

Nbr. 22 – May, 2020

Pastors in Evangelism in the Wake of Coronavirus

The warp and woof of daily pastoral life has recently. Pastors have been doing things differently while “sheltering in place,” which will last thru May.

Taking this ongoing experience as a starting point, I want to speak directly to pastors: What can you do for evangelism now? The list of such items can always run long, but here are a few:

- *Continue making wise use of technology.*

Lately, most pastors have probably done a lot of electronic Gospel communication – everything from going online with church services for perhaps the first time to developing new vehicles like daily devotions on Facebook. What might you continue doing along these lines, even after in-person gatherings become feasible again?

Your answer to this question will depend on several factors. These include your congregation’s membership profile, your own abilities, and the rest of your schedule after things “open up.”

In considering all this, don’t overlook providing your church’s members with digital resources that they can share with the unchurched. These may include answers to specific questions, snippets from sermons, devotional features, etc. (You may produce some of these yourself, and in other cases you might just provide sharable links.) Thus, you can partner with them in evangelism.

- *More Gospel communication:*

By utilizing electronic tools, all pastors are now positioned to do more Gospel communication than before, even with their own church members. Public “platforms” are no longer limited for the

most part to church services, Bible classes, and catechism sessions.

Be warned, though! Trying to keep up with all these new opportunities can burn you out.

Therefore, make sure you are studying the Bible. Be sure to receive the Good News of Jesus yourself. Fill your own barrel, so it overflows.

Also, make multiple use of your materials. For example, a portion of a sermon can double as an online devotion. Or: a lot of simple explanations you routinely make in catechism class can become sharable Q & As. If you look for such “multiple uses,” you will probably find them. A lot of them!

- *Don’t get too excited about “fan mail” from afar.*

Reactions to your online work could come from across the country, maybe around the world. These can be gratifying – if they are positive!

Don’t let them go to your head, though. Bear in mind that you have a call to a specific congregation in a particular place.

I think of a missionary in Europe, recently under quarantine. He said he wished someone had warned him not to get swept up by the euphoria of discovering that his new online streamed church service was getting laudatory responses from elsewhere in the world. He would have been helped, he said, by a reminder not to lose focus on the people he had been called to serve.

You might recall the above anecdote from a previous *See? WOW!* newsletter. I put materials to multiple uses, too!

- *Lengthen attention spans.*

Pardon the pun, but this item, related once more to electronic communication, really requires lengthier treatment. For now, suffice it to say that



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when we go online, we often try to be exceedingly brief. That is fine, up to a point.

In the long run, the Christian message cannot be adequately proclaimed in sound bites, or even somewhat longer “short forms.” If we are not constantly asking ourselves how our brief digital communications can lead people to more extensive presentations that can be better considered, we can, in effect, cut off the limb on which we stand.

At the end of something short, consider giving people alternatives. Tell them where they can delve into greater depth. Make appropriate links available.

- *Treasure God’s “outward Word.”*

Even with electronic communications, it is possible to be “high touch.” You can use such tools to help you reach out multiple times, say, to people on a prospect list.

Yet it would be a mistake for us to prize connection over content. “God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word” (SA III viii 3).

The Gospel comes as a definite Word from outside ourselves, also outside most typical interpersonal relations. The Good News of Christ is not a warm fuzzy feeling that can fade, nor does it offer a mere human friendship that can fail. It gives us something firm upon which to fix our hope, as sure as God Himself is sure, as sure as the resurrection of Christ. Thru it, the Holy Spirit brings the blessings of Jesus’ dying and rising.

- *Remember the importance of your calling and your office in the evangelistic task.*

At a time when so much information has moved online, and even TV network late night talk show hosts have started to look pretty much like guys with their own YouTube channels, pastors can

be tempted to wonder why they are needed, also in evangelism. Can’t the unchurched encounter the Gospel on the internet? Can’t one of your church members tell the Good News via e-mail?

Yes. But none of that changes the fact that the Lord has called you to be pastor to your flock and a missionary to your community. Never forget this! By sending pastors, our ascended Lord has provided flesh-and-blood reminders that notions of spiritual truth are not all equal. Christianity is not whatever anyone wants to make it out to be.

Former Lutheran Hour Speaker Greg Seltz opens up one more aspect of this subject in an interesting way. He says we need the public ministry because it is so hard to believe the Gospel. It’s not that pastors themselves give the Good News an extra “oomph.” Yet they do keep on proclaiming it, repeatedly and faithfully, with skill and compassion, aiming to be “helpers of joy” (2 Cor. 1:24) . . .

. . . and all by the Lord’s design. Valuable as electronic communications are, and as greatly valuable as God’s own Book is, He has given more. He has given *you* to bring people His Good News.

CPH FaithCourse: *Paul’s Missionary Journeys*

To help busy pastors and their congregations, Concordia Publishing House plans to make available online the above-named six lesson video Bible study, taught by me, one lesson a week starting on May 4. Every weekday a new short section of the week’s lesson will be released. People can participate wherever they are. To join this free study, go to <https://cphfaithcourses.com/dailypmj/>

Also, I will host Facebook live sessions, 9:30 to 10 a.m. CDT on Saturdays, starting May 9, to cap each week’s learning. Please see the e-mail with



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which you received this *See?* **WOW!** issue for
instructions concerning these Saturday sessions.

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