“Dear Pastor”

“A pastor’s conscience is bound to the Word of God.”

-Dr. Jim Baneck

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PALS ON LCMS.ORG/FACEBOOK

If you haven’t yet, please check out the PALS page(s) on lcms.org. Here you have access to the course listing, previous PenPALS editions, and much more.

Find PALS at https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/education/pastoral/post-seminary-applied-learning-and-support

Also, be sure to follow PALS on Facebook: LCMS Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support.

If you have any questions, please contact Jim at james.baneck@lcms.org or Robyn at robyn.armbrust@lcms.org. We are here to serve you!
“I AM SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN CHRIST—I AM NOT LYING; MY CONSCIENCE BEARS ME WITNESS IN THE HOLY SPIRIT...” ROMANS 9:1

Dear Pastor,

Luther’s words before the Emperor in Worms, Germany, April 18, 1521 are infamous. Luther was pressured to recant his writings on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His answer could cost him his life.

Luther answered, “Unless I am convinced by the teachings of Holy Scripture or by sound reasoning... I am tied by the Scriptures I have quoted and by my conscience... for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. God help me! Amen.”

Like Luther, St. Paul also appealed to his Christian conscience, as he was bound by the truth of God’s Word. St. Paul grieved Israel rejecting Jesus Christ, and thus, forfeiting eternal salvation. He writes:

“I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying;
my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit.” Romans 9:1

As a pastor, you know what this turmoil of conscience is all about, don’t you? You know the truth of the Scriptures and our Lutheran confession of faith as stated in the Book of Concord. And then, when there’s a discrepancy between Scripture and practice – especially as it affects the eternal salvation of your sheep – this causes deep unrest within you. It’s what keeps you awake at night in thought and prayer.
Conscience involves knowing and grappling with what’s right and wrong. Yet, even the conscience is affected by the fall. What is truly right? What is truly wrong and damaging to the faith? Certainly, conscience is not grounded in one’s own opinion, or what one wishes God would say – either for the pastor or the layperson. Conscience is grounded in God’s Word – what God’s Word actually says? In St. Paul’s case, what God’s Word actually says causes Him great sorrow. God’s Word says that if one does not believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness and eternal life, he cannot be saved – even for His own people, Israel!

A pastor deals with matters of conscience every day. An elder insists on open communion. The neighboring pastor is advocating women pastors. A close family member announces he’s gay. Another neighboring pastor teaches the Bible is not necessarily true. A council member insists on the pastor saying nothing about his son living with his girlfriend.

We see this in Jeremiah, don’t we? Jeremiah knows that when he preaches the pure Word of God, it causes him suffering. He says, “For the Word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.” Yet, Jeremiah continues, “If I say, ‘I will not mention Him, or speak any more in His name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer. 20:9). Jeremiah’s conscience is bound to preach the Word in all its truth and purity.

St. Paul understood this in his own life, even as he instructs Timothy, “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season... For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching... As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim.4:2-5). The pastor’s conscience is bound to the Word of God. It burns within him and he cannot hold it in.

How might a pastor deal with conscience-struggle? This might be a very topic for a PALS conversation. Here are some initial thoughts, though not exhaustive:

1. Be a constant student of the Word and continue to learn it, along with the Lutheran Confessions.
2. Teach and preach law and gospel, sin and grace, confession and absolution.
3. Be honest with yourself, deciphering the truth of God’s Word from your own teachings and whims.
4. Teach and preach faithfully on the whole counsel of God rather than targeting one “sin” or “false doctrine” Sunday after Sunday.
5. Teach and preach patiently – sometimes over weeks and years.
6. Speak pastorally – one-on-one – with the one advocating or holding on to false doctrine that damages the soul.
7. Pray for and practice humility, self-control, winsomeness, the ability to teach, and compassion.
8. Seek guidance and wisdom from another brother in the ministry, PALS facilitator, circuit visitor, or district president.
9. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your saving faith.

I leave you with St. Paul’s beautiful words to St. Timothy, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith,” (I Tim 1:5) all which comes from and through the blood, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus,

Jim

Rev. Dr. James Baneck, Executive Director of Pastoral Education
PALS Facilitator Training Event

On August 3, PALS facilitators gathered from around the country to participate in the annual 2-day PALS Facilitator Training Event hosted in St. Louis, Missouri. The event was held at the St. Louis Airport Hilton Hotel. It has been 2 years since the group met in person. Last year’s training event happened during 2 separate Zoom meetings, and although worthwhile, it cannot compare to the blessing of being about to interact in person, face-to-face.

Under the theme: “Joy-Fully PALS” time in discussion, study and fellowship were focused around the Word, “Rejoice in the Lord always. And in every circumstance.” Philippians 4:4, 12-13. There is much to rejoice over. 27 of 48 PALS facilitating pastors and wives representing 15 of the 27 PALS groups gathered together.

PALS Wives’ Facilitator Lori Payton shared, “This year, I think what really made an impression on me was how very much the Synod values and supports our efforts in the PALS program. It is a lovely thing to sense that we are part of a whole web of support and growth for these young pastors and their families.”

We thank God for the servants at work in our PALS program. Dr. Baneck remarked, “We have fantastic PALS facilitators who are invested in our young pastors and wives! What a great learning experience for me as we discussed curriculum and how our pastors and wives learn. Our facilitators recognize the crosses they and their pastors/wives bear and have a faith firmly grounded in Christ crucified and risen from the dead!”

WELCOME Sohns!

We are excited to announce Rev. Dr. Stephen and Ursula Sohns have joined Rev. Steve and Rita Wagner in serving as PALS facilitators in the Texas District. The Sohns’ will meet with the new pastors and their wives in the greater Houston area. Pastor Sohns serves as senior pastor at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Spring, Texas.

Recent PALS Activity

The Ohio District PALS group met this month led by Pastor Stephen and Heidi Lutz for a 2-day event. Pastors discussed Peter Scazzero’s book The Emotionally Healthy Leader. One PALS participating pastor shared, “PALS is such an incredible support system for my family, and it provides a unique setting to discuss difficult ministry issues. Steve and Heidi are such blessings to us!” Another PALS pastor offered, “It’s been vital for my ministry. The program helps me realize that I’m no alone in ministry. There is a band of brothers.” And another, “PALS extends the support of new pastors and their families…”

The wives discussed Kate Meadows’ book, Faith to Follow. One PALS wife noted, “I love that I have this place and these people to share your struggles -highs & lows…I love gleaning from the knowledge, experience and wisdom from others…particularly the years of insight from the leaders.” Pastor Lutz noted, “It was great to have the group together under normal circumstances!”
RESOURCES

PALS COURSE SPOTLIGHT

Conflict Resolution vs. Reconciliation by Ambassadors of Reconciliation

The PALS Course Library includes a leader’s pack and set of books for the Ambassadors of Reconciliation course, Conflict Resolution vs. Reconciliation. The leader’s pack includes the flash drive of the study guide and PowerPoint presentation with embedded videos.

“The world tempts us to believe conflict resolution is all that is necessary. There are SO MANY books out there on conflict resolution. However, as Christians we are called to *reconcile* our relationships and not settle for simple conflict resolution. God could have resolved His conflict with sin by damning us all but by His grace, opted to reconcile us to himself through Christ. What difference does that make when we have conflicts today?

Conflict Resolution vs. Reconciliation is a Bible study and conflict coaching guide from Ambassadors of Reconciliation. Great for individual, couples and group Bible study and coaching people through conflict! Each lesson features Bible study content, a major case study for discussion, and application questions for personal reflection.” - Ambassadors of Reconciliation

The Leader’s Pack and Bible study books can be checked out by PALS facilitators. All materials (including Bible Study books) need to be returned to the PALS office for use by other PALS groups.

LIFE TOGETHER AS SYNOD

*Life Together as Synod* is an informational video series on our mutual commitment to confession, mission and good order.

The PALS Office is developing ten short videos about our life together as Synod. These 3-minute videos come with a 1-page talk sheet for study and discussion.

This series is a Pilot Project with PALS. We are asking every PALS group to watch and evaluate these videos, with the possibility of more developed and used by a greater audience in the Synod. Your comments and evaluation will be very important.

The projected completion of these videos is:

**October 15, 2021**
1. Preface to our Life Together as Synod
2. The History, Confession, and Purpose of Synod
3. The Confessional Position of Synod, Doctrinal Resolutions, Statements, Agreement, and Review

January 15, 2022
4. Objectives of the LCMS 1-5
5. Objectives of the LCMS 6-10
6. Membership in the Synod

April 15, 2022
7. Relationships in the LCMS
8. The Office of the Holy Ministry
9. Districts of the Synod
10. District Presidents

Stay tuned and watch for more details!

INCENTIVE

To the first, first year PALS pastor who notifies Robyn.armbrust@lcms.org, informing her you've read this entire newsletter, we will send a $25 CPH gift card.