

Nbr. 71 – September, 2025

The Gospel Comforts Consciences

The Good News of Christ enables people to find deliverance from their guilt – not in glib evasions and excuses, not in boasts of moral superiority, but in Christ Who absorbed all the wrath of God that was against us.

Thus, they no longer have to prove their worth to God, or create a life that will impress Him. Assured of forgiveness, they find courage and strength to face the Law which condemns them and acknowledge its validity without falling into despair. Since there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [Rom. 8:1], they can dare to walk before God and one another as forgiven sinners.

See? WOW! When we bring the Good News to people, it does things. It comforts consciences.

The Meditation above . . .

. . . and others to come in this newsletter over the next few months, D.v., have their source in a valuable presentation by Dr. Gerhard Aho (1923-87), who taught homiletics at Concordia Theological Seminary for over 25 years. His lecture, “How to Preach the Gospel Without Making it Sound like Law,” is available on the CTS Media Resources website, <https://media.ctsfw.edu>

Dr. Aho began this lecture by reminding listeners of what the Gospel does, in several respects. For the Gospel, the very power of God unto salvation, is not mere inert information. It does something. This point stands out as a vital aspect of the Lutheran theology of the Word.

The Good News about Jesus does things, whoever speaks it. The Gospel loses none of its power in the mouth of any humble witness.

OAFC Adult Teams

The Central Illinois District, along with two others, South Wisconsin and Southern Illinois, has been awarded a \$15,000 grant by the Bolick Foundation. Bolick is particularly interested in innovative and cooperative projects in the field of evangelism.

Using the grant money, the three Districts involved are partnering with the Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ organization. OAFC will develop adult teams of 3 to 5 people per District. This differs from OAFC’s usual work with teens and perhaps young adults. Members of the teams we contemplate, in fact, will likely be older adults.

These teams would travel to CID, SID, or SWD congregations to offer either 2 and a half day or 5 day events that would provide evangelistic practice by a) canvassing neighborhoods; b) engaging in “dry run” practice of witnessing skills with church members; and c) helping a congregation to begin or to augment its evangelistic efforts in a nearby nursing home. An optional variation would focus strictly on items b. and c. above – in other words: no canvassing, if a congregation does not feel ready for it.

This prospect raises some questions:

- Would you be interested in serving on such a team? Do you know someone else who would – pastor, commissioned, or lay?
- Might your congregation be interested in hosting such a team to work in your midst? Do you know of a congregation that might be?
- If the answer is “yes” to any of the above questions, or if you would like more info, please contact me as soon as you can. We hope to have a training event for team members from the three Districts in late October.



Circuit Witness and Outreach Workers

Worth considering:

Listening “Under the Surface”

A fine time was had by all at Dr. Chad Kendall’s continuing education course on Protreptics this past June. He spoke on the same topic at the fall, 2024 CID/SID Pastors’ Conference. The summer course went into still-greater detail.

Along the way, Dr. Kendall cited pastoral wisdom from Gregory of Nyssa:

- *Fear* often haunts people.
- If fear is not dealt with, it leads to *grief*.
- If grief is not dealt with, it leads to *bitterness*.
- If bitterness is not dealt with, it leads to *striking*, even physical violence.

(In his presentation, Dr. Kendall used the Greek words for fear, grief, bitterness, and striking. Here, the English words will suffice.)

The last, striking, is openly apparent to all. Bitterness often lies so close to the surface that it becomes evident without much ado.

But we can and should delve deeper. For grief and fear can be directly addressed with the Gospel of the Christ Who died for our trespasses and rose for our justification.

Is someone’s anger or bitterness a sign of an underlying grief or fear? When engaged in conversation, we can ask questions to probe into these matters. This is not pop psychology, but rather an application of biblically based wisdom.

Of course, we should always avoid jumping to conclusions. Don’t assume that grief or fear lies beneath the surface in any particular instance. Yet don’t ignore the possibility, either.

Wise, well-placed questions can help to show where the Law is impacting someone. They can also show where the Gospel is to be applied.

More Adults Following Jesus in U.S. Today

Research shows that in this country almost 30 million more adults claim to be following Jesus than as recently as 2021 and 2022. The data comes in Barna’s *State of the Church 2025* report. Specifically, since 2021 there was a 12-percentage-point rise in positive responses to the item, “I have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus that is still important in my life today.”

The report of positive responses to this item may not be completely inclusive. Some Lutherans, for example, mindful that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe” in Christ may have answered “no.” (Other faithful Lutherans may have said “yes,” on the thinking that one’s own making a commitment to Jesus follows – but is not identical with – conversion.) In short, the reality of the matter may be even better than the statistics seem.

Encouraging as this news is, it may also surprise us. The numbers are up pretty much among men and women in all generations, but the sharpest rise seems to be with Millennial and Gen Z men. In the Barna organization’s history, this is the first instance in which it showed an interest in Jesus in effect being led by the younger generations.

A “renewed interest in Jesus,” as Barna’s CEO terms it, should lead to a rise in opportunities for evangelistic conversation. Such conversations remain necessary. For those responding “yes” to the above item do not necessarily go to church.

Over the years our Synod has taught the faith well to people who are already Christians. At times such folks are confused and stand in need of further instruction. We can continue to provide it, also – and especially – with those of younger generations. – Ken Schurb kschurb@cidlcms.org



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