
Introduction to This Issue

The Life of Faith Initiative: A Radical Paradigm Shift for Christian Mission

The heart of Luther's theology was driven both by the doctrine of justification and by the power of the Gospel to set us free. This freedom becomes active in love through service to the neighbors God gives us, who are not merely in the abstract, but the very particular individuals we encounter in the arenas of our daily lives: family, school, work, neighborhood, local community, and global connections. These neighbors each have faces, names, and stories.

The Life of Faith Initiative is a movement to activate the latent potential of the Reformation focus on the universal priesthood to make it the primary focus of mission in a post-Christian age. The literature and focus of recent decades on the "missional church" have primarily, if not exclusively, given attention to congregations as the "agents" of God's mission in the world. The Life of Faith Initiative, by dramatic contrast, insists on a radical paradigm shift, making the service of the baptized in daily life the primary focus. The "agents" of Christian mission are the lives of the baptized lived out in service to others, including to creation, in all their roles and relationships in life.

This paradigm shift by no means makes the work of congregations obsolete or irrelevant. Rather, in every way it reorients the ministry of congregations, including pastors, to align more closely to the practices of the earliest church. This demands concentrated attention on the formation of the baptized as disciples of Jesus Christ and on very specific equipping of the baptized to live out their identity as disciples in universal neighborliness.

While the public has legitimate suspicion about the self-serving interests of institutions in our society, including the church as institution, people still are searching to discover deep meaning and purpose for their lives. That meaning is to be discovered in the message of God's unconditional acceptance of all people in Jesus Christ and that purpose becomes manifest in unrestricted caring for others.

How can congregations re-form worship and outreach in the spirit of a Life of Faith movement? First, we can become far more articulate about our theology of worship. Worship practices are not esoteric. The practices of worship function to engrave on us the very character of Jesus Christ. Worship immerses us in the kingdom of God, forming us to be a forgiven and forgiving people, praising God, listening to God's Word, praying, making peace, being generous, hospitable, and blessed. Worship practices are life practices. We become how we worship.

Second, congregations can become teaching and learning communities that underscore the promises of baptism: to live

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among God's faithful people, to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Congregations can create a climate for discipleship in daily life by how seriously we take the joys and struggles that people bring with themselves to the gathering. How can we validate the challenges faced by parents and children in families? How can we engage the ethical dilemmas people face in their schools and workplaces? How can we encourage people to pay attention to the well-being of their neighborhoods and local communities? How can we model civility in discussing political issues? In sum, can we ask people how their daily ministries are going, invite mutual accountability, and encourage them in these callings?

Luther's theology provides depth for reclaiming the universal priesthood as the primary expression of the body of Christ in mission. According to his understanding of God's two strategies, the baptized serve neighbors in the right-hand strategy by learning to listen actively to others in order to speak the faith authentically in caring conversations and they serve neighbors in the left-hand strategy by acts of justice and lovingkindness. The articles in this issue see baptism as the authorization from God in Christ that sets us free for neighborliness in all that we say and do. Jesus commissions disciples for our callings in daily life by giving us both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Congregations best fulfill these mandates by rendering them into the real circumstances of people in their daily lives.

Craig L. Nesson articulates theological grounding for the universal priesthood as the primary expression of the church's mission. The Gospel sets us free *from* every form of bondage and *for* serving neighbors in the arenas of daily life: home, work/school, local community, and world. The "churchification" of Christianity functions as a Babylonian captivity that has led to the church's de-

cline. Renewal of the church involves the scattering of the baptized to live out Christian vocation in daily life. Baptism is the primary ordination. Worship practices are life practices to form Christians for this vocation. The author calls for a Life of Faith movement to address this unfulfilled promise of the Reformation.

Knowing that we are freed from all that holds us captive and freed for service of the neighbor is as close and as vital to Lutherans as our breath; the path to putting this theology into practice is not as obvious. **Dwight L. DuBois** contends that when we have the eyes to see the service by the baptized as the center of the church's mission, we will be freed from convincing people to do or give more, and we will be free for the work of encouraging and equipping us all to be God's hands at work in the everyday activities of our lives.

Although **Dana O'Brien** had every reason to view her previous vocation as an attorney as ministry in daily life, it was only after becoming a pastor that she began to interpret the daily work of people as expressions of ministry. What prevents us from recognizing the significance of the priesthood of all believers? We need a more expansive understanding of mission and church, together with more intentional use of language and focused ministry practices, as illustrated by the ministry of members of her current congregation.

Convinced that a theology of "moralistic, therapeutic deism" dominates contemporary worldviews, values, and lifestyles, Westwood Lutheran Church has committed to a distinctly different path that crosses the divide between faith and daily life. The congregation is on a journey of deeply engaging its theological roots of grace and vocation. **Jason Van Hunnik** argues that a deep, long-term engagement with Luther's understanding of vocation, centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, holds great promise for faithful and effective mission and ministry that engages real life, describing the journey's emerging outcomes, new questions, and next steps.

Brenda K. Smith offers an overview of three faith formation ministries found in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and presents how the partnering of these three ministries with the Life of Faith Initiative would foster a more dynamic and relatable focus on how we live out faith in daily life as baptized children of God. The Faith Practices Ministry of the ELCA is based on the promises or agreements made at baptism. The Book of Faith Initiative encourages individuals to open scripture and join a conversation about the Bible. The Renewal/Prayer and Revival Team offers revival and healing ministries to those in need of spiritual renewal.

Master narratives and worldviews are foundational not just to how we think, but also to meaning, purpose, and intuiting how we are to behave. **Steve Oelschlager** argues that Christian formation at its best is about being socialized to adopt both Jesus' alternative worldview and his behaviors of love and service. The Western church's difficulty with Christian formation is related to a prevailing master narrative of faith that needs reframing in the face of enlightenment thinking, science, markets, and progress.

The demise of the Christendom paradigm, while a cause of fear and anxiety for some, has created opportunities for expanding practices of ministry. **Richard Bruesehoff** reflects on these expanding practices that require new methods of "equipping the saints for the work of ministry." Lay-oriented theological education programs such as Education for Ministry, and its Theological Reflection process, are providing ways in which more people are exploring their various vocations as the places in which they are called to ministry.

To live the Christian way of life, one should be fluent in the language of faith. Becoming fluent in a language does not happen overnight. **Deborah A. Streicher** explains how daily practice in the home, community, and world are an integral part of learning to become fluent. Learning a language provides an analogy to navigate building, growing, and establishing a Christian way of life. Becoming fluent in a language requires immersion in that language and culture. If we are not intentional, do not set expectations, and have a plan to follow up, our efforts are fruitless. It is not about us as leaders in the congregation. It is about empowering others to be leaders of the faith in their own homes.

David W. Anderson explores how the unfinished Reformation theme of the priesthood of all believers and the current Life of Faith Initiative of the ELCA can benefit from attention to shepherding souls. Caring for one another includes caring for one's own soul, one's whole life that includes faith in God. Restricting faith formation and outreach to church professionals and congregational programs does not suffice to serve the spiritual wellbeing of followers of Jesus Christ. The priesthood of all believers involves shepherding by speaking the faith out loud. It is as simple as listening attentively to the deeper issues in a person's life that include faith, hope, and love, or offering a blessing, prayer, or table grace.

The Life of Faith theme articles conclude with a word of ecumenical encouragement from two fellow travelers, **Demi Prentiss** and **Fletcher Lowe**, who are seeking to accent the centrality of ministry of the baptized in daily life in the Episcopal Church. The section concludes with a working bibliography of several books and resources on the topic of "Ministry in Daily Life" for use by congregations and leaders desiring to explore more deeply the Life of Faith Initiative.

The issue begins with the *Listening to Immigrant Voices* feature by **Winston D. Persaud**, who invites the reader to consider how race, ethnicity, class, color, and accent powerfully shape how we anticipate and experience being welcomed, who we are and become (identity), and our sense of belonging in the new country we call our home. Persaud includes personal stories which illustrate the vital need to speak the truth in love in the face of the existential expression of the debilitating power of internalized stereotypes. He centers his reflection Christologically by pointing the reader to God's saving and healing love in Christ, who knew what it was to be "other."

The *Currents Focus* feature by **Ted Peters** takes a new look at the doctrine of justification-by-faith. Like a mirror in the sunshine, it reflects to us human beings who we are. In the name of justice,

we perpetrate violence. The pursuit of justice does as much damage as the pursuit of injustice. Like a mirror, justification-by-faith reveals who we are and who God is: we are self-justifiers, while God is a gracious justifier of sinners. Can the Finnish School of Luther research (led by Tuomo Mannermaa) recognize that Christ present in faith is the scapegoated victim of human self-justification? Once we are effectively justified by divine grace, we sinners may learn that we are no longer compelled to self-justify. Liberated from self-justification, according to Lutheran spirituality, the Christian is free to love for the sake of the beloved.

The January issue continues the tradition of *Currents in Theology and Mission* in providing succinct and thoughtful book reviews, including here some recent titles on the theme of ministry in daily life. We also are grateful for the contributions of our authors who provide useful and provocative reflections on upcoming lectionary texts in *Preaching Helps*. I am grateful for the work of all those whose efforts here have combined to raise awareness about a focus for the church's mission, ministry in daily life, that can address for the first time the unfulfilled promise of the Reformation.

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*This issue dedicated to the legacy of
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