

See? WOW!

News and Encouragement for CID Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers

Nbr. 1 – Oct. 18, 2018

“. . . all that Jesus began to do and teach . . .”

So Luke characterized the contents of his “first book” for Theophilus. That book, the Gospel according to St. Luke, starts before Jesus was conceived. It includes His ministry, His death and resurrection, and ends with His ascension. All of this, as Luke put it, was the beginning (Acts 1:1).

Jesus continued to act and to teach through His church. Acts tells that story.

Yet not all of it: Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome, teaching of Christ openly and unhindered. This kind of open-ended account may not seem very satisfactory as a conclusion for a biography of St. Paul. But Luke was not telling the story of any mere human. He was writing of what *our Lord Jesus continued doing and teaching*.

On this St. Luke’s Day, recall that *you fit into this open-ended story*. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Once you were lost, but now you are found by the grace of God and the work of Christ. And Jesus continues to act and teach through His church to this day.

See? WOW! Not only has the Lord saved us; He also continues to seek and save the lost, for time and eternity, through us and those we serve.

Connect to Disciple

“Connect to Disciple” is an outreach workshop. It heads a series of 10 *re:Vitality* workshops for congregational revitalization.

Available probably within the next couple of years from the Synod’s Office of National Mission will be “Joining in God’s Mission” (strategic planning), “Shepherding the Strays” (inactive members), and “Members of One Body”

(assimilation). Six other workshops are planned beyond these. However, the first one – with which every interested church must start – is Connect to Disciple (CTD).

I have been learning about gearing up for CTD workshops in our District. A key will be our providing workshop facilitators to work in teams of two. My hope is to develop 3 such teams, located northwest, central, and southeast within CID.

These facilitators will be trained “on the job,” each going through three workshops in the following roles: 1) observer; 2) junior member of the facilitator team; 3) senior member of the team. An overall CID “trainer” will be trained first himself, then will train others.

So long as our trainer and facilitators are themselves in the process of being trained, the Synod will pay for their expenses. I *will not* need a lot of money for this in 2019. I *will* need potential facilitators, and I am working on recruiting them.

Where I could especially use help from you right now is: *getting congregations interested in having a CTD workshop during 2019 or 2020*. A workshop runs 6-9 p.m. on Fri., then Sat. morning. Each workshop is for only one congregation.

During 2019, I would like to be able to schedule 7 CTD workshops. In 2020, I would like to set up 10 more. We will need the first 15 of these workshops to get all our facilitators trained. By the end of 2020, our 3 teams should be set to go.

So please reach out. Would your church, or another in your circuit, be willing to take the online *re:Vitality* survey and then schedule a CTD workshop during 2019? It will be important to find 3 churches willing to jump in early and have a

workshop already during spring, 2019. The only monetary cost to a congregation would be for the workshop materials (\$200-\$300) and, if the church wants to provide food, for a Fri. night meal and/or Sat. morning coffee and doughnuts, etc.

Questions? Please let me know. If you want to recommend that I contact some church or pastor, please pass that word along as well.

Worth considering

- Montgomery, John Warwick and Gene Edward Veith, eds. *Where Christ is Present: A Theology for All Seasons on the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation*. Irvine, California: NRP Books, 2015. viii + 245 pp.
- Wells, David F. *The Courage to be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. xiv + 213 pp.

In this newer edition of *The Courage to be Protestant*, released for Reformation500, David Wells summarizes work he published in four books from 1993 to 2005. His long suit is broad-based synthetic diagnosis. "A soft, shapeless Christianity ready to adapt to any worldview may enjoy initial success," he warns, "but it will soon be overtaken and lose its interest" (64). Wells observes that in Evangelical circles doctrine no longer plays its former role. Christians have largely lost track of the antithesis between biblical doctrine and their surrounding culture. Wells notes that by tolerating diverse teachings within their ranks on subjects like baptism and eschatology, Evangelicals were fostering a baleful doctrinal indifference that has since pressed well beyond those topics (14-15).

This book penetratingly analyzes, inside as well as outside the church, the rise of the *autonomous self* – "how individualism now looks in its postmodern dress" (37). Postmodernism is individualistic like the Enlightenment, yet with a decided inward twist. Having eschewed fixed and universal meaning, the autonomous postmodern self now stands at the center of life. "This means that the transcendent from which we once took our bearings has been relocated and is now found

within" (79). The autonomous self has emerged, especially over the last 50 years, via shifts from virtues to values, from character to personality, from nature to self, and from guilt to shame.

Instead of this, Wells urges that properly placed doctrine "take us back to our [true] center, to God as triune, to God in his greatness." For, he contends, to "hear God's Word as the Word from *this* God is inevitably to become God-centered" (4, emphasis original). While Wells makes some fine particular statements, overall he depicts Law and Gospel as differing in degree, not kind. For instance, he thinks discipline should be a mark of the church. Wells offers a valuable comparison and contrast between Luther's times and ours (22-33) and he is intrigued by what he calls some Lutheran thinking on "the church hidden and the church manifest" (187), but he writes to encourage Protestants to be Protestant.

Where Christ is Present tells Christians why they should be confessing Lutherans. This book can provide some help, for instance, to pastors teaching adult instruction. Editor Montgomery's witty introduction surveys an array of theological positions, narrowing down to Lutheranism as the biblically faithful option. Co-editor Veith shows that Lutheranism is well-positioned for this century: not worldly yet engaged, offering a rich spiritual heritage, evangelical and catholic in the best senses. The remaining essays each treat fairly specific subjects: what it means to be "evangelical," biblical authority, the contours of the Gospel, the means of grace, the "two kingdoms," vocation, the Christian life, the arts, and Lutheranism's cultural impact.

One occasionally finds declarations that at very least need clarification, however. For example, there is a warning about churches holding to the Lutheran theological tradition yet allowing conservative theology to turn into "reactionary social policies." So far, so good. Yet this is supposed to be exemplified by "refusal to engage in any cooperative evangelistic outreach

with biblically conservative but non-Lutheran churches or with evangelists such as Billy Graham. . .” (236). That is not social policy, though. Such refusal, characteristic of the Missouri Synod (Constitution VI.2.c), resists doctrinal indifferentism, a problem that the Wells book lamented among Evangelicals.

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