

# 500 years later: What now?

Unchanging Reformation Truths for Ministry in a Changing World



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## Unchanging Reformation Truths for Ministry in a Changing World

In his essay delivered to the WELS Synod Convention in 2009, Pastor Jonathan Schroeder introduced his presentation with the following (used by permission):

*It was nearly three in the morning when he answered his last question. Justus Jonas, sensing the end was near, asked, "Reverend Father, will you die steadfast in Christ and in the doctrines you have preached?" "Ja!" cried that loud voice for the last time. Then, on February 18, 1546, a most improbable thing happened. The professor condemned to the stake by the world's most powerful churchman, and condemned to an outlaw's demise by the world's most powerful nobleman, that professor died of entirely natural causes.*

*When the messenger reached the city of Wittenberg, he burst into Melancthon's morning lecture on the Book of Romans. When Melancthon heard the news, he cried out, "The charioteer of Israel has fallen!"*

*The question on his mind was the one of the minds of so many. "What now?" What would become of Europe? What would become of Christendom? This professor of theology had swung a hammer whose blows echoed throughout the world and had shaken the Church to its foundation. But what now?*

*Two days later, Bugenhagen, Luther's pastor, ascended the pulpit of the Castle Church in front of princes and knights, academics and commoners. And before the assembled mourners, he preached Luther's funeral sermon. The text was from John's Revelation, the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter. "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth, to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come!'"*

*It's easy to see why Bugenhagen chose this text. In Luther, God had raised up for himself a messenger who spoke in a voice so loudly that it is heard half a millennium after his death. God raised up for himself a messenger in mid-air, above the fray, and out of the reach of the beast of the earth and sea. God raised up for himself a messenger of true repentance and true faith—from his first October thesis to his last gospel postil he was a messenger who proclaimed, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come!" God raised up for himself a messenger that proclaimed the eternal gospel call to every tribe and nation and language and people.*

*But the, the funeral sermon ended, the final strains of music trailed off, and his metal coffin was lowered beneath the floor of the Castle Church. As the stones slipped into their places, they resounded with a finality that must have made everyone wonder, "What will happen now that death has muted God's messenger? What will happen to that teaching he stood by until death, now that the charioteer of Israel has fallen?"*

On this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we look back at the blessings that God gave to his church through the faithful work of Martin Luther, his contemporary fellow-reformers, and generations of faithful witnesses after him. As we do that, we can't help but thank God for the many blessings that God has passed down through the generations to us. It's a rich and priceless heritage not of money or property, but of the truth of his Word and the life-giving power of the gospel. It's a heritage that has been treasured, protected, and preserved, and which has now been entrusted to us.

Five hundred years later, we might well have the very same question that Melancthon had upon the death of the Reformer: "What now?" What do we do with the central truths and doctrinal principles of

the Reformation that God restored through Martin Luther? How are those same truths that reformed and reshaped the church of Luther's day still relevant to God's church and to the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How can we best carry out our gospel ministry in a world and culture that seems to be changing so rapidly? Today, we will review some of those central truths and discuss how the question, "What now?" needs to be asked and answered as you carry out your ministry in your congregations and schools.

### **Commitment to the Word**

*Martin Luther: "I must place the Word of God above everything. I must hazard life and limb, the world's favor, my property, honor, and all my welfare that I may keep it and cling to Christ as to my most precious possession in heaven and on earth."*

We know and believe that it is the Word of God alone that enables us to know the grace of God and to know what God has done for us in Christ. We know that it is the Word of God alone that reveals God's unchanging truth to us. It is that Word alone that serves as the only source of our synod's doctrine and the Word alone that guides us in our practice. We are committed to the conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God himself.

Sadly, such a commitment to the truth of Scripture has all but disappeared in large segments of the Christian church today. Already by the middle of the last century, the truth of the Scriptures was called into question by "theologians" who rejected inerrancy and reduced the Bible to little more than a culturally influenced collection of human wisdom. In the decades since, many Christians have heard the question posed by Satan in the garden, "Did God really say?" and have concluded, "No, he didn't." The idea that there is absolute truth itself has been jettisoned, and Christian churches and individuals have become comfortable with the idea that religious truth is whatever I decide it to be.

Not only that, in recent decades the basic truths of the Scriptures, including moral truths unquestioned for thousands of years, have been under increasing assault from a godless and hostile culture.

The value of human life, the sanctity of marriage, the God-given norms for human sexuality, the importance of work and self-sufficiency, the beauty of showing mercy and love to those in need – have all been the targets of forces that have been very successful in turning what is up down, what is wrong right, and what is ugly beautiful.

The truth of God's Word is under attack, and so are those who hold to the truths of God's Word. The faithful Christian individual and the faithful Christian church today finds itself being wrongfully accused of hatred, bigotry, closed-minded, and out of step with the times. Sometimes even the government takes up the cause and allies itself with the forces that are attempting to silence the faithful proclamation of God's truth. And despite what seems to be somewhat of a reprieve in that onslaught, we can be sure that it will continue unabated in the years to come.

Our synod has been blessed with a commitment to preach and teach the truth of God's Word regardless of the consequences. With Luther, we stand before anyone or anything that opposes God's truth. We do that not trusting in our own power or ability, but standing firmly on the Scriptures. We proclaim God's truth not to change laws but to change hearts through the power of the Gospel.

It is certainly true that these attacks will not decrease. Just the opposite. In these times, we thank God that he has preserved among us a commitment to stand on his Word. We pray that in our class-rooms, our pulpits, our synodical areas of ministry, and in our homes, that God will continue to give us the boldness and courage to cling to his Word and to boldly proclaim what he has said – regardless of the cost, regardless of the consequences.

- *What are the temptations or pressures that would entice us to back away from our commitment to the Word?*
- *What types of persecution might you (or your members and students) face as they hold on to and testify to God's truth?*
- *Other than an outright denial of God's Word or biblical doctrines, how might a wavering in our*

*commitment to the Word show itself in congregations and schools?*

## **Trust in the Word**

*"I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and my Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all."*

At our recent convention, Pastor Jon Hein, Director of the synod's Commission for Congregational Counseling, summarized some of the demographic trends in our synod and the challenges that they pose. Our synod has seen a slow but steady decline in numbers over the past decade. While not as rapid as other church bodies, those declines are real; no one denies that this is happening.

There will always be a temptation to think that the problem of declining membership can be addressed by something that we do. Or, to look at it another way, there will be the temptation to conclude that the church will in numbers if only we adopt the right strategies and programs and methods to bring about such growth. Many in the evangelical churches have determined that the "unchurched" are unchurched because the church's message is not relevant to them and to their lives. With that view, they have decided that the message needs to change. Instead of proclaiming clear Law and Gospel, instead of focusing on what Christ has done *for* us, they attempt to attract people to the church by offering a message that emphasizes what Christ can do *in* us, resulting in lives that are happier, marriages that are stronger, and Christian service that is more energized. The message of justification is overpowered by a message of sanctification. Sermons become nothing more than YouTube "how to" videos, forgetting that God has already done it for us in Christ. And Luther's conviction that "the Word did it all" is replaced by "our approach and adjustment of the message" does it all.

As confessional Lutherans, we emphasize and agree that it is the gospel in Word and sacrament that

is the "power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). We proclaim Christ crucified. The message of the cross was not the message that itching ears wanted to hear in Paul's day, and it is not a message that finds favor in the ears of today's postmodern, self-gratifying, self-centered unbeliever. As confessional Lutherans we will look for every opportunity to proclaim God's law in all its harshness, and we will be zealous to share the sweet message of the gospel to every sinner convicted by God's law. But we dare never adjust, hide, or downplay a single word of God's truth to make it somehow more attractive. To do that is to empty the gospel of its power and to lose the gospel itself.

The challenges of declining membership and reaching the lost in an increasingly secular world are challenges that we should not ignore. But these are challenges that cannot be addressed by changing the message. Rather, this is a question of whether or not we are being faithful in our stewardship of that message and strong in our trust in the power of the Word. With Luther, we need to re-assert our conviction that the power of changing hearts and bringing people to saving faith rests not in us or in our efforts, but in the power of the gospel itself, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

- *We trust in the Word. What might be signs that we are placing our trust in something other than the word...*
  - *In efforts to increase the membership of our congregations and enrollments in our schools?*
  - *In retaining young people in our congregations?*
  - *In what we define as a "quality" Christian education or, put another way, in how we convince parents of the importance of the kind of Christian education we offer?*
- *What suggestions do you have for Pastor Hein as he makes plans to address these situations?*

## **The Centrality of the Gospel**

*"The chief article and foundation of the gospel is that before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own. This means that when you see or hear of Christ doing or suffering something, you do not doubt that*

*Christ himself, with his deeds and suffering, belongs to you. On this you may depend as surely as if you had done it yourself; indeed, as if you were Christ himself. . . . This is the great fire of the love of God for us, whereby the heart and conscience become happy, secure, and content."*

It should be true of every sermon preached in our congregations. It should be evident in every class taught in our school classrooms. It should be the central focus in every counseling session with members, parents, and students. It should be what motivates and guides Christian parents and what strengthens Christian marriages. It should be what moves us to live our lives as God's children and what comforts us as our time on this earth approaches its end.

The "it," of course, is the Gospel, the good news of what God has done for every sinner in Christ. When the Gospel remains central, sermons bring people closer to Jesus, genuine repentance is brought about and nurtured, children learn to know and serve their Savior, marriages are strengthened, and Christians are equipped for lives that serve God and serve others. When the gospel loses that central place, faith withers and is replaced by self-righteousness and ultimately despair. When the gospel is replaced, even with all good intentions, by something else, we find ourselves under the same condemnation as the Galatians, preaching and believing another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

- *Sometimes Lutherans indicate that, for someone to be preaching false doctrine, you need to be able to identify a specific error in doctrine or a teaching that denies or changes a clear word of Scripture. How else might genuinely false doctrine show itself?*
- *What is the proper balance between teaching justification and sanctification? What happens when that balance is not upheld properly?*
- *What are signs that the gospel is not holding a central place in preaching? In classroom teaching? In school discipline? In parenting?*

*"Pray that God may give us – as Christ himself commands us to pray—faithful laborers and preachers who are in earnest and who hold on to the Word."*

When he began his visitation of congregations in Saxony, Luther was shocked to learn not only that the lay people were ignorant of some of the basic truths of the Scriptures, but that the same thing was true of the pastors. From that time on, Luther emphasized the importance of having pastors who are well trained in biblical languages, fully knowledgeable of the doctrines and Scripture, and committed to their task of serving as spiritual shepherds to their people.

WELS has been blessed with a ministerial education system that is well equipped to provide the thorough training to church workers that Luther championed. This system has blessed us with a dependable supply of pastors, teachers, and staff ministers who know the Word and who have been trained to preach and teach that Word.

As our schools have carried out their mission, they have looked for ways to improve the training of our called workers and to meet new needs in the church as those needs develop. In recent years, our schools have provided numerous undergraduate opportunities to serve in mission settings. They have responded to the need for pastors and teachers to serve in cross-cultural and urban settings. They have developed ways to provide additional mentoring and guidance to new graduates as they begin serving.

- *Why is ministerial education such an important part of retaining our Lutheran heritage?*
- *What is the greatest temptation for you to set aside parts of the education you received in your training?*
- *How can you help your members to understand the importance of ministerial education in the mission of our synod?*
- *What are practical ways in which our members and congregation can be encouraged to support ministerial education?*
- *What does Luther's emphasis on ministerial education say to you in terms of continuing education and professional development?*

## **Worship**

## **Ministerial Education**

*“No more splendid work exists than receiving and hearing the Word of God.”*

The worship in the congregations of our synod has been and by god’s grace will continue to be Christ-centered in its focus and dedicated to a faithful proclamation of law and gospel. Worship among us also offers believers the opportunity to respond to God’s gracious blessings in Word and Sacrament with confession of sins, confession of faith, prayers and hymns of praise.

In Christian freedom, there can and will be some variety in worship forms and styles, but there is also wisdom and benefit in a common (not necessarily identical) worship experience and emphasis that is widely shared among congregations that walk together in a common faith and mission. For that reason, our synod has undertaken the large task of creating a new hymnal. The new hymnal, scheduled for completion early in the next decade, will preserve the best from our current hymnal and incorporate newer hymns and liturgies that are Christ-centered and scripturally sound.

- *We would agree that the worship formats in our churches are matters of adiaphora. What elements of worship are not adiaphora?*
- *It’s been said, “Once something is determined to be a matter of adiaphora, that’s not when the discussion ends; that’s when it must begin.”*
- *What are the benefits of liturgical worship? What are the pitfalls?*
- *What aspect of worship is primary: proclamation, prayer, or praise?*
- *Does the way we worship reflect our theology? Should it? How?*
- *Discuss if there are elements of worship that are sought by millennials and, if appropriate for Lutheran worship, what we can do to ensure that those elements are present in our worship.*
- *What role does the Lutheran elementary school have in promoting and teaching lifelong worship habits?*

### **Christian education**

*“Indeed, for what purpose do we older folks exist, other than to care for, instruct, and bring up the young... This is why God has entrusted them to us who are older and know from*

*experience what is best for them. And God will hold us strictly accountable for them.”*

From its very beginning, our Wisconsin Synod has recognized the importance of Christian education. The primary responsibility for teaching children about their Savior rests with Christian parents. But we have also recognized that the church can assist and supplement the instruction in the home through Christian schools on all levels. We dedicate much time and resources to training teachers, operating Lutheran elementary, high schools, and colleges. In recent years, many of our congregations have recognized the opportunities for Christian instruction and for outreach to the unchurched in early childhood education programs.

The importance of Christian education is one Reformation heritage that we have treasured. But we are facing challenges in our system of Lutheran education—challenges of demographics (20% fewer WELS births than 20 years ago) and challenges of resources. Is it not time, as we embrace the emphasis that Luther placed on Christian education, to rededicate ourselves to the thorough instruction of our young people? Is it not time to recognize that the increasing pressures exerted by a hostile culture need to be countered with an even more intense effort to provide an early foundation of faith and biblical knowledge for our young people? Is it not time to recognize that we have only a short time to equip our young with the knowledge and biblical moorings they will need when they have the opportunities to “speak the things that they have seen and heard?” If it is to remain faithful to its mission, the Church of the Lutheran Reformation cannot be anything other than a church that is fully committed to Christian education of all kinds.

- *If Christian education begins in and is centered in the home, what actions can parents take to ensure that their children remain faithful Christians into adulthood?*
- *If the Lutheran school is truly a ministry of the congregation, what are ways in which the school and the congregation can and should work together in carrying out the church’s mission?*

- Some have said that formal Christian education places children into a protective bubble and that it would be better for them to enroll in public schools where they can learn to witness. What is your reaction to that advice?
- Can you think of ways in which the church or school sometimes fail in their responsibility to teach Christian vocation? How can we improve on that?
- How is understanding of Christian vocation related to “sola gratia and sola fide”?

## Christian Vocation

*How could the devil have more effectively led us astray than by the narrow conception that service to God takes place only in a church and by the works done therein. The whole world could abound to the service of God not only in churches but in the home, kitchen, workshop, and field.*

Permit a brief personal story. I come from a family of eight children. I am the youngest. By the time I was a senior in high school, all seven of my siblings were either serving in the pastoral or teaching ministry, or at the seminary. It was time for me to decide what I would do with my life, and you can imagine the pressure I was under to make it eight for eight. The pressure didn't come from my parents; it came from me. And I struggled with the decision. My mother recognized I was struggling. One day she said to me, “You know, the Lord needs good lay people just as much as he needs good pastors and teachers. No matter what you decide to do, you can be sure that the Lord will use you to serve him.” In those few words, my mother showed that she understood one of the great, almost radical, teachings re-discovered by the Lutheran Reformation: Christian vocation. In other words, god's people serve him and serve him well no matter what the calling or vocation into which he places them.

Our synod recognizes the importance of Christian vocation. While we certainly refer to the public ministry as a high calling from God, we in no way denigrate the other callings that God gives to people. No matter what the calling--as a spouse, a parent, a child, a student, a factory worker or farmer, a professional or entrepreneur—God places people exactly where he wants them to be, and in that calling God gives opportunities to serve him, to witness for him, and to show love for others.

## Showing mercy and Christian love

*“Therefore, a man should be guided in all his works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and advantage of his neighbor.”*

Sometimes Lutherans have been accused of being “against” good works. Of course, Luther's main message was that good works can't save us. But there was no one who more energetically encouraged Christians to view their lives as a time to serve God with joy and to serve others in love. In fact, Luther often made the point that showing Christian love and concern for others was the single most important way for a Christian to express his thanks and praise to God and the very reason God enables us to keep living in this world.

We have many opportunities to respond to God's blessings with the love and mercy we show to others. The WELS Commission on Special Ministries will describe the ongoing efforts to serve those with special needs, to minister to those in prison, and to bring the gospel to people in our society who are often ignored and forgotten. WELS Christian Aid and Relief will share stories with you about how your gifts of love have made possible humanitarian aid projects in our mission fields, carried out relief efforts in time of disaster, and provided help for families facing serious medical problems. Your congregation or school may have some type of mercy ministry which addresses the physical needs of people in your community. The sermons preached in your congregation can and should encourage God's people to put their faith into action through works of love as they carry out their Christian vocation.

Showing love and mercy to others was an emphasis of Luther and his Reformation. It's a

heritage that remains ours today. The question is, “Are we ready to be serious about it?”

- *Because of our emphasis on “Sola Fide,” Lutherans are sometimes accused of downplaying the importance of good works and showing Christian love. How would you respond? How can you reflect that in your teaching and preaching?*
- *The church also has a responsibility to show Christian love to those in need. What are the benefits when the church does this? What are the possible pitfalls?*
- *Share some examples of mercy ministry that your congregation or school is carrying out and how it is linked closely to our response to the gospel message.*
- *Does mercy ministry ALWAYS need to bring with it a specific effort to share the gospel? Why or why not?*

## **Missions**

*“Dear Father, we pray, give us first your Word, that the gospel be preached faithfully throughout the world.”*

It’s a phrase that occurs many times in the Book of Acts. In fact, it occurs so often that it could perhaps be the theme of the entire book. “So the word of God spread.” (Acts 6:7)

Beginning in Jerusalem after Pentecost, the religious leaders of the Jews did everything they could—including threats and arrests—to keep the apostles and other Christians from preaching and teaching about the crucified and risen Savior. But they didn’t stop. “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 5:42) As the church grew, the apostles appointed seven men to assist them in providing for the physical and spiritual needs of Christians. “So the word of God spread.”

King Herod arrested believers and carried out executions. He had Peter arrested and thrown into prison. But an angel opened the doors of the prison and Peter went free. “And the word of God continued to increase and spread.” (Acts 12:24)

Later, on his second mission journey, Paul proclaimed the gospel in Ephesus. Paul first preached to the Jewish people in the synagogue, but when they rejected his message shifted his efforts to a Greek audience. The Holy Spirit blessed his preaching. “In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” (Acts 19:20)

The same Word of God that grew despite opposition and persecution in the time of the apostles is continuing to grow today. Even though we live in a country that seems to be turning away from Christianity, and even though the influence of Christian faith and values seems to be diminishing in our own culture, the very opposite is true in many places around the world. The word of the Lord is growing. The saving gospel is on the march. God’s church is being built by the same powerful preaching of the good news of Jesus.

We have continued to open new missions here in the United States and have utilized new approaches to do that. Nearly one-third of our Home Mission dollars are devoted to cross-cultural ministry of one kind or another. And while our synod may not be increasing in numbers here in America, our fellowship around the world continues to grow.

It’s happening in some very unexpected places and in ways that we could not have foreseen. Thousands of people are hearing the gospel and being brought to faith in places like Nepal and Pakistan, where modern day Herod’s continue to threaten and oppose Christians. Literally millions of people are hearing the gospel online in Latin America through the efforts of our synod’s Multi-Language Publications. Christian groups and individuals in places like Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Sudan and Kenya—like modern-day Macedonians—are asking us to come and help them—not with manpower or money but with theological training (over 300 requests at this time!) In response, a new entity (The Pastoral Studies Institute Team) has been formed by the Joint Mission Council and Wisconsin Lutheran

Seminary to evaluate those requests and coordinate our response to them.

At our recent convention, we saw tangible evidence that the word of the Lord continues to grow—the establishment of fellowship between our synod and three Lutheran church bodies. The Lutheran Church of Ethiopia broke away from a large liberal Lutheran church body because it wanted to be faithful to the Lutheran Confessions. The South Asia Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM) in Hong Kong was originally begun as a WELS mission. But when faithful Lutheran pastors were no longer available, its doctrine and practice strayed. Now, with the help and encouragement of our WELS missionaries in Hong Kong and with pastors trained by Asia Lutheran Seminary, SALEM has confessed its full commitment to Lutheran doctrine and practice. Finally, the East Asia Lutheran Synod is a brand new Lutheran church body established on the mainland north of Hong Kong by six pastors trained at Asia Lutheran Seminary.

So, with God’s power and blessing, the word of the Lord continues to grow and spread as he gives us new opportunities to be his witnesses.

- *Even though the church of Luther’s day had no board for home or world missions, how would you say that a commitment to missions was really at the heart of the proper understanding of the gospel?*
- *Why must mission work of all kinds remain as a primary focus and activity of a faithful Lutheran church today?*
- *How can you emphasize the centrality of missions and promote a mission mindset in your sermons and Bible classes? In your church council and voters’ meetings? In your faculty meetings? In your curriculum development?*

### **Conclusion**

It’s been said that we are living in a post-Christian world. That may be true, but whenever that is said it seems that someone is advocating one of two

things. The first is that for the church to survive in a post-Christian world, it needs to take a defensive position, to hunker down in the face of opposition, and to build walls of protection against an advancing enemy. The other conclusion is that, in a rapidly changing post-Christian world, the church needs to make some fundamental changes and adapt to a new reality, perhaps by morphing its message into something more appealing, more relevant, and less offensive.

We dare not take either approach. First, Christians today alone have something that can change the world, because it has the only thing that can change hearts. We have the message that God has entrusted to us—the message of Christ crucified and risen. Far from hiding in a protective bunker, we need to realize that we have a powerful message to proclaim. We have the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God that will not return to him empty. And we have his promise that the gates of hell itself cannot and will not overcome his church.

Second, we dare not tamper with the message. Itching ears will demand that we say what they want to hear. A consumer-minded, self-centered audience will want a message that offers shallow relevance and a feel-good result. A hostile culture will demand that we avoid calling sin what it is, confronting it, and calling for repentance. But a changed and modified Word of God ceases to be the Word of God. An altered message will fall flat, the hearers will be left searching, and the visible church will fail in the main mission that God has given it.

King Solomon said that there is nothing new under the sun. The same sinful human nature that has plagued mankind since the fall is alive and well in people today. The same *opinion legis*—the idea that I must somehow save myself—lurks in the hearts of millennials and senior citizens alike, just as it did in the Pharisee of Jesus’ day. The same hard hearts beating in the hearts of the stubborn children of Israel beat in chests of people today. Unbelief and wickedness may take on different shapes and forms at different times, but nothing has really changed.

But it is also true that the only remedy for sin has also not changed. “Behold, the Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world!" has always been and remains the only remedy for sin, the only avenue to the presence of God, and only way for sinners to be saved.

As we mark 500 years of the Lutheran Reformation, let us re-dedicate ourselves to the truths and the biblical teachings that God so graciously restored to his church and which he has passed down to us as the heirs of that Reformation. We want to do that because those truths, rediscovered a half a millennium ago, remain central and relevant to the ministry we carry out today.

In every sermon preached, in every Bible class taught, in every classroom subject and school activity, in every opportunity to share what we believe with those outside of our synod, may God enable us to know and confess that we are saved by God's grace alone, that we receive that blessing through faith alone, and that we are sure of that truth because of Scripture alone. Holding on to that heritage, we will by God's grace be permitted to share in the glorious privilege of serving as his witnesses of his unchanging gospel in a changing world, and we will be able to pass that heritage down to the next generations of God's people as God continues to build his church.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

*To God alone be the glory!*