specifications, to type the Fëanorian script.”
J.R.R. Tolkien

The Storyteller: Tolkien

Published Works (Extant):

- Various translations, academic texts and literary essays.
- Heroic fantasy; he is considered the creator of “high fantasy.”
- Children’s stories and other short stories.
- Poetry written independently and as elements in his fiction.
- Correspondence with fans and friends.
- Tolkien also created entire languages and lexicons.

The Storyteller’s Literary Message:

- What one struggles to express in prose may flow in poetry.
- We need not write expressly about God to glorify his name.
- Real people make wonderful fictional characters.
- The encouragement of one’s fellow writers is invaluable.
- Remain humble, knowing that just as good writing is often unheralded, the world also frequently celebrates the mediocre.

Following Tolkien’s Example:

- Allow your personal interests to guide your writing pursuits.
- Seek out kindred spirits for mutual encouragement in writing.
- Do not settle for less than your own best effort.
- Persist, even when the effort takes years (seven for *The Hobbit*).
- Don’t expect perfection from yourself—let go of your work (for publication) at some point.

Illustration 13: The example of the Storyteller: J.R.R. Tolkien.

Capturing Elusive Ideas What Should I Write About?

Rather than list a series of specific blogging suggestions, I hope it will be helpful to offer a general description of sources for excellent blogging ideas. The potential list is lengthy. For the exceptionally observant individual, you might say potential sources could encompass almost everything to which they are exposed. Let me say that another way. Some people can find intriguing ideas, whether mere flashes of fancy or more developed concepts, nearly anywhere.

Consider for a moment J.R.R. Tolkien. Yes, I realize none of us pretends to be a successor to one of the twentieth century's greatest writers, but there are certainly lessons about writing that he can still teach. Tolkien's imagination was extraordinary. He gave free rein to it, esteeming the human capacity for what he called sub-creation, to be a reflection of the *imago Dei*. Allow that to sink in. He attributed his creativity to being created in the image of God—a nature *we share*. We will consider the example of the author of *Lord of the Rings* in greater detail in a moment.

Good writers keep their eyes and ears open. They pick up on potentially useful gems uncovered in everything they see, read, hear, smell, touch or taste. There are two equally necessary dimensions involved in gathering worthwhile blogging ideas. The

first is to hone your perceptions so you are alert to the concepts when they expose themselves. The second is to record those impressions in a place where you will be able to find them again. It's okay to scribble the fleeting note down on a scrap of paper, but you should transfer it to your regular paper or digital file while it is still fresh enough for you to flesh it out. The most amazing insight in human history would be lost if you failed to make a record of it. And, few among us have not shared that terrible pain remembering that he had a wonderful idea, one that was so amazing we knew we would not forget it even if we didn't pause to jot a note about it, only to . . .

So, if you want the scope of your ideas to stand head and shoulders above the majority of people, (1) train yourself to be more observant, and (2) record your ideas where they will remain accessible to you.

A spectacular column may begin with a tiny seed. The kernel for a great post (or even a novel) may come . . .



Illustration 14: Sources for Ideas.

All you need to do is jot the initial thought down. Just putting the words on paper or screen may stimulate the flow of ideas.

Whether it does so or not, you can file that concept away for future reflection. Some, of course, will never be used. But many

others will expand into dynamic essays during the months and years that follow. Remember though, few things are more frustrating than thinking *What was that great idea I had driving home today? It was so amazing I was sure there was no need to pull over and write it down. If I could just recall it now . . .*

If you find coming up with ideas challenging, you might consider writing a “series.” By choosing a narrow theme (subordinate, of course, to your overall blog theme), you might be able to come up with a sequential presentation that allows each topic to stand alone. For example, in “Christian Living” blog you might do a series on the familiar armor of God (Ephesians 6), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5), ways to receive the Bread of Life (John 6), forms of idolatry (Exodus 20, Jeremiah 10, Matthew 6, etc.), or anything else that inspires you or raises your curiosity.

So, What about J.R.R. Tolkien?

The list of sources we just looked at may seem pretty obvious. That’s where ideas come from. They arise as we attend to what we are observing, and take the time to think about whether they merit further reflection. These are the same sources from which Tolkien mined his masterpieces. He thought about philosophical, historical and literary elements that comprised his education. He pondered the Scriptures and the doctrines of the Church which guided his life. He remained engaged with the events of the world around him. He drew lessons from his personal experiences, which is clearly seen in how the trenches of the First World War deeply influenced the Ring trilogy. He refined his work and drew encouragement from his famous writing fellowship, the Inklings, who met regularly in an Oxford pub. One more source for

inspiration came in that simple activity, available to all, daydreaming. He penned the first sentence of *The Hobbit* while grading what must not have been a particularly engaging essay.

It was on a summer’s day, and he was sitting by the window in the study at Northmoor Road, laboriously marking School Certificate exam papers. Years later he recalled: “One of the candidates had mercifully left one of the pages with no writing on it (which is the best thing that can possibly happen to an examiner) and I wrote on it: *In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.*” Names always generate a story in my mind. Eventually I thought I’d better find out what hobbits were like. But that’s only the beginning.”

If you lack the imagination and curiosity to rely on your daydreams, and your observation skills preclude a second career as a private investigator, don’t give up hope. Consider these accessible resources.

The Bible

If you can read a chapter without encountering something worth sharing, perhaps you’re in the wrong vocation. And you need not limit yourself to the appointed lectionary; the entire Book is at your instant disposal. An online word search can present you with a comprehensive variety of passages and insights.

The News

Whether you read a newspaper, follow regular broadcasts, or peruse news online, there are countless opportunities to find new ideas. What makes you curious? If you would like to learn more about a

particular matter, perhaps your readers would enjoy that as well.

Artistic Inspirations

You may be one of those people who find inspiration in viewing art or listening to music. Look there for ideas and images. Even if these are not your primary sources for stimulating your thoughts, don't write them off.

Opinion Pieces

Most news sources also offer opinion. What do you agree or disagree with? Adding your voice to the discussion—on your blog site and, if you would like, in a Letter to an Editor or an online comment—can prove rewarding.

Magazines or Journals

If you read an article that includes a point that merits sharing or raises an issue worth investigating further, write it down. All of this valuable food for mind and spirit should not be hoarded for sermons and personal growth. Also share the wisdom with a far more diverse and potentially much larger audience, on your blog.

Quotation Collections

People enjoy reading quotations from people they respect. Many also appreciate being introduced to witty or keen commentators with whom they are unfamiliar. Scanning a list of quotations (some readily available for online topical searches) can get your

juices flowing. Plus, using the quotation itself is often a welcome addition to the post.

Online Writing Prompts

My google search for the phrase “online writing prompts” just returned “about 13,100,000 results.” I am pretty confident that at least a dozen or so should offer some decent suggestions. You can add additional words to narrow the scope of your search. (Adding the word “Christian” whittles the list down to 575,000 results.)

You may not be another Tolkien, but you might be a modern day Inklings. Being more intentional about observing and reflecting on potential subjects for blogging—and recording those ideas so they don't evaporate with the morning dew—is a valuable skill for the successful blogger.

Beware of Theological Jargon



Illustration 15: Theological Jargon © 2016 by Luke Dingman.

Glossary

About

Shorthand reference to the normal blog feature where authors describe themselves or the reason their blog exists.

Above the fold

The newspaper term for the banner (header) and content on a blog that appear without needing to scroll down.

Advertorial

Content that is actually an advertisement, designed to look like a regular post.

Akismet

An effective spam filtering service that is automatically built into all WordPress.com blog accounts.

Anchor Text

The portion of the text in a post that you choose to activate a hyperlink. (Remember to have links open in new windows.)

Audioblog

A blog where the blogger posts recordings of voice, music or other audio content, often with textual annotation to identify the content for indexing.

Avatar

A digital artifact that represents you in cyberspace. It could be your photo or anything that expresses something you choose. Your avatar can vary from site to site. For instance, I use an image of Diogenes for some, and a stained glass rendition of the centurion beside Christ's cross for others. (See also, gravatar.)

Audience

The people who read your blog, follow your tweets, etc. Also the word used by some non-Lutheran clergy for their congregations.

Banner

The header of a blog, which can be personalized to distinctively identify the site's theme.

Bleg

A blog or blog post consisting of a request to readers for ideas, donations, commentary or other content.

Blog

Originally "weblog." A personal or institutional online journal that is regularly updated and intended for public consumption. As a verb, to maintain a blog. Also, website, site, domain.

Blog Feed

A special distribution channel, often using Really Simple Syndication (RSS).

Blog Roll

A listing of other blogs that the author of the current site recommends by providing links to them. Frequently featured in a sidebar.

Blog site

The location or address of a blog, indicated by its URL (Uniform Resource Locator).

Blogger

Either a person who operates a blog, or a reference to Google's Blogger.com hosting service.

Blogoholic

A person whose addiction to blogging negatively impacts their life.

Blogosphere

The collective content of worldwide blogs. Also, blogoverse.

Blogroll

An optional list of recommended blogs that is commonly placed in the sidebar.

Branding

Identifying something, such as one's literary output, with a consistent label or mark.

Captcha

The programs that require a response when commenting. They are designed to weed out computer generated spam.

(“Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart.”)

Comment spam

Garbage generated by robot programs similar to email spam.

Commenter

A person who leaves a comment on a blog.

Dead Link

A hyperlink which no longer connects to the permalink address of another site because it has been changed or deleted.

Ebook

For blogging contexts, a digital book usually in PDF. Often offered for free by commercial sites to get readers to subscribe to newsletters, etc.

Embed

Placing content from another website (e.g. YouTube) within one’s own post, in contrast to providing a link to the original source.

Enchiridion

A handbook or manual. Commonly used as a book title from the classical period through the Reformation era.

Fair Use

The legal principle that allows you to use short excerpts from copyrighted works for educational or review purposes.

Flame

Posting deliberately inflammatory comments. “Flame wars” are unedifying exchanges, usually in the comment section of a blog.

Genre

The category or type of writing, such as fiction, homily, humor, catechesis, poetry, etc. These categories are not mutually exclusive, although one form is typically regarded as dominant.

Gravatar

Globally Recognized Avatar. Versatile avatars available for free at www.gravatar.com.

Group Blog

A blog maintained by two or more people. This approach to ministry can be particularly effective. Also referred to as a “Collaborative Blog.”

IRL

“In Real Life,” the realm with which pastoral bloggers are ultimately concerned.

IT

Information Technology. The personnel who keep a company’s computers and tech equipment functioning despite constant misuse by technologically ignorant employees.

Link

A direct connection between words, pictures, or other objects.

Listicle

An article, or post, structured in the form of an annotated list.

Lurker

A regular reader who never comments or indicates their presence.

Meme

Among bloggers, meme refers to images, words, phrases, etc. that are quickly replicated throughout the blogosphere.

Micro Blog

A blog that consists of extremely brief posts. Twitter is a platform devoted solely to microblogging.

Monetization

The blogosphere's word for how to make a financial profit from one's internet presence.

Netiquette

Accepted internet etiquette, based on the Golden Rule.

Niche

The subset of a broader category. For example, a blog about "ministry" might focus on "urban church planting."

Page

Basically these are posts that are not time-based, and are added to your menu bar to provide ready access to information of your choice.

Pastoral Blogging

Broadly speaking, any blogging done by a pastor. More narrowly, online writing that focuses on some aspect of the ministry and the Gospel (e.g. consolation, catechesis, kerygma, apologetics).

Page View

The loading of a single web page on the internet. Also called a page impression.

PDF

Portable document format. A file format that allows text and graphics to maintain their layout on different computer screens.

Permalink

The unique URL of individual posts. If you intentionally change this, you will cause anyone in the blogosphere who has linked to you to now have a "dead link."

Platform

Narrowly, the location where your blog is hosted. Also, a writer's entire public presence from which they communicate. Similar to a pulpit for a pastor, but used in an abstract manner to encompass his entire online ministerial presence.

Photoblog

A blog primarily consisting of photos.

Podcasting

The preparation and distribution of audio or video files.

Post

A single piece of content on a blog, or the act of publishing said material online. Also, article or column.

Pseudonym

An assumed name or identity used by a writer to avoid use of their actual name. Pseudonyms are used for satirical purposes, or to protect sensitive matters, but they should never be used to intentionally mislead.

Public Domain

Material that can be freely used by the public, since it is not under restrictions imposed by current copyrights or trademarks.

RSS

Really Simple Syndication allows for swift notification of news or recently updated web content. Also called “feeds” and Rich Site Summary.

Reciprocal Links

Agreements between bloggers to link to one another’s blogs to promote “traffic.”

Repost

To post a comment or post originally appearing on another blog. Also called reblogging.

SEO

Search Engine Optimization applies to methods for receiving more visibility in search engines.

Sidebar

A column or columns usually located on the side of blogs, including links, widgets and various other material.

Spam

The unwelcome messages that disrupt email, but typically in the form of garbage “comments” when plaguing a blog.

Subscribe

The term applied to voluntarily receiving notifications when new posts are added to a blog.

Theme

In addition to the common usage, in blogging it is applied to the template that controls a site’s layout.

Thread

A series of posts on a single topic.

Troll

Someone whose primary goal is to insult or provoke disagreement by leaving offensive (usually anonymous) comments.

Twitter

A microblogging platform that restricts writers to a maximum of 140 characters.

URL

The address that links to a specific file on the internet, based on the Uniform Resource Locator protocol.

Vlog

A video blog that focuses on video content.

Voice

The style, tone and approach to writing which forms a unique blend in each author.

Webinar

An online seminar or presentation.

Weblog

Rarely used longhand for a web blog.

Widget

Built-in shortcuts that are available to assist you and your readers with subscribing and many other actions.

WordPress

The premier blog hosting software used on WordPress.com and by individuals who prefer to control every detail of the programming via WordPress.org.

Zombie Blog

Not about apocalyptic survival, but consisting primarily of stolen content, with minimal (usually zero) value added. Also called a “spam blog.”



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