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The Privilege of Pastoral Care

2017–18 LCMS Circuit Bible Studies

Studies in pastoral theology using C.F.W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

LEADER'S GUIDE

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DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has assisted more than seven hundred pastors and the congregations and agencies they serve since its beginning in 2008. The DOXOLOGY program provides advanced training in pastoral care skills, combining the classic heritage of the cure of souls with the insights of contemporary Christian psychology. Information and resources can be accessed at *doxology.us*.

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References in Walther:

Articles 16, 30–38 [*Walther's Titles: Confession and Absolution; Pastoral Care*]

To the circuit visitor or discussion leader: Please impress on the pastors the necessity of reviewing the introduction to the book (vii–ix) in advance. Your discussion will be more fruitful if the group has a better grasp of the original setting of the book, Dr. Walther's intent and methodology, and how his extensive quotations illustrated how earlier generations applied Lutheran doctrine in their contemporary context.

Please guide the discussion to each article by asking, "How can I better care for the individual souls in

my congregation?" The topics can naturally lead to discussions that easily lose the main thrust of Walther's desire to be a curate of souls. One example is with Article 16 concerning confession. Instead of overemphasizing why it has been a lost art form in the Lutheran church today, evaluate ways by which we can uplift the benefits and implement simple ideas into the life of the church.

There is likely more material in this study than can be reasonably covered in the average circuit meeting. You may wish to indicate in advance which of these questions will be prioritized for your discussion.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

Each person in our parish is a soul that needs daily spiritual care. When the saints gather on Sunday morning, we have the honor of nourishing them with His Word and giving His forgiveness in Christ. Once the Benediction has been given, the saints leave the hallowed walls of the church and are thrown back into their daily vocations.

Every day, they are bombarded with temptations of the flesh, stress, insecurity, fear and brokenness. The privilege we have as pastors is to apply Law and Gospel throughout the week to each person as our time and energy allow. This is no easy task and is probably one of the biggest challenges in ministry. We ask ourselves, "Am I doing enough? How do I care for each soul while still being a faithful husband, father, grandfather, citizen and neighbor?" Walther helps answer these questions by directing our focus to the care

of each soul beyond the weekly Divine Service with these precious insights.

While caring for each soul, it is critical that the pastor is mindful of the fact that he, too, is daily bombarded with temptations of the flesh, stress, insecurities, fear and brokenness. The care of the pastor's soul is essential to any care he offers to the souls of others. While the pastor has the privilege of applying the Law and the Gospel, he also has the blessed privilege of having it apply to himself as well. What a blessed comfort it is that the pastor serves under the full absolution he proclaims on the sins of others. Thanks be to God that he, too, is wondrously nourished on the same grace of God in the body and blood of Christ that he serves to his flock.

ARTICLE 16: CONCERNING CONFESSION

Note to leaders: Private confession and absolution is one of the great challenges of the church. Make sure to emphasize the benefits that Walther highlights. Also make sure to provide time to allow the pastors to think through how they can find a father confessor for their own spiritual well-being.

1. The Augsburg Confession clearly testifies that private confession and absolution should be retained in the churches (Article XI). What are some factors today that hinder the implementation of this practice?
2. What are the benefits of private confession that Luther highlights after Karlstadt attempted to abolish the practice (p. 185)?

3. Why is it important that private confession be done in Christian freedom and not be forced upon the people (p. 188)?
4. Where is an appropriate place to have private confession? What other sensitivities do we need to exhibit when hearing confession (pp. 188–189)?
5. Why is it important to avoid asking questions of the penitents that attempt to examine secret sins? Consider Luther's Small Catechism: "...but before the pastor we should only confess those sins which we know and feel in our hearts" (Comment 4, pp. 189–191).
6. According to Walther, why is it important that our absolution always be unconditional (p. 194)?
7. Discuss the importance of keeping the confessional seal (pp. 194–196).
8. What are the benefits of the preacher going to confession before the Holy Supper? What are things that make this difficult?

ARTICLE 30: INDIVIDUAL PASTORAL CARE

"A pastor may not imagine that he does his ministry justice by public preaching alone. Individual pastoral care and the home visits that become necessary of it are also an obligation which he may not shirk if he wishes to be regarded as a faithful steward" (p. 319).

Note to leaders: Walther shows a deep desire to care for the lost sheep. Make sure to keep the discussion centered on trusting the Holy Spirit to bring people back to faith, while encouraging everyone to ask for God's guidance on how to engage and serve their community.

1. Why does Walther advocate for individual pastoral care and home visits (p. 319)?
2. Read Eph. 4:11; Ezek. 3:17; 33:7–8; and Is. 52:8. How is our calling as shepherds described?
3. What are the current challenges we face concerning home visits? What are effective ways to visit people in today's social context?
4. What boundaries are we to put in place when scheduling visits (p. 322)?
5. Read Ezek. 34:11–16. Who are the individuals we should be seeking to engage for pastoral care? What are the difficulties in this work?

ARTICLE 31: THE PREACHER'S DUTY TO VISIT THE SICK AND DYING

Note to leaders: Pastoral care of the sick and dying is a major portion of our individual pastoral care. Take time to reflect over these next few articles to receive insights from brother pastors concerning the use of Scripture and "bedside manner." Specifically, I would ask, "When is the best time to visit someone in the hospital, being mindful of their need for privacy and to protect your own personal boundaries?"

1. What are the various ways you are typically informed of a member being ill? What frustrations do you experience as a result?
2. Read James 5:14–15. What are ways we can encourage our members to contact us when they are sick (p. 324)?
3. Why is it important to bring goodwill to the sick even if they do not desire a visit? Read 1 Thess. 5:14 and 2 Cor. 1:4.
4. What does Walther encourage pastors to do when a member has a contagious disease (p. 329)?

ARTICLE 32A–E: RULES FOR PASTORAL VISITS TO THE SICK (FIVE RULES WHEN VISITING THE SICK)

Note to leaders: Be sure to highlight Comment 2 and the four questions Walther encourages pastors to ask when entering the room.

1. Why is it important to begin pastoral care for the sick with a proclamation of Matt. 10:30 (p. 331)?
2. Evaluate the four questions Walther is encouraging us to ask when visiting the sick (Comment 2, p. 333).
3. What are the difficulties when evaluating what is the most necessary need in a pastoral visit (view of Scripture, grace of God, impatience, restlessness) (p. 335)?
4. How is a “spiritual conversation” distinct from a sermon? What are some common Scripture passages that you use when guiding a spiritual conversation (pp. 336–337)?
5. Walther encourages us to remind people of the reality of death while sick. How is this done lovingly and pastorally while giving people hope (p. 339)?

ARTICLE 33: COMMUNING THE SICK

Note to leaders: Share stories of people’s reactions to receiving the Lord’s Supper while in the hospital, senior community or home.

1. Walther gives a very basic format for bringing the body and blood of Christ to the sick (Confession and Absolution, consecration, distribution, collect, blessing and the Lord’s Prayer). What are the basic formats you have used? How does the pastor prepare himself prior to the visit (p. 341)?
2. What are the benefits of wearing a clerical collar while making a visit to the sick (p. 342)?

ARTICLE 34: PASTORAL VISITS TO THE DISTRESSED AND POSSESSED

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:8–9).

Note to leaders: This section will be particularly difficult. There are varying views on who can be possessed by the devil, what is the way in which one becomes possessed, and the role of mental illness. Keep the discussion centered on the truth of God’s Word and the power of Christ and Him crucified. Reference the books *I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare* and *Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare in America* by the Rev. Dr. Robert Bennett and *My First Exorcism: What the Devil Taught a Lutheran Pastor about Counter-cultural Spirituality* by the Rev. Dr. Harold Ristau.

1. Demonic affliction and possession is quite popular in pop culture. What are some dangerous presuppositions of our culture based on movies and books (“Paranormal Activity,” “The Exorcist,” “The Conjuring,” “Annabelle,” etc.)?
2. Read Ps. 91:11–12 and Luke 10:17–20. What promise of God should give comfort to the pastor who is about to visit someone afflicted by demons?
3. Walther indicates nine hallmarks of demon possession. Have any of you experienced these hallmarks in your pastoral care (p. 344)?
4. What are the weapons that a pastor is to use when battling someone possessed or afflicted by the devil (pp. 344–345)?
5. What other professionals should the pastor seek wisdom and assistance from when confronting a pastoral care situation of the demon possessed and/or afflicted (p. 346)?

ARTICLE 35: CARING FOR THE PHYSICAL WELL-BEING OF CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERS

Note to leaders: Reference the booklet “Theology for Mercy” by the Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison. He encompasses Walther’s words from this article with this quote, “Love, care and concern for those in need (diakonic mercy/ love) are actions motivated by the Gospel, when faith (fides qua creditur/the faith by which we believe) apprehends the righteousness of Christ and His merits (Augsburg Confession IV, VI) unto eternal life. The Gospel thus laid hold of produces love. Love seeks and serves the neighbor” (“Theology for Mercy,” p. 4).

1. Read Gal. 2:9–10 and Acts 6:1–7. What does God desire for us in the church to do for the physical well-being of our congregation members?

2. What concerns does Walther present when the church allows secret societies and the government to take over mercy care of our members (pp. 348–349)?
3. Read Johann Gerhard’s seven functions or duties of a minister (Comment 2, p. 350). How much of an emphasis is placed on the care of the poor in the normal ministry routine?
4. What kinds of mercy ministries are available to the local congregation, and what ways can the church assure that we are serving the household of faith (Gal. 6:10)?

ARTICLE 36: PASTORAL CARE OF THE DYING

“If a preacher is called to a dying person, then, while he should certainly also remind him of his sins, yet above all point him to Christ” (p. 355).

Note to leaders: Make sure to highlight the challenge of proclaiming both Law and Gospel with a limited timetable when visiting the dying. Share different passages that seem to apply often in these contexts and encourage the pastors to memorize key passages when coming into an emergency.

1. Why is good Law and Gospel preaching important at all stages of life, not just when someone is on their death bed (p. 356)?
2. What is the only way a dying person can still be saved (p. 356)?
3. The four rules Walther provides place the pastor in a very close relationship with an inmate on death row. What are the challenges of visiting someone who needs this kind of pastoral care (remembering Matt. 25:36) (p. 357)?

ARTICLE 37: THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE PREACHER REGARDING BURIAL

Note to leaders: This article has many discussion points and will bring up many emotional stories of family members who were denied a funeral due to a suicide or a denial of the Christian faith. Keep the questions centered on the challenges of having an “honorable funeral” and on preaching the hope we have in Christ’s resurrection.

1. How is a funeral done in an honorable and decent way (p. 358)?
2. Discuss the traditions and customs that surround a funeral at your parish.
3. What constitutes an honorable funeral according to Walther (p. 359)?
4. What would constitute an honorable funeral today?
5. What pastoral care questions does a pastor need to ask when presented with many requests to conduct a funeral? What are the downfalls of granting every request? What opportunities come when presiding at a funeral of a non-member (p. 361)?
6. Walther warns preachers not to have a lightweight mind when preaching the Gospel at a funeral. In what ways can we have a lightweight mind when we preach at numerous funerals?

ARTICLE 38: THE PREACHER MAY NOT OFFICIATE FOR MEMBERS OF THE OTHER PARISHES

Note to leaders: We talk about *Synod* meaning “walking together.” Discuss how best to communicate when members begin visiting other parishes. This discussion is vital for the sake of showing Christian love for one another and the uplifting of the Body of Christ. Perhaps you can close this study with a prayer seeking unity in the Church of Christ:

Merciful God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit to unify under the cross of Christ, that Your Word may be faithfully preached and the Gospel received by sinners. Gather Your Holy Church as one body in service to You and in love toward others; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

1. What is the proper communication between the pastor and the church where the person holds membership? Why is it important that there is communication even if from a heterodox church (p. 365)?
2. When is it never appropriate to receive a member of another church (p. 366)? Reflect on any stories concerning a member trying to join another church without proper communication and/or after being excommunicated.
3. Walther reminds us that we are able to accept members from heterodox parishes when they desire absolution and are repentant. What church bodies would we consider heterodox today?