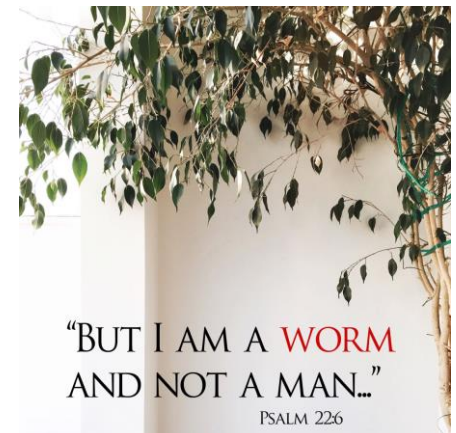


Who Am I?

Have you seen the musical *Les Miserables*? The main character, Jean Valjean, is continually assessing his life, searching his soul, and evaluating his place before God. At one point in this drama, an innocent man is wrongly accused for Valjean's crimes. Valjean, now a repentant man, living a righteous life, must come to terms with if he will allow this innocent man to take the punishment for his wrongs. It is at this point that Valjean asks the question we all ask in this miserable life: "*Who Am I?*"



Dear Pastor, have you ever asked yourself this question? Do you ever sit in your study, contemplating your ministry, your family, your life, only to ponder the question, "Who am I?"

Psalm 22:6 gives us the answer: "I am a worm and not a man." Uplifting words, aren't they!? However, they are true. We are poor miserable sinners, to the disgrace of being a worm; low and helpless creatures we are! We are condemned because of our own guilt, with no ability to wiggle ourselves into salvation.

You might say, however, that Psalm 22 is Messianic; it's talking about Jesus. True enough! Psalm 22 is about Jesus becoming *man* in your place. *He becomes the worm for you... for me... for all!* In the lyrics *Who Am I*, Valjean sings, "This innocent who bears my face who goes to judgment in my place." God becomes man; Jesus becomes the worm that we all are, innocent Jesus who bears our face and judgment in our place. In taking our place, He takes away your guilt, your sin, and your death and sets you free for all eternity.

While you contemplate who you are, the Christian (yes, including the pastor!) cannot get stuck on being a worm – though Satan would love it if you stayed in this despair. Jesus Christ has changed all that! There is a greater life for you. *You are a baptized child of God, washed in the blood, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!* This changes your ministry. This changes your family. This changes your life. You are free to serve. You are free to forgive. You are free to live in the grace, forgiveness, and strength of the One who became a worm for you, and now rules and reigns for all eternity.

Jim

Rev. Dr. James Baneck, Executive Director of Pastoral Education

Becker's Missouri District PALS Group Welcomes Visitors to Meeting



We appreciate the willingness of Pastor Andy and Nikki Becker to welcome *Reporter* managing editor and writer, Paula Ross and LCMS photographer, Erik Lunsford to their January PALS meeting.

We are excited to “get the word out” about PALS, encouraging our new pastors and their families to share in the fellowship, collegiality,

encouragement, and education offered through the PALS gathering experience.



Watch for the story to be shared in *The Reporter*. Join us in getting the word out about PALS!

Iowa District West Enjoys Winter Retreat



PALS Facilitating Wife, Monica Andreasen writes:

“We are just leaving our Iowa District West PALS winter retreat. What a great group! Thought I’d send this picture off right away. We had the new SMP Pastors and wives too. It’s great how this group recruits the new families to come.”

NEW! PALS Wives Facilitator Resource

Each Facilitating wife has received a copy of Christina Hergenrader’s new book: *Family Trees & Olive Branches: Creating a Culture of Grace in Your Family*.

“Families are equal parts blood, duty, history, fights, and future. Families are beautiful, complicated, and infuriating. Pastors' doors revolve with families looking for healing from one another. Siblings hold grudges for years...But what can break our generational curses? What can shine bright light into our dark hearts? What can change everything - even our ugliest family feuds?

God's grace and His forgiveness.

Family Trees and Olive Branches points readers to the authority and comfort of Scripture as they seek to repair and improve their family relationships. Inspired by Matthew 18:22, *Family Trees and Olive Branches* is a conversation about grace, the oil that unsticks fighting families.....In this book, readers will look at the different types of olive branches in the Bible with the purpose of opening their hearts



and minds to spiritual transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit. Each chapter offers lessons of forgiveness, tips on reflecting God's grace in our toughest relationships, journal and prayer prompts, and discussion starters."

PALS groups are encouraged to use this resource as a separate study for PALS wives-or a great resource to use together as PALS couples. If you are able, purchase the book ahead of time for use during a book study. Please be reminded of the 20% discount offered by CPH to all church workers.

New PALS Curriculum "Pastor: Apt to Teach" by Dr. Mark Blanke



The DVD introduction for "Pastor: Apt to Teach" will soon be posted on the PALS page on lcms.org. The DVD is complete and study guide is through doctrinal review and on its way to LCMS Communications for editing and design.

We will continue to keep you posted. **PALS facilitators will receive an email communication when it is available for use.**

PALS Facilitator Training Conference "Encourage One Another"

The event is scheduled for July 31-August 1. ALL Facilitators, new and veteran, are ENCOURAGED to join us. We would love *every* facilitator to be able to receive ENCOURAGEMENT-and be equipped to ENCOURAGE PALS participants.

The revised conference schedule includes more time for "table talk" between new and returning facilitators, PALS curriculum training, evaluation and revision-as well as ample time for "best practice" sharing.

PALS Facilitating couples will be receive registration information and conference agenda in the coming weeks. PALS funds the conference and all travel expenses. We pray every facilitator will be able to join us in our endeavor to strengthen our PALS program, encourage our facilitators, and prepare for another year of service to our new pastors.



What are PALS Participants Saying?

Statements taken from 2017-18 Fall and Winter PALS Meeting Evaluation Forms.

Our Facilitators are so incredible. Their mentorship is so helpful moving forward.

PALS creates invaluable connections with others in similar situations to increase our stamina in service to others.

It has eased our transition from seminary to the parish tremendously!

PALS is an opportunity for a new pastor to realize it's OK not to know everything.

I felt I could be honest and no topic/burden was too serious/lengthy to bring up.

PALS is the best and most supportive resource for a new pastor...I've enjoyed my time and think everyone should participate!