



A LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE ON

WORKER WELLNESS



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THEOLOGY OF WELL-BEING

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BY REV. DR. SCOTT MURRAY

THEOLOGY OF **CONGREGATIONAL** WELL-BEING

Some years ago, a friend called to inquire why the congregation I serve continued to grow while so many in our area and our church body were declining. I answered very simply, “We preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. What else would we be doing?” His reply was startling to me: “No, that can’t be it. That’s what everyone else is doing and their congregations aren’t growing.” I couldn’t convince him. He was certain that there was a secret sauce that was contributing to the general health and growth of the congregation I serve.

As it turns out, Word and Sacraments are the whole of it. Why should we be surprised? We believe that the Word of God does everything. Martin Luther extolled the power of the Word of God to accomplish everything for the church and her children: “God’s Word accomplishes what is good times without number; indeed, it does all things: it produces and strengthens faith, conquers sin, the devil, death, hell, and all evil; it makes us obedient to God, indeed, children and heirs; it glorifies God, it delights all angels and gladdens all creatures. But all this must also be in the Supper, because God’s Word is in it” (AE 37:133). When we presume that there must be “something else” that causes our congregations to be healthy, we are implicitly denying the power of the Word of God and throwing our lot in with the father of lies, “Did God really say...?”

Congregations are healthy when they are in the Word of God. Go figure! Ted Kober has found that congregations which have devastating conflict to which they do not respond appropriately are almost always characterized by ignorance of the Word of God. He found that leaders are sometimes ignorant of the most basic Bible knowledge.¹ When a congregation’s lay leaders cannot find the Gospel of St. John in their Bibles, what chance is there that they know what God says in the book? They will never offer sacrificial service to the parish when it is faced with a challenge,

¹ Ted Kober, *Built on the Rock* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

because they do not know what Jesus teaches His disciples about humility and service to others: “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (**JOHN 13:12–17**). Leaders not in the Word respond with anger, recriminations, power plays and legalistic solutions, riling up congregations, damaging ministries, and multiplying animosity (**PROV. 15:1**).

Healthy congregations are not always tranquil. Satan remains on the prowl to devour Christ’s children (**1 PETER 5:8**). Healthy congregations are on Satan’s special hit list. However, when he attacks, healthy congregations respond with the most powerful weapon against satanic warfare: God’s Word. St. Paul encouraged Timothy to remain anchored in the Word of God: “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (**2 TIM. 1:13**). The word translated “sound” in this text also means “healthy” or “healthful.” The Word of God is the sole cause of our congregations being healthy. Healthy congregations always have the medicine of God’s Word providing that health. What powerful medicine this is! See all the mighty things that it does. It delivers Christ, forgiveness, life, salvation, peace, comfort and certainty. It is no wonder that the church continually prays for the health-giving Word of God, so that every Christian can model it in their speech and life. O Lord Jesus Christ, send us Your healthful Word!

This healthful Word has a specific character that is to be modeled by us. C.F.W. Walther summarized this character in his

Law and Gospel: “You are not rightly dividing Law and Gospel in the Word of God if you do not allow the Gospel to predominate in your teaching.”² We preach Christ and all His Gospel works for us. This is an overflowing preaching of grace. If the people know Christ as Savior from their sin and weakness, then they will respond with humility and service to the needs of the neighbor, overlooking his weakness and granting forgiveness when sinned against. They will have no need to justify themselves, because they have been justified through faith in Christ. They can freely confess their sins. They will anxiously seek holy absolution. This preaching of the Word of God to God’s people will always deliver comfort to those whose hearts tremble at the sight of their sins. This preaching will proclaim the Jesus who seeks and saves the lost. If this is the Christ proclaimed to God’s people in our parishes, how much greater the chances that they will have the Spirit-given resources to weather a conflict in their parish.

In a parish I served many years ago, I attempted to establish activities that would enable the people of the parish to serve each other and those around them with good works. The people responded: “Oh, Pastor, we got Word and we got Sacraments. We don’t need any of that other stuff.” What could a pastor say to that? They had a point, a good Lutheran one. Let the Gospel predominate not just in preaching and teaching, but in everything the church says and does. If the Gospel unalloyed is preached, taught and focused on, then the people will do works worthy of repentance (Luke 3:10–14). If there is Word and Sacraments, then “all that other stuff” will also emerge from a healthy parish life (Matt. 6:33). During Hurricane Harvey, which caused so much damage in Houston in 2017, I was on the West Coast. I didn’t arrive back in Houston for another week after its landfall. While I was gone the people of my parish prepared and

² Walther, *Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 455.

served over 1500 meals for those who were stranded, flooded out of their homes, or first responders. I didn't do a single thing to organize this. This is just what biblically trained Christians do when there is a need. God's Word creates this health. And nothing else.

NOTES

BY DEACONESS DR. TIFFANY MANOR

THEOLOGY OF

EMOTIONAL

WELL-BEING

God has created everything that exists, including human emotional capacity (**GEN. 2:7; ISAIAH 42:5; JOHN 1:3; COL. 1:16; SC, FIRST ARTICLE OF THE CREED**). While it may be uncommon to find the word “emotion” in some translations of the Bible or historical Christian writings, the word “heart” is used frequently in Scripture as well as the Lutheran Confessions to describe emotion and the seat of our feelings. There are hundreds of emotive “heart” phrases in the Bible, as well as the Lutheran Confessions, along the lines of “glad heart,” “grieved heart,” “hardened heart,” “stirred heart,” “lift up your heart” and “merry heart.” Emotional well-being is not a new concept but has been discussed throughout time in Holy Scripture, in the writings of the Church Fathers and in the Lutheran Confessions.

Emotional wellness is experiencing a wide spectrum of emotions, having the ability to be aware of our feelings, both positive and negative, as well as managing the impact of our emotions on our behavior and actions (**ECCL. 3; ROM. 12:15; EPH. 4:26–27; SD II 68**). The goal of emotional wellness is not to be happy all of the time. Jesus Christ, even as the perfect, sinless man, was not happy or cheerful at every moment. We have multiple scriptural accounts of our Savior experiencing a wide variety of emotions (**MATT. 9:36; JOHN 15:10–11; MATT. 23:33; JOHN 2:13–17; JOHN 11:33–35**).

Our emotions enrich our lives, our relationships with people and our interaction with God’s creation. Jesus celebrated with His neighbors at the wedding in Cana (**JOHN 2:1–12**). He was sad when thinking about the people of Jerusalem (**LUKE 19:41–44**). When Lazarus died, Christ mourned His friend and showed compassion to Martha (**JOHN 11:1–44**). Following Christ’s resurrection He was joyful with His friends many times (**MATT. 28; MARK 16; LUKE 24; JOHN 21**). Our emotions will change from day to day, from moment to moment. Our Lord understands our emotions and has experienced a full spectrum of emotions Himself, yet without sin (**HEB. 4:15**).

Our reactions and feelings are among the inner physical workings of our bodies. Some of these are voluntary and at the forefront of our conscious thoughts, but emotions may be involuntary at times and are not necessarily always a conscious choice we make. Being aware of the emotions we are experiencing, being able to name them, giving an appropriate level of attention to our emotional state and working to keep our emotions from leading us into sinful actions and behaviors, are all vital skills in order to be emotionally well. It is also vital to recognize and confess sinful emotions and actions.

Forgiveness is important to our emotional well-being and is needed repeatedly throughout our lives, and by the Holy Spirit we are empowered to receive it. When God converts us, He redeems and begins the transformation of every part of our lives including our hearts (**ROM. 12:2; AP IV 46; SD II 70**). Our sinful nature seeks to separate us from God, the law written on our hearts shows us how far we are from God and we can experience terror, guilt, shame, despair and more (**SA III 2**). In the Christian life our hearts are strengthened through our Baptism, the Lord's Supper and God's Word assuring forgiveness and life everlasting. Even if we don't always feel transformed, the Bible assures us that we are transformed from the moment of our Baptism, and God continuously transforms us through His Word.

We need to understand and deal with the impact other people's emotions have on us. The positive emotions of those around us can increase our own joy. At other times our neighbor's emotions could become overwhelming. Resilience, being able to deal with other's emotions, needs to be developed by having appropriate boundaries. As Christians we bear one another's burdens (**GAL. 6:2**) and have compassion and empathy for one another. Yet our ability to bear burdens has limits, while our Lord's is infinite. Our emotional burdens are made lighter by the great burden bearer, Jesus Christ (**MATT. 11:28-30**).

It is crucial that we not mistake very real illnesses that can cause emotional distress, such as depression and anxiety, as issues that can be solved by things we do. We cannot solve clinical depression or anxiety by increasing our trust or faith, or by praying more. While these are powerful spiritual resources in resisting the terrors of mental illness and distress, there are other resources that God has provided for healing and bringing balance to brain chemistry. Much damage has been and can be done by oversimplifying and presuming that emotional distress can be solved on our own. It can be harmful to misapply Scripture verses with the hope of cheering someone up or helping them to “snap out” of stress, melancholy or worries. Our Lord deals gently with us (**ISAIAH 42:3; MATT. 12:20**). May we do the same as we point one another to sources of help and healing.

God provides many resources to those who are struggling with emotional well-being. He gives brothers and sisters in Christ to provide consolation and companionship (**1 SAM. 16:14–23; 17:10–11**). He gives us church workers and teachers who listen, pray and share His Word with us. He provides clinical professionals such as medical doctors, psychologists and therapists. He gives the great blessing of pastors who bring the comfort of God’s Word and Sacraments, including peace to troubled consciences through the gift of personal absolution. Through all of these means, the Lord is at work. His Spirit is “another Helper” who always intercedes for God’s beloved children (**ROM. 8:26–30; JOHN 14:16**).

When we are experiencing emotional wellness we have a greater sense of optimism, grounded in eternity, and a realistic outlook on life. We can more easily enjoy the life that God our Creator has given us. For the believer, the real comfort is that Christ is with us in every emotion we experience (**PSALM 139:8**). We belong to our Triune God regardless of our feelings, because He claimed and made us His own in our Baptism (**PSALM 73:26; 100:3**). Through His Spirit and by His gifts, He is continually

strengthening us, protecting us and filling us with hope (**PSALM 121; ROM. 5; 8:18–30; 15:4, 13; SD XI**).

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NOTES

BY REV. DR. JAMISON J. HARDY

THEOLOGY OF **FINANCIAL** WELL-BEING

Financial well-being is often misunderstood in many circles of our church and world. Too often people place financial stability, success and wealth as markers of financial well-being. To be financially stable is not the single marker of financial well-being. In fact, financial well-being begins with a strong faith in our Lord. To be in harmony within your faith life begins the process of having overall well-being and starts you on the road to financial well-being. Article XX of the Augsburg Confession makes clear that our works merit us nothing in terms of salvation and grace from God. Therefore, the world's definition of success does not match the biblical definition of success in financial wellness. With the biblical definition of financial wellness looking so different from the world's, we can only discover it in the pages of our Lord's Word.

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING FROM CREATION

From the beginning of the creation story in Genesis 2:15,¹ God has set us apart to be good stewards of all that He has provided for us and to manage those relationships, opportunities and materials He provides for us properly. Societal greed has contributed to an unhealthy culture regarding money and possessions which has led to an unhealthy understanding of financial wellness. The standards of this world are set based on external possessions, rather than your relationship to Christ and your faith life secured in Him at your Baptism. Possessions and wealth have been the societal signs of financial well-being since the early ages of recorded history. Evidence of this is recorded throughout Isaiah:

“Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!

¹ “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live” (ISAIAH 55:1–3).

The issue of financial well-being is not new to society. Jesus addresses financial well-being before the crowd of people hungry for wholeness in Luke 12:15, “And he said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’” Jesus provides a great picture here for Christians. The amount of what you have does not dictate whether you have financial well-being, happiness and contentment. That comes only when your heart is in a right relationship to God through an understanding of Jesus the Savior.

Having financial well-being starts by understanding the clear message and posture that comes from Genesis 32:10: “I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant.”

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING AND FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

All that we have from a monetary standpoint is a gift from God. He gives what He chooses, and we are stewards of those gifts. Too often, we place the emphasis on ourselves and seek to pressure ourselves to be more creative, harder working and prosperous in order to feel fulfilled financially. Fulfillment comes from Christ alone and financial well-being shows itself clearly when we are seeking to give God glory with our possessions and wealth.

This fulfillment we have in Jesus Christ is the motivator behind our financial well-being. It is a personal response to God's love showered on us. This point is clearly made in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." For us to return to the Lord what He has entrusted to us demonstrates a strong level of financial well-being. As we seek to care for others with what God has given to us is one way to demonstrate the wellness that we have with money, as well as our faith.

Our faith journeys do not begin and end at Baptism, but continue through life. Having a solid and strong faith relationship with your Lord throughout life is the foundation of ongoing financial well-being. While the foundation of financial well-being rests in a strong faith relationship in Christ, there are some matters within our control in regards to personal finances and stewardship. These things offer us the opportunity to become more content and create ongoing financial wellness.

WALKING IN FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

First, do not approach financial wealth from a standpoint of greed. Greed has its roots in the self and not in Christ. Being greedy regarding finances signals that the heart is seeking gain and not focusing on what is best for the faith relationship with Christ. This point comes through clearly in Luke 12:15, referenced earlier. Be thankful for what God has entrusted to you and use it wisely. Be a joyful giver and thus share the love of Christ as a means of thankfulness for what He has done for you. Satan would want nothing more than to turn your eyes toward yourself and the amount you have accumulated. This in turn pulls your eyes away from Christ and from having a thankful heart. Instead, focus on the joy and gratitude of what Christ has done for you once and for all, as well as what He continues to do for you each day.

Second, many find it useful to put a plan together for your finances that includes a budget for spending and a plan for saving. This point is shown to us in Luke 14:28, “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?” The Lord does encourage us to make plans, even when life demands some flexibility. There are many plans and suggestions for how to budget. Too many times people spend time planning and then, due to unforeseen circumstances, they deviate from that plan. This can be a very difficult situation to recover from and can create an unhealthy financial environment for even the faithful. God is faithful to help and guide us, however, in the day-to-day of budgeting, as well as when we get off course.

Third, evaluate your situation regularly and be vigilant about looking ahead. Proverbs 27:23–24 states, “Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever; and does a crown endure to all generations?”

Having a plan is important. Equally important is evaluating the progress of your plan toward the goal set forth. Financial well-being includes looking ahead to see what the needs will be, and then preparing today for those times that are yet to come. If there is one truth to financial well-being, it is that one should recognize that finances ebb and flow based on many factors and uncontrollable circumstances. James 4:13–15 states, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”²

² Also see Matthew 6:24–34.

For the Christian, financial well-being, which comes directly from a complete and strong faith in Christ, starts when you see the Lord as the source of all blessings. Being a steward of those blessings is a reflection of the faith that a Christian has through Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit living in the heart of a Christian is the source of all well-being. We, as children of the heavenly Father, can employ good financial techniques that will support and strengthen our financial well-being. However, nothing will ever replace that which starts with thanksgiving to the heavenly Father for all He has done to support this body and life.

BY REV. DR. JAMES BANECK

THEOLOGY OF INTELLECTUAL

WELL-BEING

INTRODUCTION

The Early Church theologian, Tertullian,¹ is attributed with saying, “Christians are made, not born.” Tertullian is describing the person born into sin and death and made to be a Christian through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism.

The same can be said for one in a church work vocation. Pastors, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses, church musicians and the like — they are not born, they are made. More precisely, church workers are made and formed by the church. Church work formation involves spiritual,² character,³ confessional,⁴ physical, emotional,⁵ and even Synodical development.⁶ This is a process that takes place over months and years.

One vital area of church worker development is intellectual well-being. Intellectual well-being involves, but is not limited to, a quality education; a desire and energy to learn; immersion in literature, philosophy, mathematics, composition, music, art and science; continued growth in thinking, reasoning and speaking skills; and growth in wisdom through practical experience, age, mentorship and continuing education.

¹ 160–220 A.D.

² Spiritual development encompasses a thorough knowledge of Holy Scripture, a father confessor/pastor, a godly family, immersion in the liturgical life of the church, reception of the Lord’s Supper and daily prayer.

³ Character development encompasses a baptismal faith and life. This baptismal, sanctified life includes repentance, the fruits of the Spirit, integrity, virtue, manhood, manners and civility.

⁴ Confessional development encompasses a thorough knowledge of Holy Scripture, a father-confessor/pastor, a godly family, immersion in the liturgical life of the church, reception of the Lord’s Supper and daily prayer.

⁵ Physical and emotional development encompass the categories brought out in the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, including healthy choices and living, exercise, healthy diet, an understanding of self, interpersonal relationships, and the capacity to navigate physical and emotional issues.

⁶ Synodical development encompasses a thorough understanding of the Synod’s structure, the LCMS Handbook, ecclesiastical supervision, the call process, Synod and district conventions, convention resolutions and church worker conferences.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EDUCATIONAL WELL-BEING OF CHURCH WORKERS

We live in a time when people believe knowledge is obtained by opening an internet search engine, or asking our technological devices their opinions. We live in a world that likes when people appear “in the know.” Some believe they are already knowledgeable in all things.

Why is the educational well-being of church workers so important?

INTEGRITY OF THE CALL

First, there is the integrity of the call and the sacred vocation of serving God and neighbor in the church. The pastor’s call is the high and holy call from God and requires Him to be competent in this office.

For centuries, the church has called or appointed workers to support the Office of the Holy Ministry. The Lutheran church refers to these offices as Ministers of Religion—Commissioned. These include professors, teachers, directors of Christian education, directors of Christian outreach, directors of family life ministry, directors of parish music, deaconesses and parish assistants.

Whether ordained or commissioned ministers of religion, it is necessary and required of those serving in these offices to be intellectually competent and to maintain intellectual well-being for the sake of the integrity of their call/vocation.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE CALL/VOCATION

Those called to the pastoral ministry and in the auxiliary offices of the church undergo a comprehensive formation. Included in this formation is intellectual development.

When a man is properly called into the Office of the Holy Ministry, one of the biblical and confessional mandates is the examination of the candidate. “The Scriptures mandate that the candidate for the holy ministry be personally and theologically qualified for the office (1 TIM. 3:1–7; 2 TIM. 2:24–26; TITUS 1:5–9; 1 PETER 5:1–4)” (2016 Res. 6-02).

A commissioned worker also undergoes thorough examination to be qualified for the office he/she serves. The culmination of fulfilling these qualifications is in the installation vows of a Lutheran school teacher: “Will you, trusting in God’s care, seek to grow in love for those you serve, *strive for excellence in your skills*, and adorn the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a godly life?”⁷

Just as the surgeon’s work appears to only be operating on the body, fixing the parts, sewing the patient up and checking on them in post-op, a church worker’s vocational work is not only that which is visible. However, consider the invisible intellectual knowledge base required of both vocations.

Consider the pastor who gives pastoral care to the drug addict, the dying young father, the woman wrestling with sexual orientation, the pregnant teenager, the soldier with PTSD and other everyday pastoral situations. Consider the knowledge of the Lutheran school teacher who teaches multiple subjects, students living in dysfunctional families, the slow learner, the accelerated learner, the unruly learner and more. The intellectual well-being and skill set of every man and woman in church work vocations is necessary, astounding and intentional.

Church workers do not just learn skills. Their task is not performing mere functions. Preaching is more than public speaking. Teaching is more than instilling knowledge. Organ playing is more than touching keys. Directing youth is more than planning a youth meeting.

⁷ *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 212.

APT TO TEACH

St. Paul writes to Timothy, “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 TIM. 4:2–4).

These words are specifically written to the pastor. However, they have appropriate application to all workers in the church. This is why The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod forms her workers through a thorough liberal arts education, providing them a broad educational experience.

For a pastor to fulfill his call, he must be intellectually equipped. He must have a knowledge of sin, grace, Jesus Christ, man, the philosophies and myths of this world, human will, skills in articulation and speech, as well as a knowledge of himself, a knowledge of his hearer, and a knowledge of God and the whole council of the Word. How does he relate to his hearer who is a physician, someone emotionally challenged, a young child, a truck driver, a war vet, a stay-at-home mom, an engineer, a person of a different ethnicity than him, and so on? What does he know about how his hearer learns and communicates (visually, verbally, through stories, through lecture, intellectually, emotionally, one on one, in groups, etc.)? To be apt to teach, the teacher must learn, and continue to learn — not only subjects and theology, but people and how to relate to people.

ROBUST INTELLECTUAL EDUCATION

DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS AND HIGH STANDARDS

In his preface to his Small Catechism, Luther writes, “The

deplorable, miserable conditions which I recently observed when visiting the parishes have constrained and pressed me to put this catechism of Christian doctrine into this brief, plain, and simple form. How pitiable, so help me God, were the things I saw: the common man, especially in the villages, knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, *and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach* ... So look to it, you pastors and preachers. Our ministry ... has become a serious and saving responsibility.”

Historically, the church has learned the importance of the intellectual well-being of their pastors, teachers and workers through painful mistakes of placing unqualified workers in the field with no continuing intellectual support, including in Luther’s own Saxony, and the Lutheran Church of the Stalinist (WWII) era.⁸

While The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod sets high standards for ordained ministers, no less is demanded from her commissioned ministers. There is no debate that our American culture is also in “deplorable conditions,” especially concerning marriage, sexual identity, religious liberty and life issues. For this reason, the church calls for a robust educational formation toward the intellectual well-being of her workers, both ordained and commissioned.

The LCMS strives to provide intellectual well-being to all her workers not for the sake of having smart people. This excellence is about serving God’s people in their faith and life here on earth with the view of life eternal. First and foremost, learning the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions is for the sake of teaching it to God’s people, whereby the Holy Spirit creates and sustains eternal saving faith.

⁸ Lawrence R. Rast Jr., “Pastoral Formation in the 21st Century: The Pedagogical Implications of Globalization,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2019): 137–156.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believes her workers are handling the holy things (Word and Sacraments) of God for the eternal faith and life of God’s people. To this end, she sets high educational standards in forming men and women for her various vocations.

Rast writes:

Admission to Wittenberg [in Luther’s day] assumed familiarity with the Latin language and the classics. The *gymnasium* process of education was assumed. The responsibility of the university was to help the students become fruitful users of these tools for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. As the university itself states: ... “How can [the student] expect to be able to interpret sacred dogma without the mastery of the correct use of Biblical exegesis, or in case he fails to grasp the context of passages from which conclusions are drawn?”⁹

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR THE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING OF WORKERS

Continuing education is encouraged and expected for the intellectual well-being of our workers. In his *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors*, Martin Luther writes, “For it was in this kind of activity [visitation] that the bishops and archbishops had their origin — each one was obligated to a greater or lesser extent to visit and examine. For, actually, bishop means supervisor or visitor, and archbishop a supervisor or visitor of bishops, to *see to it that each parish pastor visits and watches over and supervises his people in regard to teaching and life*” (AE 40:270).

Not only pastors, but all church workers are evangelically supervised with the encouragement of continuing education

⁹ Rast, 142.

to grow and excel in their vocation. This is an expectation, and sometimes requirement, of the worker.

For the sake of intellectual growth and well-being, the church provides many opportunities to her workers for continuing education. Resources like Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) and Preach the Word are Synod-administered opportunities for pastors. Churches and Lutheran schools also supply their workers with many opportunities, choices and resources for intellectual well-being in their field. The church also encourages continuing education through self-reporting in their church-worker files. Other opportunities are provided by other Synod and district conferences and resources. Intellectual well-being is a lifelong process of tending to the Word, our vocation and personal growth, rooted and grounded in the gifts of God to His people on earth.

BY DR. JOHN ECKRICH

THEOLOGY OF **PHYSICAL** WELL-BEING

**“OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS A
TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, WHOM YOU
HAVE FROM GOD? YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN, FOR
YOU WERE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE. SO GLORIFY
GOD IN YOUR BODY” (1 COR. 6:19–20).**

God creates us — body, mind and spirit — to be stewards rather than owners of His creation. St. Paul reminds us of this special purpose and the importance of God’s human creation as a vessel to house the gift of His presence as the Holy Spirit — as well as the cost of that precious purchase, the death of His very Son.

From the fall (**GEN. 3**), we know of the disease, dysfunction and death brought on by the doubt and disobedience of our ancestors and ourselves. We know the cost of this distrust of our relationship with our Creator: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**ROM. 6:23**; **SEE ALSO ROM. 7:1–6**).

What are the stewardship principles for bodily care that God reveals to us in His Word and as He continuously opens knowledge of creation to His children?

MOVEMENT: All of God’s creation is in motion, from the stars and planets of the universe to the tiniest elements housed in each cell of our body. Even what appears inanimate has ions in slow, rhythmic motion. Movement is essential within the temple of the Spirit as well. Muscles, digestive juices, immune system and all components of our body function best when they are in motion, fed by oxygen and glucose or exercised and rested. We rejoice, no matter what stage of life we are in and no matter what our physical abilities or limitations, that God has graciously granted us the capacity of a variety of types of movement. We can establish patterns of regular movement to help optimize effective bodily function and, furthermore, as a unique opportunity to care for our neighbor.

NUTRITION: God creates us and all creatures to thrive on His gifts of plants and animals. He gave us all fruits and vegetables with reproducing seeds for food in the Garden (**GEN. 1:29–30**). After the flood, in Genesis 9:1–5, God likewise gave us every moving thing that lives. God Himself uses these means to bless bodily life with longevity, quality of function and health. Scripture guides us to avoid gluttony of any kind and to respect and give thanks for both the source and consumption of our nutrition.

REST: God designs His creation to thrive with periods of regular rest. He models that in the seven days of creation (**GEN. 2:2**). All of creation — humans, animals and nature itself — functions best with times of rest. Jesus often goes off alone or with His friends to set boundaries, pray, commune with His Father and have physical rest (**MARK 4:35–40; MATT. 14**). Bodily function, cognitive ability and hormonal function, as well as all parts of the body, serve us best with periods of recovery and rest. All of us will die, unless Jesus comes soon, and we will enter the great rest of heaven. When He returns, He will restore us, changed, and will heal all of a damaged creation to perfection. We believe in the resurrection of the body after that rest (Article III of the Apostles' Creed).

LIVING NON-ANXIOUSLY: We see the effects of stress, fear and worry on our minds (the innumerable anxiety disorders of our culture) and our spirits (Satan's attacks on faith), but also clearly on our bodies with the physical sequelae of anxiety: heart disease, hypertension and stroke; digestive disorders; obesity and eating disorders; dementia and death itself, to mention but a few.

God speaks to us in His Word: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. ... Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (**MATT. 6:25–26**).

Look at the anxious and unhealthy state Adam and Eve find themselves in after their (and our) disobedience. And yet, the Creator leaves our first earthly parents (and us) with a promise and fulfills that covenant with His creation in His Son (**JOHN 3:16, GEN. 3:15**). We are gifted by the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit to work peace in troubled body, mind and spirit: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (**ROM. 8:26–28**).

Rather than bearing these destructive forces ourselves, we can place them in the arms of our Savior, “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (**1 PETER 5:7**).

With these stewardship principles in mind, we thank the Creator that He has made us physical beings. We are aware that God also allows us to care for our bodies according to the capacity and limitations we experience in genetic infirmities, bodily disease, mental illnesses and the aging process in general. We thank Him for the redemption bound to Jesus’ physicality, His body and His blood brought to us in the Sacrament of the Altar. We praise Him for granting us the response-ability to pray, praise and thank Him as we say and sing to His glory through healthy lips, and as we serve Him and His people with physical limbs.

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified” (**1 PETER 4:10–11**).

BY REV. DR. BRIAN HELLER

THEOLOGY OF **RELATIONAL** WELL-BEING

God is a relational God. The very nature of the Trinity — three persons in one — confesses the necessity of relationships. After creating Adam, God Himself spoke, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (**GEN. 2:18**). Yet when sin entered the picture, the relationship that mankind had with God was shattered. God, in His infinite love for humanity, therefore sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to be with us in the most intimately relational way — to be born of the Virgin Mary, true man and true God, to be Immanuel, to be “God with us” (**MATT. 1:23**), to tear the temple curtain separating us from God, and to restore our relationship with the Father through His own death and resurrection.

Our relational well-being is grounded in grace — we are loved by God and He restores us to Himself. He establishes His relationship to us in Holy Baptism, where we are given His divine name, and brought into His family. God sets us apart to be His people, bringing us out of the darkness to be restored to His marvelous light (**1 PETER 2:9**). The Holy Spirit strengthens and nourishes the faith given to us through Christ’s church, where we hear the Word of God and receive the forgiveness of sins, where Christ bids us to eat His body and drink His blood in the Holy Supper, uniting us with Himself. Rooted in the truth of a restored relationship with the Father through the Son, we are given the gift of being in relational wellness with family, friends and neighbors.

In the Small Catechism’s explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, where our Lord teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (**MATT. 6:11**), Martin Luther confesses that among the many gifts our Lord gives us, devout husbands and wives, devout children, good friends and faithful neighbors are all gifts that are essential to life itself and part of the daily bread we so fervently pray for. Naturally, our relationships with others begin in the home, with our parents. Parents are given authority by God to faithfully care for their children’s needs of body and soul. Parents

are separated and distinguished by God from all other relationships because He places them at His side (LC I 105). Children, therefore, are called to honor, serve and obey their parents (even in spite of their failings), and hold them as “the most precious treasure on earth” (LC I 109). Parents, too, are called to relate to one another in a godly way. Scripture paints the picture of Christ’s relationship with us, the church, as a marriage (REV. 19:7). Husbands are called to give self-sacrificially to their families, putting aside their own wants for the sake of the welfare and godly instruction of the home, and wives are called to receive in thanksgiving the gifts that husbands provide, just as the church receives with gladness the gifts that Christ so freely gives (EPH. 5:22–33). Therefore, in the home, as sinners yet saints in Christ, opportunities for repentance, forgiveness, and unconditional love abound, cultivating us for the relationships we have with our friends and neighbors.

Friends, as Luther rightly confesses, are gifts given to us by God that are essential for our very lives. But what is a friend? Sadly, our culture has devalued the concept of “friend” to mean anyone you have a slight acquaintance with. Even in Christian circles, we are tempted to look at the “phileo” love (that is, brotherly love, which is the foundation of friendship) as being significantly lesser than the “agape” love (the unconditional love that God has for us). Yet Scripture stresses the importance of friends (“phileo” and all) and defines what a friend truly is. Friendship is love based on a shared virtue. A true friend is someone that you trust, someone you look to for encouragement, and someone that is willing to hold you accountable to who you are as a new creation in Christ. We pray for such a friend in the timeless hymn, “O God My Faithful God”: “And let me find good friends for counsel and correction” (LSB 696:4). Jesus Himself shows His esteem for friendship when He calls His own disciples “phileos” (friends) two times in rapid succession (JOHN 15:14–15), inviting His disciples to give Him

encouragement and counsel. Just as friendship was essential to Christ's earthly ministry, so we too are called to recognize our own friendships for what they are: our daily bread, given to us by God for our well-being. Naturally, these rare and special friendships should be sought within the church, prayed for, and nurtured through the giving of time and love.

CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Just as we pray for loving families and faithful friends, we pray for faithful neighbors. Yet, like the true friend, the faithful neighbor is hard to find. As Christians, we are called to bring the light of Christ to this darkened world, engaging the culture God has placed us in by truly loving our neighbors as ourselves (**MARK 12:31**). How do we love our neighbor? As Christians, we follow the examples that God gives to us in Scripture. Abraham offered extravagant hospitality to the strangers that showed up near his tent, even before the strangers uttered a word (**GEN. 18:1-5**). The least likely person, the Samaritan, the one who worshipped at the wrong mountain and whose very name was used as an insult among Jews (**JOHN 8:48**), showed mercy to his Jewish neighbor in a dire time of need (**LUKE 10:25-37**). Just as Christ has loved us and has paid our redemption price, we too are called to extend acts of mercy and love to our neighbor, regardless of the neighbor's appearance, ethnicity, religion and the like. In short, *we* are called to be faithful neighbors to the culture around us.

Christ desires all nations and peoples to be saved (**JOHN 3:17**). Christ died for the sins of all, and we are called to view *every* person as a creation of God, knitted and formed in his or her mother's womb (**Ps. 139:13**), and view *every* person as our neighbor, as someone that Christ loved so much that He gave His very life for him or her on the cross. And our neighbor is a gift given to us by God. Therefore, as St. Paul writes, "As we have opportunity,

let us do good to all people” (GAL. 6:10), performing acts of mercy to all, and speaking the truth in love: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 PETER 3:15). Though Satan tirelessly attempts to exploit divisions of nations, tribes, peoples and languages among us, we rejoice in the harmonious unity found in Christ Jesus among all who believe and are baptized into the one holy church (REV. 7:9). Just as Christ has restored us to the Father, we too desire that our neighbors be united with us in the blood of the Lamb.

CONCLUSION

Every one of our relationships — from the bond of husband and wife, to friendships of mutual encouragement, to the mercy we offer in our culture — flows from the love that Christ has first shown to us. In our homes, we mirror the sacrificial love between Christ and His church; with faithful friends, we give thanks to God and nurture the “phileo” bonds that sustain us in Christian community; and in cultures marked by differences, we extend mercy to all of our neighbors, just as Christ lavishly pours out His mercy on us. United by Baptism, strengthened by His Word and Sacraments, and looking forward to the second coming of Christ, we continue to give thanks and pray for the daily bread of those relationships that God gives to us for the welfare of body and soul.

NOTES

BY REV. ROBERT ZAGORE

THEOLOGY OF **SPIRITUAL** WELL-BEING

As church workers, our greatest spiritual error can be believing that we know the Gospel and need to move on to something else for our comfort and sustenance.

The daily life of a church worker is often engaged with the Means of Grace and the church, without being nurtured by them. We read the Bible for professional purposes. We attend church services and worry about the experience everyone else is having. Church workers and their families are always watched and judged. Fellow Christians make us the object of callous or hurtful criticism. We try to endure the most difficult times with a kind smile, a joyful heart and a steady disposition. Because of this, we can come to envision the church, the classroom, the Bible and worship as places of obligation and even hardship. It is a recipe for spiritual starvation and burnout.

We often mistakenly assume that *since* we know the Gospel but are still pressed down, burdened, accused or guilty, that something more than the Gospel is needed. We try to change our behavior: accomplish more, pray more, study more. It does not work because it cannot work. Since hard work fails, we try to find comfort in worldly pleasures. One-third of church workers say they are bound up in destructive compulsive behaviors. Rather than comforting us, these bind us to our shame. Perhaps this contributes to the anxiety and depression with which a quarter of our church workers have been diagnosed.

In the recent worker wellness survey, one-third of church workers *self-report* their work is getting in the way of their relationship with God. Our work, like all work done here on earth, is accomplished “by the sweat of [our] face” (GEN. 3:19). Unfortunately, when you “work for the Lord,” it is easy to think of hardship as His rebuke. Since the consequence of personal failure seems to have eternal impact, the guilt and shame of our troubles can be overwhelming. The church, the Word, the prayers become work-related burdens. Our hearts and logic

plead to find comfort elsewhere. At the very time we should run for refuge in our Father's grace, it becomes easy to run *from* it instead. This is an old problem.

UNDERSTANDING THE WHY AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Back in 1518, during the Heidelberg Disputation, Martin Luther described the problem using the terms “theology of the cross” and “theology of glory.” During the dispute, Luther surprised everyone by declaring that even good and evil cannot be understood apart from God's revelation. “A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.”¹ If we look at life apart from God's Word and promises, we can easily find ourselves trying to escape our only refuge and strength. All fallen people are by nature theologians of glory. We believe that comfort, earthly peace, riches and temporal success are signs that God is with us. For a theologian of glory, suffering, hardship and rejection are signs that we are failing, or worse, that even God is rejecting us. Luther contradicts that. We need a theology that understands that the cross of Jesus Christ is the Lord's way of saving the world. That theology of the cross continues with the martyrdom of the apostles, the suffering of Christian martyrs or even us. The church or church worker that runs from the cross may likewise run from their role in God's ongoing saving work.

Theologians of glory can abide a little suffering. It adds glory to our story. A quick, glorious martyr's death can be celebrated, even *sought*. What is harder to comprehend is the meaning of what Luther called *anfechtungen*, or “pokes of a spear,” the thousands of public and private wounds wrought by daily life. Good

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 40.

and evil people alike suffer from them in a dying world. We live in a dangerous place where bad things happen to everyone. But why does God permit this for His children?

As traumatizing as these can be, Luther warns against trying to explain the “why.” Neither our behavior nor our circumstance can reveal God’s plan for us. There are areas of life that will always be shrouded in mystery, and no effort on our part will explain the “why” of it all. “That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1:20].”² We cannot interpret God’s hidden will. We cannot know what God does not reveal. Therefore, if we are to know His will and plan, we need to run to where He reveals mysteries, His Word and Sacraments. In these we find His statement of our status that tells far more than our circumstances.

Luther diagnoses the problem: “The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.”³ We confuse love and pleasure and believe one necessarily leads to the other. God’s true love pulls us away from looking at our hearts or our circumstances, pleasure or sorrow. It leads rather to where God’s outpoured gifts create life and love. As Luther says, “The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it.”⁴

Therefore, spiritual health needs the Means of Grace, where God comes to His people. St. Paul warns, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith” (GAL. 3:3–5).

² LW 31:52

³ LW 31:57

⁴ LW 31:57

MANY GIFTS

Spiritual health means living as joyous children among all the free and unconditional gifts the Father gives for Christ's sake. The apostle says, "In every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge — even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you — so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 COR. 1:5–7). God gives us gifts which, when received by faith, become opportunities for joy, meaningful service and purpose in our lives. The psalmist rejoices, "Your testimonies [O LORD] are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart" (PSALM 119:111).

Through Word and Sacrament — delivered in myriad ways — we receive the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. You are blessed, kept and beloved children who live in peace (NUM. 6:24–26). The Word and Sacraments are found where His people are gathered at the Lord's altar. It can never merely be our place of work. Along with all the saints, God's servants receive the benefits of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. His servants are restored there, and then God gives even more.

The Father tells us in Proverbs, "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (PROV. 4:20–23). We can wrongly take this as admonition and accusation, but if instead we hear the promise we learn of further gifts.

Amidst our anfechtungen, we tend to focus on evil and "tears have been my food day and night" (PSALM 42:3). But the Lord calls us to His gifts. These are "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (HEB. 4:12). We must, therefore, guard our hearts with all vigilance and "set [our] minds on things that are above" (COL. 3:2) — and that can be deeply enjoyable.

There are so many gifts. Theologians of the cross do not think of prayers as an obligation or a burden. Praying is a gift that children can happily enjoy without ceasing (1 THESS. 5:17). Those who see it as a wish, command or last resort forget the joy of going to Jesus with “our Father.” He speaks of His children’s prayers as a golden bowl lifted before His throne (REV. 5:8). He does not parse our words for correctness. He sends His Spirit to search our hearts. According to Romans 8:28, even our groans bring answers. Have you noticed how children love to sing? Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs lift the downcast and fill our lives with thanksgiving (EPH. 5:19). The Scriptures are a book of promises, not a self-help manual. Seeking the treasures nestled among the words is an inexhaustible source of joy. Even when two or three Christians seek these gifts together, they are transported to the throne of grace (MATT. 18:20). Helping the broken and distressed is, therefore, not merely keeping the law, it is the opportunity to behold the hidden Christ (MATT. 25:40). The list could (and will) go on for eternity.

Because of Christ’s cross and resurrection, the Father withholds nothing good from His children (PSALM 84:11). Jesus rent the heavens and came down (ISAIAH 64:1), that we “may have life and have it abundantly” (JOHN 10:10). Only in His gifts do we find life, health and peace. As Isaiah rejoiced, “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation” (ISAIAH 12:1-2).

Spiritual health consists in receiving this gracious salvation and daily drinking deep drafts of God’s gifts: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (ISAIAH 12:3).

BY REV. JAMES OTTE

THEOLOGY OF **VOCATIONAL** WELL-BEING

**“I THEREFORE, A PRISONER FOR THE LORD, URGE YOU
TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING TO
WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED” (EPH. 4:1).**

“Calling” or “vocation” is not a foreign idea to most professional church workers. We understand the notion, because it is rooted both in our Baptism and the purpose behind the context in which we work. In Baptism, God calls us to be His own, expressed in the same words He gave to Jesus in His Baptism: “You are My child, whom I love. With you I AM well pleased.” Baptism creates the initial moment in which we receive the voice which calls us, and it offers the power we need to be sustained when the work is hard to do. But as familiar as the idea of vocation is to many of us, what we don’t think much about is vocational “health” or “well-being.”

What is “vocation”? More than simply one’s work or career, our understanding moves us into the realm of God’s specific call to ministering. That makes vocation *contextual* — that is, it takes place with someone, and to someone, and in some place. One’s vocation could be as an educator in a school setting, a pastor in a congregational setting, a director of Christian education in an education or youth ministry setting, a church musician in a congregational setting, a chaplain in an institutional setting, and so on. The context does not determine the validity of the vocation, but the health of the context certainly affects our health and wellness as we exercise the call.

The health or wellness of the context in which we serve impacts our sense of fulfillment in our work within our vocation. If the school or congregation is in perpetual conflict, if it is in constant financial survival mode, or if the environment is not open to creativity and new approaches, then the context in which we serve affects our motivation to serve. Called workers will still

serve out of the joy we have with our Lord, but the wear and tear of such an environment can drain the positive energy out and replace it with depression or apathy.

Dr. John Eckrich writes in his book on vocation, “A person should be happy and satisfied with his or her vocation, so it is important to understand our gifts and passions. This does not mean that everything is peaches and cream. But one must feel productive, qualified, purposeful, and fulfilled by his or her daily work.”¹

Every professional church worker knows that the identifiable feeling of “peaches and cream” vibrant health and vitality happens occasionally, but not always. The daily work can, at times, feel like a daily grind because in working with people, it’s difficult to quantify productivity in a measurable way. Growth in faith and discipleship cannot often be measured by way of numbers, though we attempt to do so (i.e., worship attendance, number of Baptisms, how many people participate in an event, how many people gave us positive feedback). Ministry is often a “two steps forward, three steps backward” process, thus contributing to the likelihood that a worker will feel inadequate in their setting or in ministry as a whole, which often leads to questioning the validity of one’s calling or vocation.

SCARCITY, GROWTH AND WELL-BEING

Certainly, the Scriptures offer wisdom applicable to the tensions present in our vocations. St. Paul, writing in Philippians 4:11–13, speaks of learning the secret to contentment, which is the antidote to those feelings of inadequacy. Contentment shifts our focus from the temptation of comparing our failings to others’ successes and our vocational struggles to others’ apparent ease. Contentment

¹ John D. Eckrich, *Vocation and Wellness: Renew Your Energy for Christian Living* (Elgin, Ill., and Tyler, Texas: Tenth Power Publishing, 2016), 38.

moves us out of what Dr. Brene Brown, clinical social worker and shame researcher, labels as a mindset of “scarcity,” with its condemnation of “not enough,” into the victorious “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

So, what are some practical ways to move from scarcity, lack, frustration and discontentment in our ministries and vocational lives to vitality and well-being in ourselves and the context in which we serve? One way is to pay attention to our “sweet spot ratio.” “Sweet spot” is a term often used in the sports world to describe the spot on a baseball bat or golf club or tennis racket. It is where, when the ball comes into contact with that spot, the optimal effect is realized: a hit, the perfect shot, the winning ace. The sound the ball makes is sweet, and the result is satisfying.

One’s sweet spot in ministry refers to any activity, task or responsibility that a person feels confident and joyful while doing. The sweet spot will differ from person to person, but the feelings of it are consistent. Common expressions of finding and working in the sweet spot are:

“This is what I was born to do.”

“I can’t believe they are paying me to do this.”

“This activity is so me.”“

“This fits me to a T.”

“I feel so confident in this.”

“This is why I get up in the morning.”

Common experiences accompany us when we are ministering in our sweet spot:

It is within our comfort zone, even if it is stretched a bit.

It is a character strength we already have.

We enjoy doing it.

We don’t procrastinate doing it.

We have skills and an aptitude for it.

We enjoy learning how to do it better and more effectively.

Other people confirm that this is right in our wheelhouse!

Examples of such things are: preaching, preparing lesson plans, playing with children, leading a discussion, playing a certain kind of music, creatively writing articles for Synod publications, etc. When we are in our sweet spot, it feels as if time slows down. We are in the zone!

Not every activity or responsibility, however, can be in the sweet spot, and most professional church workers find that some of their vocational duties take them out of the joy zone. This is true for everyone (even people who are not in professional church work). Vocational researchers suggest it is a good idea to pay attention to keeping a healthy ratio of sweet spot to non-sweet spot activities. An excellent goal is 70% sweet spot to 30% non-sweet spot.

Studies in what contributes to burnout and apathy among professional workers (teachers, nurses, dentists, social workers, etc.) reveal that among the factors that do in fact lead to burnout and apathy is the feeling that more and more of the activities they are required to do aren't in their strength zone. In other words, the requirements of the institution become overwhelming because they poke at our weaknesses, frustrate us more easily, are not things we feel confident in doing, and might even feel outside our calling. When the ratio shifts from 70/30 to 50/50 or even less, our joy is diminished, and we begin to entertain the possibility of a permanent change. It's good to do things that leave us feeling uncomfortable. It's good to wrestle with how God would have us steward our time in ministry, but the sweet spot idea helps us to personally gauge how and where we can best spend our time and energy in ministry while maintaining well-being personally. It helps us balance the desires of the con-

text of our ministry with our own skills, strengths and what we hear God calling us to do as we study His Word.

Keeping a healthy ratio may require a conversation with our employer or senior leadership. Or it may require a change in environment. Such changes can include seeking a redefinition of our job description or a move between staff positions. For some workers, this may involve notifying the district president of the desire to be put on a call list. One option, which is more and more common, is that of moving into a bi-vocational or “worker-priest” situation. Especially as some settings are increasingly unable to financially support a full-time worker with a full salary and benefits packages, workers are moving into this form of service, which has benefits and drawbacks, like any vocational setting or context.

Of course, there are challenges inherent in “serving two masters,” so to speak. As God’s children, we are never called to one vocation only. We are husbands, mothers, neighbors and more in addition to the vocations of our ministry. Challenges inherent to this include the time demands on the worker, when both employers and the family want him/her in the same time and on the same day. It is wise to put intentional effort into a reasonably balanced ministry life. Such effort will help the minister maintain his/her vocational fidelity and enjoy the fruits of wellness. However, investing this kind of effort requires strength, time and energy the minister may think he/she does not have to invest. So, let the worker be cautioned and encouraged: You are worth it! You are worth the investment for the sake of your health, your loved ones and your ministry.

Finally, when you find yourself in a difficult vocational circumstance, seek out someone who can help you sort through what you need to once again find fulfillment and joy in ministry. There are counselors and spiritual companions who can walk alongside of you as you faithfully seek our Lord’s will for your ministry and life.

In the end, Jesus is still Lord and Savior in every single one of our vocations, contexts, settings and relationships. He fills all our needs, granting us the knowledge our sins are covered and our weaknesses filled in Him. We look to Him and His Word when we are troubled, apathetic, burnt out or struggling vocationally. He makes us well in His salvation and gives us many resources to find contentment in the midst of struggle and questions.

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