

See? **WOW!** News and Encouragement for CID **Circuit Witness & Outreach Workers**

Nbr. 29 – December, 2020

“All politics is local.” Gospel Too?

Former Speaker of the House Thomas “Tip” O’Neill famously said, “All politics is local.”

By contrast, all *Gospel* is universal – if it is genuine Gospel. This has been true ever since (and, really, even before) the angel said, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). Not just for *some* people, but for *all* people! Good News of universal grace in the Christ Who came for all!

There was more than one way to render into Greek the Hebrew word for *assembly* – for example, one could say “synagog.” Yet the much more prevalent term in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, church. In secular life, an *ekklesia* was an open, public assembly. Early Christians wanted to make clear that their gatherings were not “in-group” affairs, so they called them not *synagogs* but *churches*. All are welcome! All Gospel is universal.

Still, all Gospel is also *located*. The angel went on, “you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). At that place they would find God Himself, come in grace. In subsequent years, the place moved around as Jesus Himself moved. But the Good News remained located . . . located in Him.

See? **WOW!** It’s still true. Christ comes to sinners in His grace thru His Word and Sacraments. Around these He gathers His church. Even if the place of proclamation moves, all Gospel is located.

It’s also universal. We welcome everyone to church services. And we depart from them as God’s people, bringing to others wherever we go the News that is Good for all. We are privileged to invite them to be gathered with us around the Gospel.

Inviting response to your online church services

If visitors are present in your church building, they can sign a guestbook or a “rite of friendship” pad. But how do you gather contact information on those who view services online?

If people watch you on Facebook live or a similar platform, you can see their names. Someone can monitor those who look in, and even carry on a live chat with them.

But what if you load your service onto YouTube, or your church website? How do you entice viewers to contact you, say, via e-mail, so that you can follow up on them later? A set of suggestions is on the CID website. See <http://www.cidcms.org/resources/InvitingResponsesToOnlineService.pdf>

Book Discussion: *The Unholy Trinity*

Starting Thurs., Jan. 14, I plan (D.v.) to conduct every-other-week, one-hour Zoom discussions of this CPH book by Michael Lockwood, chapter by chapter (with a break in Feb.). This wide-ranging book is about Luther’s treatment of idolatry, with contemporary applications. A good basis to address current cultural idolatries!

Sessions will be Thursdays at 3:00 p.m. on: Jan. 14 (intro & ch. 1), Jan. 28 (chs. 2 & 3), Feb. 25 (ch. 4), Mar. 11 (ch. 5), Mar. 25 (ch. 6), Apr. 8 (ch. 7), Apr. 22 (ch. 8), and May 6 (ch. 9).

These Zoom discussions are free and open to all members of CID churches. Pastors and other rostered church workers are encouraged to join us.

E-mail me ASAP to initiate your registration. We’ll send the Zoom link. CID may be able to provide you a *gratis* copy of the book. On or before January 4, 2021, we will try to mail such copies so recipients are able to read the introduction and chapter one before the first session on Jan. 14. Worth considering: Expanding AND Contracting



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Right now we face a paradox in our Synod and within our Districts. This conundrum comes into view especially when the subject of church planting is raised, as we did in our last newsletter. The paradox is that we are talking about expanding the number of congregations just when this number is also contracting. Some churches are consolidating, while others are outright closing. In fact, one side of the paradox can bleed over and affect the other. Someone might say, "Why plant new churches when the existing ones are not full?"

I don't think that anyone would expect that each new church start will be successful – in other words, that in every case such an effort will result in a new congregation that eventually joins the Synod. Sometimes the Lord has other plans, so we go to work elsewhere. Nor should we think, especially in light of church history, that all the congregations which exist today will necessarily live on into the future. Like it or not, we have the same situation that every generation of Christians has faced: expansion in some places and decline in others.

Under these circumstances, we need to exercise the best stewardship of mission resources that we can. It is one thing, in a community where there are six Missouri Synod churches, for three of them to combine. It is another thing for the only Missouri Synod church in an entire county to close. In the latter case, we lose a foothold in that county. The human beings, the church members, will hopefully transfer to others of our churches, but the physical buildings will likely be lost to us. I make no bones about it: I would like to see us preserve mission infrastructure wherever possible.

The polity of our Synod makes it difficult to coordinate the use of resources. For the Synod cannot order a congregation to close or consolidate with others – and I thank God it can't! Yet there is a forum for cooperation to occur between churches. I mean literally the often-underutilized Circuit Forum and also the Circuit Convocation. Circuit-level

awareness and assistance might prove vital to sustaining congregations who lack resources. Circuit-level coordination and cooperation can help to guide congregations considering consolidation.

For years now, Circuit Forums have been able to consider and recommend new work, and even adopt joint plans for mission outreach. Realistically speaking, a lot of church planting activity in the foreseeable future will be in cities of at least some size, and it will likely be supported and executed at the Circuit level. Some Circuits have Mission Councils for such support and action.

Regarding support, the CID Stewardship Commission has determined to implement the Synod's recent mandate for the so-called 1.1.1 mission funding model (\$1 per member per week beyond regular offerings) not church by church but rather Circuit by Circuit. In Circuits, we think we can best show "member congregations the defined mission outcomes" that the 1.1.1 funds could help achieve (2019 Res. 8-02). New church planting efforts will receive their support not from the District but from Circuits and congregations.

A potentially more difficult challenge is execution of these efforts. Where church planters are in short supply or cannot be financially funded, this work will fall largely to pastors assisted by others in the existing churches. Who should take the lead? The pastor closest to the new start? Not necessarily. Not everyone is cut out to do church planting. In any case, fellow pastors and others in the Circuit can offer help and support to those who carry the heaviest load in the new work.

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