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## 500 Years Later, It's Still All About the Cross!

### III. Under the Cross

1 From Scripture, we know that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His ascension into heaven  
2 was the coronation of the God-Man, our brother. By his power, he shakes the nations and rules the  
3 kingdoms of the earth. He lifts his voice to tell the rebellious world "Be still! Know that I am God, not  
4 you! (Ps 46)." He sustains all things by his powerful Word (He 1), and one day everything in heaven, on  
5 earth, and under the earth will publicly admit—or be forced to—that he is Lord (Php 2) And he has made  
6 you royalty already through your baptism! You are already victorious with him by faith, and you already  
7 are ruling with him in his kingdom.

8 But we don't see any of this now – the majesty of Christ and his kingdom. For now, it is hidden. Luther,  
9 you know, didn't invent or prefer the term "invisible Church." He often spoke, rather, of the "hidden"  
10 Church. This side of eternity, the true glory of the Church – just as the true glory of Christ himself – is  
11 hidden under the cross.

12 Our last stopping point is **under the cross**. No brilliant insight here when I say that we labor on in the  
13 Lord, and some days it is really, really labor. Occasionally people ask me what I teach, and I sometimes  
14 say, "Greek, Latin, and New Testament... some days better than others." We all know the feeling. Part  
15 of laboring under the cross is dealing with the reality of our own weaknesses and limitations.

16 But we also must remember that being **under the cross** also means that we will never truly be friends  
17 with the world. Let's take the education world. Yes, they may admire many things we do, and yes, they  
18 may respect us as educators. But they can never truly love us, or even be on the same page with us. For  
19 we have to remember what Paul said: *We preach Christ crucified – a stumbling block to Jews and*  
20 *foolishness to Gentiles*. They can't understand the cross because it's not a matter of intellectual  
21 comprehension. It is a truth you believe and cherish because God in his grace has revealed it to you and  
22 enabled you to believe it by the Holy Spirit. It is the very thing that drives us – the gospel. This cross and  
23 the redemption God provided there is at the very heart of our being.

24 About Luther's great teaching, we speak of the *theology of the cross*. The cross is God's ultimate  
25 revelation to mankind. Prof. Koelpin uses an insightful definition of "the theology of the cross": it is  
26 accepting God on his terms, in the way in which he wishes to be received. Jesus said as much in Luke 10

1 when he said the "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow  
2 me." *Self* is the enemy of true, Scriptural, Lutheran theology of the cross. "Self is so near and dear to us  
3 that its denial is, on the face of it, extremely difficult. In fact, there is nothing more difficult than to deny  
4 *self*."<sup>1</sup> *Self* doesn't want God on his terms, especially on the terms of the cross; the cross is foolishness  
5 to *self*. *Self*, especially in our American context, wants success, visible success. *Self* wants to believe that  
6 to follow Christ is to constantly seek the betterment of *self* – a program for my best life now. In its most  
7 crass form here in America, *self* thinks that the whole goal of following Christ is to be "blessed"—in a  
8 visible, material way—and shudders at the idea that to take up the cross and follow Christ involves  
9 suffering, sorrow, and pain. Herman Sasse points out how Luther understood the true theology of the  
10 cross from very early on.

11 In the explanation of the 20<sup>th</sup> thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation Luther says: "In John 14 [:8]...Philip  
12 spoke according to the theology of glory: 'Show us the Father.' Christ forthwith set aside his flighty  
13 thought about seeing God elsewhere and led him to himself, saying, 'Philip, he who has seen me has seen  
14 the Father' [John 14:9]. For this reason, true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ  
15 (WA 1, 362 [American Edition 31,53]). This last thought is repeated in the explanation to his next thesis:  
16 "God can only be found in suffering and the cross" [ibid.] Here is a bedrock statement of Luther's theology  
17 and that of the Lutheran Church. Theology is a *theology of the cross*, nothing else. A theology that would  
18 be something else is a false theology."<sup>2</sup>

19 In other words, the true theology of the cross that receives God on God's terms, not ours, understands  
20 that God most often reveals his truths in *paradoxes*, and true Lutheran theology receives these  
21 paradoxes without striving to reconcile them in a way that pleases *self*. "When God reveals himself to  
22 our world, he goes into hiding."<sup>3</sup> We can only judge things with our limited reason; we cannot have or  
23 begin to understand the whole picture and how the various, disparate items in our world integrate.<sup>4</sup> So  
24 faith receives God where and how God wishes to be received. He reveals himself by hiding himself in the  
25 Word. He reveals himself through the preaching of common men, through the classroom teaching of  
26 common men and women. He reveals himself by hiding in the water of baptism, and in the bread and  
27 wine of his sacrament. He reveals himself through *means*, though *self* desperately wants mystical,  
28 magical, direct revelation and "experience," or signs and wonders, or at least the feeling that "God  
29 spoke to my heart." *Self* wants the glory of the kingdom now or a restoration of the kingdom to Israel  
30 (Ac 1:7), although Jesus indicates how things are going to go in the New Testament era when he asks,  
31 "But when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?" (Lk 18:8). *Self* wants "the crown"  
32 now without the cross...and then a bigger crown when we get to heaven. That was the thrust of Satan's  
33 third temptation in the desert, and thanks be to God that Jesus saw right through it. And by his Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel M. Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections on His Cross and Ours*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn, 1st edition (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Sasse, *We Confess: Anthology* (Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold J. Koelplin, "The Cross: God's Mask in Human History," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, The 31st Annual Reformation Lectures: The Luther-Erasmus Debate Revisited, 39, no. 1 (March 1999): 54. The series of three essays by Prof. Koelplin in this issue of LSQ are excellent.

<sup>4</sup> Such understanding—perfect intelligence—was the driving force behind Plato developing his philosophical theory of *forms* and *universals*, especially seen in *The Republic* book X's "Parable of the Cave."

1 Spirit, Jesus also teaches us to see through things. He teaches us to see and understand what is most  
2 important, the one thing needful.

3 As we gather here as pastors and teachers, what is it that challenges us, that feels so heavy on our back  
4 as we strive to minister to the world? What temptations allure, what mirages glisten in the desert?

5 I'd like to spend some time now thinking about those things that remind us that we live and serve **under**  
6 **the cross**. Perhaps this is more for the school teachers here, but certainly there are things we as  
7 congregational leaders can be aware of—challenges that make ministry in Jesus' name difficult these  
8 days.

### 9 **Challenge 1: The Challenge of Identity**

10 Let's take a moment for a bit of a group exercise: *think – pair – share*. Question: You are talking with  
11 some new acquaintance, and you mention that you teach/preach at Calvary *Lutheran* Church and  
12 School. She asked, "What is *Lutheran*?" Yes – what is "Lutheran?" What makes your school a *Lutheran*  
13 school? What is it that is distinctly *Lutheran*?

14 • 3 min: *think*

15 • 5 min: *pair and share / discuss*

16 In the midst of all the talk of the Ninety-Five Theses, and the book of Romans, and indulgences, and faith  
17 vs. good works, I hope that we don't forget that the Lutheran Reformation was also an *educational*  
18 movement. It began in a school, the University of Wittenberg. The early debates were held in schools,  
19 such as at Leipzig and Heidelberg. Luther was passionate about education. During the frantic and  
20 incredibly productive 1520's, Luther also advanced the cause of Christian Lutheran education,  
21 advocating reforms and progressive advances of which even today's secular historians sit up and take  
22 notice. His textbook of the Christian faith, the *Small Catechism* (1529) is, arguably, his most important  
23 and lasting achievement. The Reformer himself thought so; in the introduction to the *Large Catechism*,  
24 he spoke of its importance and how he, great doctor and theologian though he was, still humbly needed  
25 to read and learn it new every day. The prolific reformer even publicly stated that he would be content  
26 to have all his writings burned except two: the *Catechism* and *The Bondage of the Will*.<sup>5</sup>

27 Luther, as I said, was passionate about education, and as early as 1524 he penned his famous treatise, *A*  
28 *Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen of all the Cities of Germany on Behalf of Christian Schools*. In it, in  
29 addition to outlining his ideas on the necessity of education, Luther did not mince words to the city  
30 elders: "In my judgment there is no other outward offense that in the sight of God so heavily burdens  
31 the world, and deserves such heavy chastisement, as the neglect to educate children."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, 50:172–73; Bainton, Mentor edition, 263

<sup>6</sup> F.V.N. Painter, *Luther on Education; Including a Historical Introduction, and a Translation of the Reformer's Two Most Important Educational Treatises* (Philadelphia, Lutheran publication society, 1889), 178. Available also at <http://archive.org/details/lutheroneducati00luthgoog>.

1 To be sure, the time of the Renaissance was ripe for educational reforms. Before Luther, the Roman  
2 church had no formal system of schools for the young apart from the monastic schools designed to lead  
3 young men to the higher calling of service to God. There had been minor movements devoted to  
4 educating the youth, such as the fourteenth century Brethren of the Common Life<sup>7</sup>, but these were few  
5 and far between. Luther's theology, moreover, increased the need for education. For a Christian to have  
6 a living relationship by faith *not* with the church but with God as an *individual*—that took Christian  
7 education. Christians would need to know how to read the New Testament he had translated (1521) and  
8 how to study the Catechism in their homes. Similarly, while the Roman Church looked down upon  
9 secular professions, judging them a less holy life than one devoted to God, Luther's rediscovery of the  
10 doctrines of the priesthood of all believers as well as that of Christian vocation dignified that occupation  
11 as God-pleasing pursuits for Christians. But to be useful elders, good statesmen, governors, lawyers,  
12 judges, businessmen, etc.—all that required intelligence, acquired through Christian education. In his  
13 1530 *Sermon on the Duty of Sending Children to School*, Luther wrote:

14 Even if there were no soul and men did not need schools and the languages for the sake of Christianity and the  
15 Scriptures, still, for the establishment of the best schools everywhere, both for boys and girls, this  
16 consideration is of itself sufficient, namely, that society, for the maintenance of civil order and the proper  
17 regulation fo the household, needs to be accomplished and well-trained men and women. Now such men are  
18 to come from boys, and such women from girls; hence it is necessary that boys and girls be properly taught  
19 and brought up.<sup>8</sup>

20 So, you understand my point. Lutherans have always been passionate about educating the youth. We  
21 live at a time where this strength is becoming, perhaps, more noticed by modern parents who are  
22 questioning the value and benefit of general public education.

23 But now, back to our question. How will we "sell" our "product" to the world? Why are parents and  
24 students attracted to our school? Is it because they are "private"? Is it because of the "quality"? What  
25 do we do with the name "Lutheran" when it comes to talking about our schools? What are our school's  
26 stated mission and vision? Does it sound "Lutheran"... or appeal to secular sensibilities? What is our  
27 ultimate goal? It is to make life-long disciples of Jesus who are, in fact, Lutheran—not for the incredibly  
28 short-sighted goal of gaining more WELS people, but because we Lutheran pastors and educators are  
29 convinced that God in his grace has preserved the truth of the gospel in Word and sacrament among us?

30 We live in a world that balks at asserting such a strong identity when it comes to religious matters. Nor  
31 am I accusing anyone here of anything untoward. The questions above are meant for self-reflection,  
32 introspection, faculty and staff discussions. Perhaps, in the end, the main questions are these: am I an  
33 educator who happens to be Lutheran...or am I a Lutheran educator? Is our school just one of many in  
34 the community labeling itself as "Christian," or are we a Lutheran school?

35 America has its brand of religion, as I think you well know. It boils things down to the lowest common  
36 denominator and minimizes differences. It colors political speeches with vague religious talk and

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<sup>7</sup> Painter, 85–86. They focused their educational efforts on the poor and emphasized religious instruction above all. Yet they also did teach the traditional medieval *trivium* and *quadrivium*.

<sup>8</sup> Painter, 65.

1 spiritual references. It is useful for dignifying specific events or perpetuating the illusion that we are one  
2 nation under God.<sup>9</sup> The result? The temptation is great in our time to minimize differences and  
3 celebrate commonalities. A word of caution from a German pastor (whose break from the state church  
4 cost him and others plenty) is perhaps in place as we think about how we might go about presenting  
5 ("marketing," if you will) our churches and schools to American communities:

6 If we did not have God's clear Word and the lessons of church history, we would probably also be satisfied  
7 with the often-heard motto, "The main thing is Jesus." Then we would also tolerate all the theological  
8 movements which bear the name of Christ. But from church history, as from the history of Israel, we learn  
9 what the outcome is when God's Word is not preached, heard and obeyed in every point. Christ through the  
10 word of the apostles did not tell the pastors just to proclaim what each might consider most important and to  
11 hold the congregation only to that. He said, "Teach them to obey everything." Unlike the malefactor on the  
12 cross, we have not yet finished our course. We must continue to fight the good fight of faith. It is simply a  
13 devilish minimizing of the danger when we are directed to contend only against massive enemies like atheism  
14 as if Satan would not employ his temptations against our own hearts and also within the Christian  
15 congregation.<sup>10</sup>

16 Who are we? By God's grace, we are Lutheran Christians. This 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation gives  
17 us a golden opportunity to explain precisely what that means, what we believe, *teach*, and confess in  
18 our churches and schools. **The cross** is central to everything we do.

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## 20 **Challenge 2: The Challenge of Stability**

21 Another challenge that we Lutheran Christians face as life and ministry **under the cross** is the challenge  
22 of *stability*. These challenges have both an external as well as an internal component. Sometimes these  
23 two also overlap.

24 *Externally*, apart from the evils and pressures of society (which I will discuss below), our churches and  
25 schools face external pressures of other kinds that affect the gospel ministry entrusted to us. For one,  
26 there is the constant reality that, increasingly, we need to *compete* with the secular schools. To state the  
27 obvious, non-member parents are usually not looking specifically for a confessional Lutheran church and  
28 school. What is it that they want? We hear such things as "safe environment"; "quality education";  
29 "higher than average on standardized testing"; "classes that focus on STEM"; "dynamic extracurricular  
30 programs"; etc. etc. How do we *compete* for students? I don't really have a good answer for that; I'm

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<sup>9</sup> In an important article written in 1967, Robert Bellah outlined the basic tenets of what he called "Americal Civil Religion." Originally found in *Dædalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, from the issue entitled, "Religion in America," Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, pp. 1-21. Freely available here:

[http://www.robertbellah.com/articles\\_5.htm](http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm) Interestingly, the concept is still very much alive: Pally, Marcia. "Donald Trump: Apostle of America's Civil Religion." ABC Religion and Ethics Updated 23 Nov 2016 (First posted 16 Nov 2016). <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/11/16/4576065.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Stoehr, Werner. "Teach them to Obey Everything I Have Commanded You." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Fall 1990. Trans. P. Eickmann. This essay was delivered to the Seventy-sixth Convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche in Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz), October 6-8, 1989. It can also be found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File at: <http://essays.wls.wels.net/handle/123456789/3881>

1 just acknowledging that the pressure exists. And this pressure is a threat to our stability as a school.  
2 After all, we need students to keep the school in operation. Sometimes we want to cry out with the  
3 prophet Amos, *How can Jacob survive? He is so small! (Am 7:2).*"

4 Sadly, it's a game we are forced to play; that's a reality. We all dream of a world where people  
5 automatically see the eternal value of Christian education and, out of love for their children and their  
6 Savior, they would make this a high priority in their lives. But we know it isn't so. So there are struggles.  
7 Churches face them too, of course. So the pressure to compromise to accommodate or compete is also  
8 ever-present.

9 In respect to schools, though, it is interesting to step back and see what is happening in the landscape of  
10 educational America. In particular, the tide of School Choice programs via vouchers seems to be rising.<sup>11</sup>  
11 I certainly am no expert in this field. It also is true that programs differ from state to state, since  
12 education is overseen by the state, not federal, government. Certain states have had school choice  
13 programs for over a hundred years (e.g., Vermont), created primarily to give expression to the principles  
14 of democracy. The concept of providing parents with vouchers was popularly advocated by the famous  
15 economist Milton Friedman in 1955. His ideas were not based on the ideals of democracy but instead  
16 upon the mechanics of free market economy.<sup>12</sup> Milwaukee sponsored the first voucher program in 1990,  
17 and it has been expanding ever since.<sup>13</sup> Usually, a driving force behind any state's interest in the voucher  
18 program has been for those underprivileged and disabled students, that they receive as good an  
19 education as possible. What once was a stark choice between public and parochial education in many  
20 places has now proliferated into Choice, vouchers, charter schools, homeschooling, and online  
21 schooling.

22 Where will all this go? In this unique place called America, which is the most religious of all Western  
23 nations and yet maintains the strictest separation of church and state,<sup>14</sup> legal challenges to the voucher  
24 program state by state will undoubtedly be an ongoing situation. SCOTUS' ruling this past summer in  
25 favor of an LCMS school that wished to receive state funds for the improvement of their playground  
26 facilities was a somewhat unexpected victory for Choice advocates (*Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia,*  
27 *Inc. vs. Comer*)<sup>15</sup> Yet, on the other hand (though not strictly related to education), a recent ruling by a  
28 federal court in the Western District of Wisconsin in regards to the tax-free clergy housing allowance,

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<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Fox and Nina K. Buchanan, eds., *The Wiley Handbook of School Choice*, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017). This is an expensive collection of essays, but I would advise any church / school contemplating getting into the School Choice program of their respective state should make a thorough study of the latest research found here.

<sup>12</sup> John F. Witte, "An Introduction to Educational Vouchers," in *The Wiley Handbook of School Choice*, ed. Robert A. Fox and Nina K. Buchanan, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 275.

<sup>13</sup> Witte, 277. What began in Milwaukee with a cap of 1500 students (only 341 actually took advantage of it that first year) now includes over 120 schools and 30,000 students. Florida has the largest program with 78,142 students.

<sup>14</sup> Elixabeth Green and Ray Pennings, "Religion in Schools," in *The Wiley Handbook of School Choice*, ed. Robert A. Fox and Nina K. Buchanan, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 465.

<sup>15</sup> National news analysis from a variety of viewpoints is readily accessible on the web. Here is the Supreme Court ruling: [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/16pdf/15-577\\_khlp.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/16pdf/15-577_khlp.pdf)

1 indicates that these battles over the separation of church and state will, most likely, continue.<sup>16</sup> In  
2 respect to education, "The most common issues that arise involve the Equal Protection Clause and the  
3 Establishment Clause."<sup>17</sup> Also, a factor is the 1880 Blaine Amendment, introduced by Republican  
4 Congressman James Blaine in the days of President U.S. Grant. This amendment, now in force in 38 of 50  
5 states, essentially seeks to prevent any state tax dollars from being used for the benefit of parochial  
6 schools. Green and Penning note that "the target was not religion, per se, but denominational  
7 manifestations of religion that seemed to threaten national identity."<sup>18</sup>

8 Again, though, where will all this go? I'm no prophet, of course. There are some among us who feel  
9 strongly that the church has no business taking money from the government for gospel ministry. My  
10 father felt strongly about this, as well as any intrusion by the government into the affairs of the church  
11 (e.g., licensure).<sup>19</sup> That caution is always in place. At the same time, I find it interesting that the exiles  
12 returning from Babylon accepted government money for the rebuilding of the temple (Ez 6:8 ff).  
13 Granted, different time, different place, different circumstances. But, to me, still interesting.

14 But the section title here has to do with *stability*. For those in voucher programs or contemplating  
15 entering the same, the caution is to be informed and stay informed. Laws vary from state to state, as I  
16 said above. We need to be cautious that we don't build upon an unstable foundation, i.e., government  
17 funding that can rapidly change or disappear entirely. It is always best to help guide our members to  
18 understand that "church" and "school" are not two separate entities in competition, but two parts of  
19 the one gospel ministry that needs to be supported. As we all know, though, funding is an issue.<sup>20</sup>

20 At the same time, we also have challenges regarding *internal* stability. The point is simple here: we need  
21 pastors and teachers. We're probably aware that the current pastoral vacancy rate is around 135. We'll  
22 well aware that teachers are likewise a challenge to come by, especially for early childhood education.  
23 As I write this, we have about 48 freshman pastoral students at MLC. Historically, on the pastor side, we  
24 have about a 1/3 attrition rate across the years (NWC too) in the pre-seminary track. If things unfold as  
25 usual, we will expect to graduate 32 in four years. Nor is it a given that everyone these days goes to  
26 Seminary, or finishes it. All this affects the stability of various ministries in various places, whether it be  
27 with constant turnover, long vacancies, or a certain called worker frequently receiving calls.  
28 Recruitment of and retention of students for the gospel ministry needs to be a high priority for all of our  
29 congregations and schools.

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<sup>16</sup> Peter J. Reilly, "Clergy Housing Tax Break Ruled Unconstitutional - Again," Forbes, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterjreilly/2017/10/07/clergy-housing-tax-break-ruled-unconstitutional-again/>

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne E. Eckes and Regina Umpstead, "School Choice and Legal Issues," in *The Wiley Handbook of School Choice*, ed. Robert A. Fox and Nina K. Buchanan, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 494. The Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment seeks to provide equal treatment for all citizens, while the Establishment Clause of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment forbids government from establishing any religion. One can easily see how the tension arises between those two.

<sup>18</sup> Green and Pennings, "Religion in Schools," 466.

<sup>19</sup> My father and then Prof. John Schibbelhut memorialized the 1999 synod convention about this very thing.

<sup>20</sup> Jason T. Gibson, "The Relationship between Tuition and Enrollment in WELS Lutheran Lutheran Elementary Schools" (Martin Luther College, 2016).

1 **Challenge 3: The Challenges of Society**

2 In addition to these challenges, there are also the significant challenges of *holding out the Word of life*  
3 (Php 2:16) in a rapidly decaying society. Aristotle once wrote centuries ago that the "virtues" of a dying  
4 society are tolerance and apathy. We know how readily "Meh" comes from the younger generation's  
5 lips; they are interested if it's not their problem. We all know how big an issue "tolerance" is in our  
6 society, and how conservative Christian churches and schools are viewed for their Biblical stance on  
7 social issues of tolerance. Debates about funding (back to the above section) might well be tied to such  
8 issues as secularists attempt to portray religious schools as intolerant, less divert, socially aloof.<sup>21</sup> So it is,  
9 so it will ever be as we live as foreigners and strangers to the world. For this reason, it is good to study  
10 Church history. Christians have been "the bad guy" before, the very reason society and mankind aren't  
11 progressing. I find it ironic, for instance, how the tables are turned. In the late first century, Christians  
12 were accused of being perverse, incestuous, sexually liberal by Roman authors and elites! In such times,  
13 though, how important to hear the comforting words of our Savior from the Upper Room: *If you*  
14 *belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have*  
15 *chosen you out of the world (Jn 15:19).*

16 There are challenges, though, even in teaching and preaching to those who are our members, who are  
17 Christians already yet are part of various generations. Much ink has been spilled in recent years about  
18 "millennials"—their mindset and behavioral tendencies, likes/dislikes and, for us, the most notable  
19 feature of being the least religiously-minded generation alive. No need to rehash that readily-accessed  
20 research, be it from Pew, Barna or even our WELS website and the recent demographic study by Rev.  
21 Jon Hein presented at our synod convention last summer.

22 But I would like to take just a couple of minutes to talk about the next generation, 1995-2015. I have  
23 three of these living in my home. This generation goes by a variety of names: Gen Z, iGen, Screen-agers.  
24 At MLC, we have only Gen Z students now, and these also are the ones sitting in your classrooms. For a  
25 recent college conference, I was asked to prepare some research on this, and I share it with you based  
26 on Seemiller and Grace's latest study.<sup>22</sup>

27 Here you see the some of the features that generational experts are saying distinguishes the  
28 generations. Two of the tell-tale signs for Gen Z: *fear and phone*. More than the other generations,  
29 demographers are noticing that they have grown up in an increasingly violent world. Even the campus is  
30 no longer a safe-haven. Economic uncertainties have made Gen Z *realists* and *cautious* (not so much  
31 *risk-takers*). The vitriolic political climate has also undermined their trust in authority figures to keep  
32 their promises; some radiate *cynicism* in speaking of politics.

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<sup>21</sup> Green and Pennings, "Religion in Schools," 468. But in this fascinating chapter, Green and Pennings go onto talk about the reality of the research, that religious schools tend to produce students that are *higher* achievers and *better* adjusted socially, contradicting all the common stereotypes.

<sup>22</sup> Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, *Generation Z Goes to College*, 1 edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016).

1 Strangely, you would think some traits such as those just mentioned would produce another rebellious,  
2 anti-authoritarian generation. But not so. The early tendency of members of Gen Z (influenced by their  
3 Gen X parents) is to rely on oneself, not the institutions. So Gen Z shows some signs of being very  
4 intentional in their approach to life, and to their higher education. This group of people is shaping up to  
5 be a very *practical and pragmatic* generation that doesn't prefer learning theory or background; they  
6 only want to know what they need to know. It seems that for many Gen Zers, learning for learning's  
7 sake isn't part of their agenda; learning has to be for a purpose.

8 One different author put it this way: you have to think about Gen Z like baseball. Good coaches do not  
9 teach their players to run TO first base but THROUGH first base. So many Gen Zers are looking past high  
10 school when they enter high school, and past college when they enter college. I gather we are going to  
11 see fewer students who "don't" know what to do," especially since financing college polls as a large  
12 concern for Gen Zers.<sup>23</sup>

13 There are also some very positive character traits that Gen Z believes itself to have. For fun, when we  
14 were going to the Cities a few months ago, our two Gen Z kids were in the car with Liz and me. It was  
15 somewhat of an experiment, of course. I made them put their phones away, and had Liz read this  
16 opening chapter about Gen Z character traits to the kids, looking for their reaction. Joseph (our junior)  
17 was... "Meh..." Joanna, going into 9<sup>th</sup> grade (and usually more reserved) blurted out, "Finally! Finally,  
18 somebody is writing something good about us, instead of just complaining about our phones!" I thought  
19 that comment itself spoke volumes about us.

## 20 **Gen Z: Beliefs**

- 21 • Politically: liberal to moderate
- 22 • Religion: One study said 78% believe in God; 41% in survey = weekly religious attendance
- 23     ○ cmp. at same age: Boomers (26%); Gen X (21%); Millennials (18%)
- 24 • Information/ News: "If it's online, it's true."
- 25     ○ "They believe a cheerleader on YouTube more than the CDC!"
- 26 • Access: Must be immediate and constant: Bad Wi-Fi! = #1 Complaint on campuses
- 27 • Social: Fear of missing out; diversity; equality
- 28     ○ The English word "selfie" was named "Word of the Year" in 2013 by the Oxford English  
29         Dictionary.<sup>24</sup>
- 30 • World is a scary place
- 31 • Volunteer...or "voluntold" (if "service" is class requirement, only 6% of those studied did it)

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<sup>23</sup> I noticed this just the other night in a conversation with my nephew, a senior at MVL. We were talking about AP courses, PSEO courses and if he was going to take any of them. He said (roughly), "I'm not going to take an AP course just for taking it. I'm already looking past high school – and even past college—to plan for what I really want to do." Now, a talk with my nephew, of course, does not make an authoritative study in and of itself. But it immediately caught my ear because of what I had been reading about Gen Z. He was born in 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Narcissism and Social Networking Sites: The Act of Taking Selfies Taylor M. Wickel Strategic Communications  
Elon University. [https://www.elon.edu/docs/e-  
web/academics/communications/research/vol6no1/01WickelEJSpring15.pdf](https://www.elon.edu/docs/e-web/academics/communications/research/vol6no1/01WickelEJSpring15.pdf)

- 1 • Career: Creative entrepreneurship, passion, and revenue generation (Uber, eBay, Esty, etc.)
- 2 • Education: Costly...limited quality...but needed.
- 3 • Leadership qualities: Gen Z has grown up where there have only been *strength-based* leadership
- 4 models<sup>25</sup>

5  
6 The authors also suggest that we will find Gen Z students not motivated by things that traditionally  
7 motivate students.

- 8 1. ACCEPTANCE: This is less important than being true to yourself; individualism.
- 9 2. BARGAINS: “You do this for me, I’ll do this for you.” – nope. Not interested in “using” people or  
10 superficial bonds.
- 11 3. MONEY: They are more conservative than the Millennials, who commonly were labeled as “earn  
12 to spend” in their approach. They have seen financial insecurity in the lives of their parents.  
13 More important than the big paycheck is stability/building a financial base for a secure future.  
14 Survey: economic gains would motivate 28%.
- 15 4. PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGMENT: Not so much. Personal achievement is far less significant than  
16 making a difference in the world.
- 17 5. COMPETITION: Gen Z’s self-identification as “loyal, compassionate, thoughtful” will find less and  
18 less participating in organized/scholastic sports. Competition means conflict to many of them,  
19 and that’s not how they roll. The authors do have a section on sports teams and how they might  
20 be impacted shortly. They also note that the “connectedness” of Gen Z means that many of  
21 them will be more out of shape. But the answer to having a healthy lifestyle will not be  
22 “participate in school sports.”

### 23 **Their / Our Challenges**

- 24 • The myth of multi-tasking
- 25 • Sorting out information
- 26 • Last minute research
  - 27 ○ “Gen Z is in a culture of ‘just in time’ learning, and although it is not a good idea to
  - 28 encourage last-minute inquiries, having more expanded hours might fit better with their
  - 29 work schedules and even how they learn. Some older people might think that this
  - 30 generation can just wait until Monday morning the way everyone else had to when they
  - 31 were in college. But the reality is that everyone, Generation Z included, has access to
  - 32 nearly everything all the time. Higher education is simply behind the times.”<sup>26</sup>
- 33 • Intrapersonal learning: most preferred method:

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<sup>25</sup> Seemiller and Grace, 154.

<sup>26</sup> Seemiller and Grace, 200.

- 1           ○ “My ideal learning environment is one where I can participate with the group only if I
- 2           choose. I like to be mentally engaged, but learn best by myself, and would prefer that
- 3           collaboration was an option.”<sup>27</sup>
- 4           ○ “More than 70% think it is important to be able to design and build their own course of
- 5           study or major. They prefer to learn on their own time and in their own way...”<sup>28</sup>
- 6       • Trusting people / developing meaningful relationships
- 7

8       So, as far as a society making ministry difficult, we find somethings are different, some the same.

9       Generations have their unique traits, but many things we see in society are merely theme and variation

10      of the same old things that come out of the imaginations of sinful hearts (Ge 6) – the resistance to the

11      gospel of Jesus Christ, yet behaviors and beliefs only showing how desperately another generation

12      needs it. Watching Ken Burns' *The Vietnam War* this fall made me realize that pastors, teachers, and

13      parents of the 60's-70's certainly had their challenges too.

14      The Word was there. The Spirit was there then as now. The same love of God that eagerly seeks the

15      salvation of all people was there then as now. His promise bolsters our courage as we live and labor

16      **under the cross**: *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Mt 28:20).*

17      But labor on faithfully, dear brothers and sisters, labor on! *For your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

18      First the cross, then the crown. This is the pattern of Christ's life. It is the pattern for your life, for the

19      lives of the students sitting at your feet. *To the one who overcomes...* Revelation says repeatedly and

20      shows us the eternal glories that follow. Life **under the cross** really can't be judged accurately from a

21      human perspective. But there is one thing that is certain: it ends in the joy of heaven.

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<sup>27</sup> Seemiller and Grace, 178.

<sup>28</sup> Seemiller and Grace, 185.