

Nbr. 39 – January, 2022

You're In!

Life for workers in the church has its high points. Take Christmas, for example.

It also can have its low points. Hours can seem unending, duties can seem wearying, people can seem draining. Like Paul in the Epistle lesson for Epiphany, pastors can say: "I was made a servant of this Gospel by the gift of grace which God gave me" (Eph. 3:7). In their own ways, all Christians can say the same. But in moments of discouragement, our flesh might be tempted to add: "Some gift!"

Yet we are not like factory workers who toil away all day, only to go home at night with relatively meager wages while others profit greatly from their combined labor. Our Lord says, "I do not call you slaves anymore . . . I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (Jn. 15:15). Even when the work had gone well and the 70 came back giddy with delight, He told them: "Do not rejoice over the fact that the spirits obey you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk. 10:20).

We might spend a lot of time pointing out that the Gospel that is good for us is also good for everyone else, and so we should all get out there and tell it. Yet the reverse remains true too: the Gospel that is good for others also remains genuine Good News of forgiveness and life in Christ for us.

See? WOW! You're in! You! Pick up that quote from Paul where we left off above: "To me, though I am less than the least of all His believers, He gave this grace: to preach the Good News of the immeasurable riches of Christ to the Gentiles . . ." (Eph. 3:8). In those riches, there is cause to rejoice.

Sermon outlines on Member Assimilation

I have written a series of assimilation-oriented sermon outlines to support preaching on 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. These biblical chapters will be read in their entirety as the Series C epistle lessons for this coming January 16, 23, and 30.

The outlines will be available soon on CID's website. Go to <http://www.cidlcms.org/resources-studies.html>

Members of One Body (MOB) Bible Study

MOB, the new *re:Vitality* module on member assimilation, is nearing completion. A pilot workshop for Trinity, Springfield will be in March.

Everyone is invited to the preparatory MOB Bible Study, which I will teach at Trinity's Parish Center, 515 MacArthur St. in Springfield. Here's an opportunity to get a little taste of MOB. Perhaps a congregation in your Circuit would be interested in this module – maybe to beta test this summer!

The Bible study sessions will be held at 6:30 p.m. on a series of four Tuesday evenings: February 1 and 15 and March 1 and 15. For further information, or to advise me that you plan to attend, please e-mail me: kschurb@cidlcms.org

From Evangelism

Dr. Joel Heck has taught theology at Concordia, Austin for more than 20 years. When he was a relatively new professor at Concordia, Mequon he produced a journal named *Evangelism*. Topics about which he wrote during the late '80s and early '90s are still worth considering.

Starting in the present issue, our "back-page" articles will draw heavily on some of Dr. Heck's articles from yesteryear. I thank him for granting permission to use this material anew.



Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers

Worth considering:

The Vocabulary of Evangelism

(based on Joel Heck, *Evangelism* 1:2 – Feb., 1987)

There are certain words we should NOT use as we tell the Good News about Jesus. They can be grouped into a few categories:

1. *Big words*

It is not too hard to recognize “propitiation” as a word that will prove mysterious to most people. But likewise with other terms that might roll off our tongues easily, e.g., “atonement,” “righteousness,” “regeneration,” or “sanctification.”

Fewer and fewer people are familiar with the vocabulary of the faith these days. So we have a challenge resembling that of Bible translators, to use words that make our point most directly, without either leaving people behind or insulting their intelligence.

Yet in Christian witness we have an advantage over translators. They usually have to choose just a single word or perhaps two to make their point. We can explain at greater length.

2. *Confusing words*

These words prove confusing because unchurched people do not use them the way Christians do. A non-Christian once saw a sign that said, “Jesus saves.” He told a nearby Christian: “If Jesus is thrifty, perhaps I should be thrifty too.”

Other words can be confusing. Think of “redeem,” “justify,” “blood of the Lamb” (which might suggest to some a kind of voodoo ceremony), even “believe” (which can be the equivalent of “feel” to some), and “second coming.”

These biblical terms can and should be taught. But it would be naïve to expect the unchurched to comprehend them instantly and accurately.

3. *Vague words or phrases expressing poor theology*

“Make Christ a part of your life” lies open to misunderstanding in a number of ways. Christ is not a part, a thing. He is a Person. And He should not amount to a mere percentage of a Christian’s life.

Moreover, those who are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) have no power to carry out this sentiment, any more than they can commit their lives to Christ or give their hearts to Him, or open to Him the door of their hearts, or make Him the Lord of their lives.

Then there is the admonition, “You must forsake all your sins.” Even Christians cannot quit sinning, though! According to our new man, we do not *want* to fall into any kind of sin. Still, so long as we live in this world, we will never be free from sin.

When we conclude our telling of the Good News, sometimes it is best simply to wait. Let silence prevail for a time. Our conversation partners will likely not want it to continue for long. They will say something. What they say can provide you a clue to the next thing that you should say.

If necessary, you can ask: “Am I making sense?” This can afford others an opportunity to point out whatever confusions they might have.

Alternatively, you can ask: “How do you react to what I have said? What do you think?” Again, the forthcoming response will help you to discern whether to proceed with Law or Gospel.

A wise pastor observed that people typically want to stay in the faith the way they think they came into it. If they think that was by their own power, even a bit, they will end up disappointed. Faith is God’s gift. So, no boasting! And great comfort! — Ken Schurb kschurb@cidlcms.org

