IOWA DISTRICT WEST
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD

409 Kenyon Road, Suite B
Fort Dodge, IA 50501
515-576-7666 FAX: 515-576-2323
www.idwlcms.org

Executive Assistant - Human Care and Missions
THE REV. MARK GERKEN
Mark.Gerken@idwlcms.org
515-570-2331 cell

Dear partners in the Gospel,

The Human Care Committee of Iowa District West shares this proposed planned program with the prayer that it will be a blessing to you and to those you serve. May it bring to your awareness again the mercy and grace you have received from God. Then, *in view of God's mercy,* [may you] *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1).* May it make you aware of the opportunities in your local community to share God's mercy. May it lead you into specific actions you can take as a congregation or circuit to share God's mercy. Finally, may it result in glory to God and the gift of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ being received by more people.

We share this proposed planned program to help you carry out what we as a District resolved to do at our 2015 convention. At that convention we passed resolution 2-04 which said, in part, *Resolved, that the congregations, schools and other ministries of Iowa District West be encouraged to incorporate at least one intentional act of Christian mercy into their annual ministry plans with the goal of serving especially the citizens and institutions of their local community.*

Each of the studies has been written by a different individual, reflecting their style and perspective. The topics selected are a reflection of the four focus areas of the Human Care Committee—acts of mercy, older adult ministry, life issues and church worker wellness. May God use these studies to stimulate reflection, discussion and action among those in attendance.

The first study, "The Mission of God" written by President Turner, serves as a foundation for those that proceed it. Following the first lesson you are free to use them in any order you desire. We also urge you to consider utilizing the studies within your congregation(s).

We welcome your input and especially the accounts of the intentional acts of Christian mercy carried out by the people within your congregation(s).

On behalf of the Human Care committee,

Mark Gerken

Rev. Mark Gerken
Executive Assistant for Missions and Human Care, IDW

IOWA DISTRICT WEST
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THE *MISSIO DEI*
AND
THE THEOLOGY OF VOCATION

The Church is a missional entity.

It was formed by a missional God.

John 1:1-14

Mission always begins with a need. What is the need introduced in John chapter 1?

Vs. 11 God comes to the need. How does the need receive Him?

Vs. 12-13 How does this inform us about the missional nature of God?

Consider this in light of Luther's explanation of the 3rd Article of the Creed. Who is the actor in conversion?

Vs. 14 God comes to us. *Missio Dei* is not fulfilled from a distant transcendent God. It is fulfilled by the intimate Son of God. He is the Word made flesh who ἐ σκή νωσεν - literally moved into your house!

Luke 19:1-10

Why did Jesus go through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem? There were other ways.

What are some things we know about Zacchaeus?

Tax Collector—What does that tell you about his relationship in the community?
Wealthy—probably a supervisor of other tax collectors.
Short—short and tall were relative in ancient societies as they are today.

Does Zacchaeus come to Jesus or does Jesus come to Zacchaeus?

Who extends the dinner invitation?
What is the missional purpose? (see verse 10)

To participate in the mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people. Therefore the Church is to be a participant both as one who has been called by the Holy Spirit to be a disciple of Christ and one who is being sent to make disciples of all nations. The mission to which God has called Christian leaders is nothing less than an activity of God.

There is a Church because there is a mission, not vice versa.

Time and again the Scriptures portray God as a sending God. God has always been on a mission to seek, save and redeem. In the Old Testament, angels and prophets and even foreign rulers are at times His agents. Sometimes they communicate judgment and other times mercy. What the Bible consistently communicates is a God whose great and holy purpose is drawing humanity to Himself.

Exodus 3:1-10 The *Missio Dei* and Moses

Why does God appear to Moses? Vs. 7 Mission begins with a need.
The rescue is clearly God's work. Vs. 8
What is God doing with Moses? Vs. 10

It is clear that God sent Moses, which means he was commissioned by God to present to Egypt the living Lord.

Deuteronomy 31:23 Moses passed this mantle of missional leadership on to Joshua.

Note the imperatives Be Strong…Be Courageous. Why?

What is the commission of Joshua?

"for <u>you</u> will take the Israelites." Does this surprise you?

God used Joshua to go and possess the land He had promised His people Israel.

The *Missio Dei* in the Old Testament demonstrated God's ideal for Israel:
Exodus 19:5-6

What were the children of Israel called to do?

If they did, what would they be?

This blessing is for whom? Why?

Jesus says to the first leaders in the Christian Church, "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). The Scriptures reveal a God always active in mission. The Church of all sizes has a calling from God to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations, The Church, rooted in the concept of the *Missio Dei*, will recognize that there is one mission and it is God's mission.

God's mission is our mission.

What is that mission? 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

What is God doing in Christ?

What has He entrusted to us?

To whom has God entrusted the ministry of reconciliation?

God's objective is to reconcile the world to Himself, and He has entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to all Christians. The plan to involve a community of believers in Christ's mission to the world had its foundation already in the beginning when God chose and destined sinners to become His children through faith in Jesus Christ. It is God who has originated this plan and made it part of His eternal plan of salvation.

Conversion is fundamentally not the work of humans but of God. The mission does not have its authorization through any decision by the Church in the past, in the present, or ever. We are not at liberty to decide whether or not to engage in mission. It has its origin and source in God the Father and His sending of His Son to atone for the sin of the world and the Holy Spirit who calls and gathers His Church. It is the Triune God who now commissions His Church to go into all the world to proclaim the Good News of reconciliation through the death of Jesus Christ. It is the same God who has also promised His Church the gift of the Holy Spirit so that it can effectively perform its mission even until our Lord's return. Therefore, the mission of the Church is not optional. It is the Lord's work. It is the *Missio Dei.*

Vocation does not belong to heaven; it belongs to the world.

All Christians are called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1). We are called to participate in a local congregation where we each have a part to play in the community of faith. We do not all have the vocation to be preachers or teachers. Luther understood vocation as a "station" which is by nature helpful to others. This witness of being a Christian in the world is most often lived out in ordinary lives.

We live our lives in the time, the culture and the community where God has placed us.
Romans 12:4-8

In Christ, the many form what? What do we call that?

The parts of the body do not have the same *functions.* (πρᾶξιν, maybe better translated, "tasks.")
What are the different tasks in the Church?

Vs. 5 To whom do we belong?

Vs. 6 What have we been given?

These gifts are some, certainly not all, of the vocational gifts given to the Church.

In our vocations, people are not reaching up to God but rather their vocation is the means by which God, through them, reaches out to the world. Vocation is lived out in service to neighbors. A challenge of contemporary Christians is to relate their faith to their daily activities. There is often a separation between Sunday and Monday. Christians often do not see the relationship between their work, other daily activities, and their Christian faith. There is often a disconnect between the spiritual and the secular in people's lives.

Luther, in rather earthy language, said it like this:
"If you are a craftsman you will find the Bible placed in your workshop, in your hands, in your heart; it teaches and preaches how you ought to treat your neighbor. Only look at your tools, your needle, your thimble, your beer barrel, your articles of trade, your scales, your measures, and you will find this saying written on them... 'My dear, use me toward your neighbor as you would want him to act toward you with that which is his.'"

As is clear from the above quotation, "vocation" refers not only to one's occupation but also to all one's relationships, situations, contexts, and involvements (including, of course, one's occupation, if one is employed).

Robert Kolb keenly points out that faith recognizes that God is present in this world. But faith also recognizes that Jesus is no longer present in His own flesh. When Christ ascended, He promised His Holy Spirit. It is now the Holy Spirit that works in Christians and through them in their vocation. The Holy Spirit, Kolb argues, has not become incarnate. Rather, He has to "borrow our tongue and hands and warmth and feeling to accomplish His purpose, to carry His love to others."

According to Kolb, how does God work in the world today? Where will God use us?

A healthy understanding of the doctrine of vocation allows us to appreciate the different roles we are asked to play in the life of a congregation. God uses the events of people's lives, their intellectual capabilities, and their personal characteristics to prepare them for service.

The *Missio Dei* calls us to action to use the gifts He has entrusted to us. God does have a mission, and God's mission is our mission. In their vocations, God works through His people in their ordinary stations of life to which He has called them. In this way He cares for everyone—Christian and non-Christian—whom He has given life. God will use the vocational diversities of your Church to serve Himself and your community.

If, as we said earlier, “mission always begins with a need” and “to participate in the mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people” then where are the needs/opportunities in your community for your congregation to bring that love of God toward people?

What about in your vocation? Where do you personally have that opportunity?

Take a few moments to identify one concrete, specific step that you can take personally and another step that you believe God would have your congregation take to bring God’s love toward people under the broad umbrella of human care. Share what you identified with the person next to you. Close in prayer, thanking God for taking that step in sending your Savior as well as meeting your first article needs. Pray that the steps you identify might be the first step in connecting others with their Savior.

For more information contact:
Rev. Dr. Steve Turner
President, IDW
Email: steve.turner@idwlcms.org
Office Phone: 515-576-7666

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Acts of Mercy: Calling all Congregations to Action

"Christian life consists of faith and charity." - Martin Luther

Note to leader: *While it is understood that preparation on the leader's part will normally include reviewing the material in advance, we encourage you to familiarize yourself with the websites and information they contain that are mentioned on pages 4-5. You might wish to share the information for your county/area with the others and share insights you received. God's blessings as you facilitate this study!*

1. What is mercy? [1]
    a. Diakonéō (to serve), diakonía (service), diákonos (servant, deacon). This word for service, as distinct from douleúō (to serve as a slave), therapeúō (to serve willingly), latreúō (to serve for wages), and leitourgéō (to do public service), carries the basic nuance of personal service.
    b. Diakonéō outside the New Testament
        i. The concrete sense is basic: a. "to wait at table," b. "to care for," and c. (Comprehensively) "to serve." For the Greeks service is undignified; we are born to rule, not to serve. Service acquires value only when it promotes individual development, or the development of the whole as service of the state (or ultimately as service of God). If this demands some renunciation, the idea of self-sacrificial service finds little place.
        ii. In Judaism, service is not thought to be unworthy; hence a deeper understanding of it develops. The LXX does not use diakoneín, but has leitourgeín, latreúein, and even douleúein. Philo has diakoneín for "to serve" with an echo of waiting at table. Josephus has it for "to wait at table," "to boey," and even "to render priestly service." The commandment to love one's neighbor offers a solid basis for sacrificial service, but in later Judaism tends to be weakened by the distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous and the construing of service as meritorious rather than sacrificial.
    c. Diakoneín in the New Testament: By exalting service and relating it to love of God, Jesus both sets forth a completely different view from that of the Greeks and purifies the Jewish concept.
        i. The sense "to wait at table" occurs in Luke 17:8 and John 12:2. An astonishing reversal takes place when the returning maser rewards his servants by waiting on them (Luke 12:37). Jesus Himself is similarly present as one who serves (Luke 22:27). Hence when He asks who is greater, the one who sits at table or the one who serves, the obvious answer that the Greeks would give is wrong. Yet Jesus does not substitute an answer that is theoretically opposite. Instead He points to Himself, for as the Son of Man who is also Lord of the kingdom, He institutes a new pattern of human relationships which extends even to waiting at table or washing the feet (John 13:4). In Acts 6:2 diakoneín means "to supervise the meal," i.e., its whole provision, preparation and organization. This diakoneín as love in action is set in tension with the diakonía toú lógou as the proclamation of love. Most likely what was involved was not just the distribution of portions to those in need but the arranging of common meals, and the radical issue might well have been that of table fellowship rather than wrangling about the better portions; if so, the appointment of the Hellenistic Seven takes on added significance. Diakoneín is also used for Martha's serving in Luke 10:40 (cf. John 12:2) and that of Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:31. When the angels serve Jesus in Mark 1:13, Matthew 4:11, they, too, are probably bringing Him food after the period of fasting.
        ii. The wider sense "to serve" reflects the same transvaluation of values as the narrower meaning. Waiting at table may well be included in Luke 8:3, but the term covers many activities in Matthew 25:42. Here service of others is service of Christ and involves

personal commitment. Worldly rulers lord it over their subjects but the concern of the disciples is with God's kingdom, the way to which leads through suffering and death that has service as its point. Hence the only path of greatness for Christians is to become the servants and even the slaves of all (Mark 9:35; 10:44). More than table service is now involved; all kinds of sacrificial activity on behalf of others, as exemplified by Christ's own self-offering, are required. Service of others is service of God, and it may entail service even to the point of death itself (John 12:25-26).

iii. The life of the community is thus a life of serving. Every charisma is given (1 Peter 4:10) in stewardship, and the charísmata comprise gifts of word and gifts of action, the latter especially being described as diakoneín. Timothy, Erastus, Onesimus, and Onesiphorus (Acts 19:22; Phlm. 1:8-10, 2 Timothy 1:16) offer examples. The prophets rendered an advance service (1 Peter 1:10), and the apostles also do service (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3: "a letter diakonētheisa by us"). This service cannot be proud, self-righteous service; it is discharged only by God's power and to His glory.

d. Diakonía.
   i. In the New Testament this first means "waiting at table," "providing for physical sustenance," or "supervising meals" (Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1).
   ii. A wider meaning is "the discharge of a loving service." The diakonia of Stephanas is an example (1 Corinthians 16:15). It is linked with works, faith, love, and patience in Revelation 2:19. All that edifies is covered in Ephesians 4:11-12. There are various ministries (1 Corinthians 12:4), but all are rendered to the Lord. Acts of care must have been included (1 Corinthians 12:28).

e. What did you discover from the above word study? How do you think that might apply to our study of "acts of mercy" which we carry out as Christians both individually and corporately?

2. How does God demonstrate mercy to us?
   a. Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
   b. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

3. To what is God's mercy connected?
   a. 1 John 2:2 "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Propitiation conveys God's mercy, as indicated by the translation of the same Greek word as "mercy seat" in Hebrews 9:5. This is a reference to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant and represents God's throne, which is the source of mercy (Hebrews 4:16).
   b. Psalms 25:6 "Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old."
   c. Psalm 103:2-4 "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy."

4. What shall be our response to God's mercy and love?
   a. Luke 6:36 "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

b. Galatians 5:13 “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”
c. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”
d. Romans 12:1-22 “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters*, in view of God’s mercy*, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” *Live a life transformed!*

5. Today more than ever? Importance of actively engaging in acts of mercy in today’s culture:
    a. Although it has not been our intent, many from outside the church perceive us as defensive and reactive in response to today’s political and cultural changes and challenges. This perception (sometimes reality) pushes us further and further away from people who are not part of the church, and them from us. As we engage the culture, speak loudly in the public square and assert our right to freedom of religion and speech, we risk making the battle to protect what is ours the point, and forget the real point – the real reason we are here: to participate in God’s mission leading to salvation for all people.
    b. Read and discuss this observation: *“How in the world did the term ‘Evangelical’ become the antithesis of grace? If Evangelicals are known mainly for the defense of their own ethical views and their own legal rights, they risk becoming one marginal interest group among many. Or they could be known for always considering the person…A model of social engagement for Christians would be to act like Jesus – the image of Jesus in the Gospels – the one who brought good tidings to the poor, bound up the brokenhearted, and proclaimed freedom to the captives. When people, including modern, cynical, skeptical people see the image of Jesus even partially reflected in another human being, it appeals across every distinction, every division, and every boundary. It stirs the deepest longings of the human heart. And when the representatives of Christ act like Jesus, true authority and influence returns.”* [(2)]

6. Opportunities: Acts of mercy provide opportunity and prepare the way for verbal witness. What would our churches look like if ministries were based on current needs of the community rather than tradition? What would be different and what would be the same in your congregation?

7. Identifying current needs: who are the “least of these” in my community?
    a. Those without a voice; unseen or often overlooked, societal outcasts
    b. Vulnerable people – give examples
        i. Poor
        ii. Elderly
        iii. Homeless
        iv. Unemployed
        v. Uninsured
        vi. Mentally incapacitated or impaired
        vii. Physically incapacitated or impaired
        viii. Addicted
        ix. Single parents
        x. Children/teens in foster care system

xi. Children unsupervised while parents work
xii. Preborn
xiii. Veterans
xiv. Others…?

8. What opportunities exist in my community to demonstrate mercy? How can I know?
    a. Support my community: *Partner with Existing Providers*
        i. What LCMS partners are possible?
            1. Crisis Pregnancy Centers
            2. Lutheran Family Service
            3. Perry Lutheran Home
            4. Other Lutheran Homes for Aged
            5. Lutheran School or Pre-School
            6. Camp Okoboji
            7. IOWAY projects
            8. Operation Barnabas
            9. LERT
            10. Lutherans for Life
        ii. Are there other non-LCMS partners, either governmental or religious?
            1. Department of Human Services
            2. Residential home for adults with mental disabilities
            3. Residential treatment centers for youth
            4. Boys & Girls Club
            5. Skilled Nursing Care Homes
            6. Public Health Department
            7. Public School
            8. Domestic Violence Shelter
            9. Homeless Shelter
            10. Drug/Substance Abuse Residential Treatment Center
            11. Hospice/Home Health services
            12. Veterans Care and Support
            13. Senior Centers
            14. WIC (Women, Infants, Children), Public Health Department
            15. Others…
    b. Get to know my community: *Identify unmet needs through conversation and research*
        i. State of Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), find funded services by county, all populations: http://dhs.iowa.gov
        ii. Vital Statistics: Statistical information by Iowa County, 2014 last reporting year: https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/68/HealthStats/vital_stats_2014.pdf
        iii. Child abuse statistics by County in Iowa, 2015 last reporting year: https://dhs.iowa.gov/reports/child-abuse-statistics
        iv. Older Iowans 2016: http://www.iowadatacenter.org/Publications/older2016.pdf
        v. Veterans in Iowa: https://va.iowa.gov/counties
        vi. Poverty in Iowa, by County: http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/iowa/percent-of-people-of-all-ages-in-poverty#map

vii. Population profile by County compared to rest of Iowa, education, poverty, English, non-English speaking households, unemployment, food insecurity, income by source: http://www.icip.iastate.edu/special-reports/poverty
viii. Disability, Uninsured, Household composition, education, poverty, others by County: http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00
ix. Iowa State prison and community based corrections populations, updated daily: http://www.doc.state.ia.us/DailyStatistics
x. Iowa Juvenile Detention placements, de-individualized, sort by county: https://data.iowa.gov/Public-Safety/Iowa-Juvenile-Detention-Secure-Placements/3kck-gq3y
xi. Community specific data, Lutheran Church Extension Fund: https://lcef.org/demographics/
xii. LCMS support for community outreach (Planting Gospel Seeds)

The "Planting Gospel Seeds While Serving Human Needs" program helps congregations develop ways to enable their neighbors to break the cycles of poverty and struggle:

- After-school care or youth mentorship
- Food pantries and nutrition
- Legal and resettlement assistance for immigrants
- Job-retraining and job-related transportation assistance
- Assistance with physical and mental health concerns
- English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL)

By identifying the most critical, unmet and under-served needs in the community, congregations can plan ministries that build closer relationships with neighbors and help congregations become vital, growing churches, making new disciples for Christ! Provides demographic study and onsite consultation.
http://www.lcms.org/gospelseeds

9. Barriers: What are some potential barriers or areas of resistance to beginning an active mercy outreach effort in my congregation?
    a. Fear –diseased (HIV/AIDS, hepatitis); non-Caucasian; unchurched; poor; tattooed, mentally ill…
    b. Disapproval of lifestyle – same sex relationships, living together without marriage
    c. Self-righteousness – prejudice, punitive attitude ("You made your bed…")
    d. Inertia – ("We've never done it before"; "We're too small…")
    e. History of failed effort – ("We tried that before and it didn't work…")
    f. Futility - Believe "recipients" unwilling to change, won't appreciative our efforts
    g. Wrong motivation: Goal to increase our membership rolls or strengthen our financial position….
    h. Resistance to working with others across congregational lines or with non-church entities doing mercy work –
        i. **The church will cooperate with others in meeting human need.** Cooperation in externals has long been an expression describing the church's legitimate ability to cooperate with other entities (Whether churches, societies, Lutheran, Christian or not) in meeting some human need. To cooperate in externals means to work toward common goals in endeavors, which do not necessitate, require or necessarily imply church fellowship (communion in sacris) or involve joint proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments (worship). Such cooperative endeavors are entered upon often for practical reasons (e.g., lack of critical resources). But such

endeavors are also often an expression of the belief (when entered into with other Christian entities) of the catholicity of the church (See Formula of Concord, Preface; Tappert, p.11), as well as an expression of love for fellow Christians. Through such endeavors, the LCMS will often have opportunity to insist on theological integrity and the truth of God's word, and thereby make a positive contribution to ecumenical activities. Such endeavors may range from providing resources for a simple community food bank to the highly complex ecclesial and civil realities involved in operating a jointly Recognized Service Organization. Such endeavors must recognize legitimate doctrinal differences and provide for the requisite integrity of its partners. (3)

ii. **The Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms grants broad freedom for the church to engage and be active in its community**. The church has a role in its community (local, national, international) by virtue of the fact that congregations and national churches are actually 'corporate citizens' of their respective communities. As such, congregations, churches and Synod as a whole engage the community as corporate citizens of God's 'left-hand kingdom,' working toward worthy civic goals (good citizenship, just laws and society, protection of the weak, housing, etc.). 'Legitimate civil ordinances are good creations of God and divine ordinances in which a Christian may safely take part' (Apol. XVI.1). As such a corporate citizen, the church has civic and political capital… There have been times in the life of the church when it was the sole guardian and provider for the needy. In our day, the rise of the modern welfare state has shifted that (monetary) responsibility in large measure to the civil realm. But there is a large intersection of civil and churchly endeavor at just this point. Thus the church's response to these issues is always mutating and nuanced. In these matters the church must spend its capital wisely and sparingly. It must avoid both quietism and political activism. The former shuns the ethical demand of love for the neighbor (ignoring for instance, the ethical urgency of the Old Testament minor prophets), the latter may obscure the church's fundamental and perpetual task as bearer of the Word of salvation to sinners in need of Christ. Where the church loses sight of this proclamation of the Gospel, it thereby loses the very motivation for diakonic work (the Gospel)!" (3)

iii. Others…

10. How can I help my congregation overcome those barriers?
    i. Bible study on "acts of mercy" in LWML, men's group, Sunday morning/weekday Bible study; take home study for families
    ii. Engage emerging leaders – potential new generation of leadership in the church, ready to take on an active role in mercy work
    iii. Start small if necessary, 2-3 motivated people, small group guided conversations
    iv. Identify and life up effort that is working well in another IDW LCMS congregation
    v. Consider benefit of joining with a neighboring congregation to divide the work and multiply the joy, build relationships across congregational boundaries, increase the impact…

11. What do you believe God would have you do as a result of this study?

    Don't brush over this question too quickly. Challenge each participant to come up with at least one action step and share it with the person next to them.

"But know that to serve God is nothing else than to serve your neighbor and do good to him in love, be it a child, wife, servant, enemy, friend….If you do not find yourself among the needy and the poor, where the Gospel shows us Christ, then you may know that your faith is not right, and that you have not yet tasted of Christ's benevolence and work for you." - Martin Luther

(1) http://www.lcms.org/emphasis Greek Word Study

(2) http://qideas.org/videos/the-pope-francis-moment/

(3) *Theology of Mercy*, Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, 2004, reprinted 2015, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

For more information contact:
Wanda Pritzel, LISW
Director of Ministry Support, Lutheran Family Service
Email: wpritzel@LFSiowa.org
Office Phone: 515-573-3138, ext. 22
Cell Phone: 515-570-2310

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Human Care and the Mission of God

The Preborn

There is a significant contrast in our culture today regarding how to view those who are not yet born. Some view the unborn as "human beings," others do not. A true understanding of the nature of the unborn is important if we are to appropriately extend the Mission of God to all nations and all peoples.

For millennia, followers of Jesus Christ have believed the unborn were human beings because they were created by God in His own image and likeness. Unfortunately, in the pagan Roman empire children were not valued highly and therefore abortion, child abandonment and infanticide were commonplace. Especially if a child was deformed, frail, handicapped or interestingly enough, female, it was not uncommon to dispose of the child for reasons related to the culture's general lack of value for life.

When a culture looses its honor and respect for the Triune God, it most naturally looses a moral compass that is related to nature and conscience. Like the Roman Empire, the United States today is on a slippery slope finding itself devaluing human life in direct proportion to the rejection of the Triune God. As our "Christian roots" get dryer and dryer we see our culture, including leaders in government, viewing the unborn or newly born more subjectively, and by this view, life is valued not by *what it is*, but according to *what it does*.

Conservative Christians in the U.S. are dumbfounded by the general lack of value for life in our nation. Many older Christians are severely depressed at the distinctions drawn from their day to our day. Not long ago artificial contraception was viewed as contrary to God's Word across denominational lines. Now Christian churches are even debating whether or not they should speak against abortion or even infanticide at all! The challenge for Lutheran Christians in Iowa District West is very much like Christians in a pre-Christian era. *How do we respond in and to a culture that places subjective value on the unborn and human life in general?*

It is important to remember that Christians have never formed their faith on the basis of man's word. The Christian faith is formed by the Word of Christ. God's Word is always relevant. God's Word declares truth. Within Scripture we learn of a God who created us in the beginning, knows us intimately, and loves us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His own Son in order to save our lives from death and destruction. The Gospel message transcends time and culture. If God created and loves life from the moment of conception, His people should do the same.

This study is meant to encourage conversation on the subject of the unborn as human beings, created in the image of God. Biblical texts are offered for discussion and reflection. As you read, reflect upon God's attitude toward the unborn. Ask yourself how you can serve them and their families in mercy in your own area of influence. Discuss what you know about life-affirming ministries and efforts in our district. Finally, discuss how serving the *"least of these"* relates to the Mission of God.

"Your eyes saw my unformed substance"

In Psalm 139, David reveals much about the unborn. In a classic Psalm for our understanding about life in the womb, he makes clear that God is in control and is with us throughout our lives. In an effort to reveal just how intimately God knows our "ways," he not only says that God knows our "*sitting down and our rising up,"* or that He knows our thoughts but he also shares what God knew about us before we were born saying, *"Even the darkness is not dark to you...for you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."*

3D and 4D ultrasound technology has made it even easier for us to understand what David writes in Psalm 139 and what Christians have believed for millennia: the Preborn are indeed human beings wonderfully made by their Creator God! The Scriptures truly are consistent with reality. Just take a look at the evidence and you will see! What a message we have to share, indeed, "Praise the Lord!"

Biblical Testimony: Often we want to read the Scriptures like we read the rules on the fence at the local swimming pool. If it doesn't say, "Thou shalt not" than apparently I can do it! However, this is not the way we are to read the Scriptures. Lutherans read the biblical text in light of the Analogy of Faith, that is, in light of the central teachings of the Scriptures and their harmony and unity. For example, we read the text keeping in mind just who God is, what He has done, what He is doing and what He has promised. When we do this, of course, we learn above all, that God is holy, man is sinful and Christ was sent to die and rise for the entire world, that is, every sinner who ever lived. While there are many texts that indeed speak "against abortion," considering the issue from the perspective of The Analogy of Faith helps us see the big picture and that abortion simply does not jive with God's design. Consider the following texts especially in terms of the relationship that they reveal between God and man:

Genesis 1:26 *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness…'"*
The creation narrative places special emphasis on the creation of man/humanity. The LORD intentionally created in a special way and gave humanity responsibility over the rest of His creation. Part of this responsibility was "to be fruitful and multiply."

Jeremiah 1:5, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

Though the text doesn't say when Jeremiah "became a human," the LORD's words are implicitly clear: *"before I formed you in the womb I knew you."* These words reveal the intimacy of God's *relationship* with Jeremiah and the unborn generally speaking. An example of Genesis 1, Jeremiah shows God as Creator. As Creator, God also has a plan laid out for Jeremiah, even before his birth.

Psalm 139:13-14, *"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."*

The Psalmist makes clear that God the Creator is very happy and in charge of what is going on inside the womb of another creation of His, the child's mother. In that place, God is seen keenly engaged in His creative activity, "fashioning" the unborn. In response, the Psalmist with great joy gives thanks to God for this intimate relationship. Not only are the Lord's works wonderful, but "my soul knows it very well."

Mark 10:13-16, *"And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them…and he said to them, 'Let the children come to Me…'"*

Jesus destroys the ancient Roman and Jewish perception that children should not be meddling in public with men which is why His disciples rebuke those who brought them. However, Jesus not only turns the tables on the money changers in the temple, He turns them on His own disciples saying, "Let them come to me and do not hinder them…" This text is always read in our baptismal liturgy, reminding the Christian community that Christ came for the least of these!

Luke 1:41, 44, *"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb...For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."*

The text of John the Baptist leaping within the womb of Elizabeth is not only one of the most joyous moments in the Scriptures, it can also be argued to be a declaration of humanity in the womb. The setting makes it even more profound. John leaps at the sound of the greeting from Mary, as Elizabeth puts it, "the mother of my Lord." In essence, the Holy Spirit seems to move prenatal John to joyous emotion felt and perceived by his own mother.

Luke 1:30-31, *"And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.'"*

The greatest conception to ponder in relation to the subject of abortion is that of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes very clear that Jesus will sanctify the lives of His people at every point, even from the moment of conception in the womb to His death on the cross.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions related to the texts above and the introduction on the first page. How do these biblical texts, and others not mentioned, form not only our understanding of the preborn but how we should respond to them in mercy?

1. In Genesis 1 God created man, *"In His own image and likeness."* Though man subsequently fell into sin after the creation of Adam and Eve, is there still something to be said about the image of God and human life born and unborn?
2. God makes clear in the creation narrative that man should, "*be fruitful and multiply"* (See also Gen. 9, 17, 28, 35 and 48). Psalm 127:5 adds, *"Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!"* Do these texts inform how we relate to life in the womb?
3. Many people love Jeremiah 29:11, "I know the plans I have for you…" Jeremiah 1:5 reveals a very personal plan from God to the unborn Jeremiah. What does this text tell us about God's ways and our ways?
4. How is God shown exerting His charge over life in Psalm 139? What is the attitude of the Psalmist in relation to His activity? How does 3D and 4D ultrasound technology affirm this Psalm?
5. Gender selective abortion is alive and well today even as it was in the ancient Roman empire. What does this practice reveal about the true nature of legalized abortion? What does it reveal about the culture's value of life? Finally, do you think the abortion issue in our day relates more to the 5th Commandment or the 1st? Why?
6. The truth found in Holy Scriptures are in keeping with truth discovered according to nature and conscience. How does this understanding help in the task of speaking for life in the public square?
7. Many women can tell you about the first time they "saw their belly move." What do you think Elizabeth said to Zechariah after John leaped in her womb at the sound of Mary's greeting? How can you use this text to comfort couples grieving the loss of an unborn child?
8. The Annunciation and birth of Christ is the most profound narrative related to the unborn the Scriptures contain. Discuss the significance of Christ being "conceived in the womb" especially as it relates to the book of Hebrews (Hint: Hebrews 2:14-18).
9. Consider the incarnation of Christ and the logic of "choice." At what point in the pregnancy would aborting Jesus be less radical?
10. What do you believe God would have you do as a result of this study? Leader: Don't brush over this question too quickly. Challenge each participant to come up with at least one action step and share it with the person next to them.

For the Leader:

The purpose of this study is to help pastors and churches in Iowa District West realize the Mercy and Human Care possibilities that abound all around them, as they relate to care of the Preborn. As the study concludes, discuss with the group ways in which they and their congregations are active, or can be active, in showing mercy to the unborn, to children, to post-abortive women and men, or anyone involved in a vocation related to the care of children. Some questions might include:

1. How can you use your Preschool or Early Childhood Center to affirm God's gift of life in your community?
2. What are some natural points in the lectionary that lend themselves to the preaching and teaching of life?
3. The "Crisis Pregnancy Center" is a wonderful entity that gives a "face and place" to life ministry. Is there a crisis pregnancy center in your community? What is happening there? Could you support that ministry?

For more information contact:
Rev. Nathan Sherrill
IDW Life Advocate
Email: pastorsherrill@splc.omhcoxmail.com
Church phone: 712-322-4729

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Older Adult Ministry

Leader's Guide

Goals of this study:

1. Identify personal and professional experiences and observations relating to relationships with older adults.
2. Explore what Scripture says about older adults.
3. Develop a framework for approaching and growing an older adult ministry on a personal, congregational, and community level.

Scriptural References:

"The Physical":

2 Corinthians 4:16
"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."

Psalm 92:12-15
"The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

Proverbs 16:31
"Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life."

"The Need, The Plea"

Psalm 71:18
"So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come."

Psalm 71:9
"Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent."

"The Response, The Promise"

Job 12:12
"Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days."

Psalm 37:25
"I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread."

Isaiah 46:3-4
"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."

1 Timothy 5:8
"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Psalm 73:26
"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Questions to elicit thought and discussion from participants

Take a few minutes to remember, and share if you will, what the final ten years of life were like for your great-grandparents, grandparents, or parents. What was their health status? Where did they live? How much help did they need from others? How willing were they to accept that help? How old were they when they died? What was most important to them? What was their faith life like? Did they regularly attend worship? How did they practice their faith? As you think about those final years of your loved ones, what emotions are evoked in you?

Take a few minutes to think about what you hope your final ten years prior to the end of your life on earth might look like. Where will you live? How much help will you need from others? How will you feel about accepting that help? What will be most important to you? How will you practice your faith? How will you disciple others?

As you look at the members of your congregation who are in the latter years of their life, what needs do you see? What are some of the physical challenges? What are some of the mental and emotional challenges? Are they attending worship? Are they receiving the Sacraments regularly? Who is helping them? What are the needs of those who are helping them? What are the barriers the older adults and their caregivers face in meeting physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs?

How can you apply the scriptural references given to address the needs of older adults who are your loved ones and/or members of your congregation? How might you utilize their gifts in your own family or congregation? What are the barriers for utilizing their gifts and talents?

In what ways can you address and facilitate meeting the needs, personally and professionally, of the older adults who may be difficult to have relationships with due to their personality traits and/or failing cognitive status (dementia)?

What does God call us to do, personally and professionally, when we have relationships with individuals nearing the end of their life who have lived a life that has caused great pain and anguish to others? For example, someone who has been physically, emotionally, or mentally abusive to you or other people?

How might you facilitate the creation of a network in your community that better serves the needs of older adults? What are the barriers that keep you from doing so? What are the resources that you might be able to utilize to develop that network?

Leader's notes

***Encourage participants to look at how older adults were regarded and valued several decades ago compared to today.**

***Assist participants in looking at personal fears about aging and how that might affect their interaction with older adults.**

***Encourage discussion about how God charges us as Christians to regard and treat older adults personally and professionally. Ask how are we falling short of God's calling in this area? How can we make corrections to align ourselves both personally and professionally to God's calling?**

Share resource/informational handouts to assist participants in developing a plan to address barriers and improve communication and ministry to older adults.

For more information contact:
Toni Larson, LISW
Lutheran Family Service
tlarson@LFSiowa.org
Office Phone: 515-573-3138

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Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a progressive disorder caused by abnormal accumulation of toxic proteins that kill brain cells. The disease affects memory, language, directional skills, thinking and behavior. The condition often begins after age 60 and is present in nearly half of those over 85. However, it is not an inevitable part of aging.

Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

Signs of AD progress over time and include:

- Memory loss
- Problems with thinking
- Word finding
- Getting lost
- Restlessness
- Mood swings
- Personality changes

Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease

If you or a loved one has memory loss, visit the doctor for testing. Your doctor will work with you to manage problems, suggest changes to the home, and give support to family members and other caregivers.

Medicines should be started as soon as possible to have the best effect on thinking and behavior problems in the early stages of the disease. Talk to the doctor before starting any medicine. Medicines provide treatment for symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, but do not cure the condition.

More on next page ➔

Learn more about your health care.

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Wexner Medical Center

In later stages of disease, memory and behavioral changes become more prominent. The person loses their abilities to perform their usual activities. Eventually, the person is not able to do tasks such as eating, dressing and bathing. He or she may become anxious or violent, or wander away from the home. As the disease progresses, the person will need 24 hour care.

Most people live 8 to 12 years after symptoms become obvious. The most common cause of death in people with Alzheimer's disease is infection or the inability to swallow.

The Alzheimer's Association provides caregiver education and support groups and has a Safe Return Program to help persons with AD who wander away or get lost. Participation in research is critical to find better treatments.

For more information, contact these organizations:

- Alzheimer's Association, www.alz.org, 1-800-272-3900
- Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR), www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers, 1-800-438-4380
- Eldercare Locator, www.eldercare.gov, 1-800-677-1116
- Family Caregiver Alliance, www.caregiver.org, 1-800-445-8106
- National Family Caregivers Association, www.thefamilycaregiver.org, 1-800-896-3650
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), www.nimh.nih.gov, 1-866-615-6464
- National Respite Network and Resource Center, www.archrespite.org

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**

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Caregiver Self-Assessment Questionnaire

How are YOU?

Caregivers are often so concerned with caring for the relative's needs that they lose sight of their own well-being. Please take just a moment to answer the following questions. Once you have answered the questions, turn the page to do a self-evaluation.

During the past week or so, I have …

1. Had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing…. ☐Yes ☐No
2. Felt that I couldn't leave my relative alone……..... ☐Yes ☐No
3. Had difficulty making decisions……..... ☐Yes ☐No
4. Felt completely overwhelmed……..... ☐Yes ☐No
5. Felt useful and needed ……..... ☐Yes ☐No
6. Felt lonely……..... ☐Yes ☐No
7. Been upset that my relative has changed so much from his/her former self……. ☐Yes ☐No
8. Felt a loss of privacy and/or personal time……. ☐Yes ☐No
9. Been edgey or irritable…….. ☐Yes ☐No
10. Had sleep disturbed because of caring for my relative…..... ☐Yes ☐No
11. Had a crying spell(s)…….. ☐Yes ☐No
12. Felt strained between work and family responsibilities… ☐Yes ☐No
13. Had back pain…… ☐Yes ☐No
14. Felt ill *(headaches, stomach problems or common cold)*….. ☐Yes ☐No
15. Been satisfied with the support my family has given me……. ☐Yes ☐No
16. Found my relative's living situation to be inconvenient or a barrier to care……... ☐Yes ☐No
17. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "not stressful" to 10 being "extremely stressful," please rate your current level of stress. _____
18. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "very healthy" to 10 being "very ill," please rate your current health compared to what it was this time last year. _____

Comments:

(Please feel free to comment or provide feedback.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

AGS Geriatrics Healthcare Professionals

Leading Change. Improving Care for Older Adults.

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Self-Evaluation

To determine the score:

1. Reverse score questions 5 and 15.
   For example, a "No" response should be counted as a "Yes" and a "Yes" response should be counted as a "No."
2. Total the number of "yes" responses.

To interpret the score

Chances are that you are experiencing a high degree of distress if any of the below is true:

- If you answered "Yes" to either or both questions 4 and 11
- If your total "Yes" scores = 10 or more
- If your score on question 17 is 6 or higher
- If your score on question 18 is 6 or higher

Next Steps

- Consider seeing a doctor for a check-up for yourself
- Consider having some relief from caregiving (Discuss with your healthcare provider or a social worker the resources available in your community.)
- Consider joining a support group

Valuable resources for caregivers

HealthinAging.org
(800) 563-4916 | www.healthinaging.org

Caregiver Action Network
(202) 454-3970 | www.caregiveraction.org

Eldercare Locator
(a national directory of community services)
(800) 677-1116 | www.eldercare.gov

Family Caregiver Alliance
(800) 445-8106 | www.caregiver.org

Medicare Hotline
(800) 633-4227 | www.medicare.gov

National Alliance for Caregiving
(301) 718-8444 | www.caregiving.org

Local resources and contacts:

This questionnaire was originally developed and tested by the American Medical Association.
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COMMUNICATION TIPS WHEN INTERACTING WITH DEMENTIA PATIENTS

It has been noted widely that non-verbal communication, such as body language, voice tone and facial expressions relay great amounts of information to the cognitively impaired adult. As their ability to process verbal information is impaired, the way in which we use language is extremely important when working with cognitively impaired adults.

Clear communication, verbal and non-verbal alike, is the essence of any quality interaction. The following suggestions will enhance your effectiveness with your family member or patients.

1. **In your interactions with the patient, try to:**
   - *** Be calm and reassuring**
   - *** Speak slowly and distinctly**
   - *** Use simple words**

2. **Remember that the patient is dealing with:**
   - *** Confusion**
   - *** Anxiety**
   - *** Loss of self-esteem**
   - *** Irritability**
   - *** Feeling of depression (when he is aware enough)**

3. **Before asking the patient to do something, address him by name to get his attention. While you are speaking, maintain eye contact to help maintain his attention. Non-verbal gestures help in communicating to the patient what you want him to do.**

4. **Ask only one question at a time and give the patient time to respond. If the patient does not seem to understand, repeat the question using the same wording. If this does not work, after a few minutes try to rephrase your question. (This will require that the patient process new information).**

5. **Approach the patient from the front. It may startle and upset him if you touch him unexpectedly or approach him from behind.**

6. **Allow the patient adequate time to respond in conversation or when performing an activity. Rushing the patient will increase his confusion.**

7. **Use humor whenever possible though not at the patient's expense.**

8. **Always remember the importance of love and affection. Sometimes holding hands, touching, hugging and praise will get the patient to respond when all else failed.**

9. **The feelings expressed in your voice when speaking to the confused patient are as important as the words you say.**

10. **Try to maintain a regular daily routine. An Alzheimer patient has difficulty coping with change. A structured routine will help the patient maintain his abilities. It may also save you time and energy.**

11. **Involvement with his daily tasks help to maintain the patient's self-esteem. Also, disruption in the patient's usual habits may result in his no longer being able to perform that activity. For example, if you begin dressing the patient, he might soon forget how to perform this function.**

COMMUNICATION TIPS …CONTINUED

12. Keep your expectations of what the patient can do realistic given his degree of impairment. There will be less frustration on both your parts if expectations are realistic.

13. Break down all tasks into simple steps. Tell the patient one step at a time what to do. Giving too many directions at one time, or giving them too quickly, will increase the patient's confusion. If the patient gets upset and becomes uncooperative, stop and try again later.

14. When the patient wakes up from a nap or a night's sleep, he may be more disoriented than usual. Expect this and be prepared to orient him through general conversation.

15. Do not disagree with made up stories. Instead, gently correct the patient to avoid increasing his anxiety. If the patient mumbles incoherently or rambles, attempt to reduce this by directing him with an activity.

16. Be consistent. If you say that you are going to do something, follow through with it.

17. If the patient repeatedly asks a question, remember that he cannot remember the answer you have just given him. Instead of answering the question after a second or this repetition, reassure the patient that everything is fine and that you will be with him and will help him.

18. Repeating the same act may be meaningful for the patient and provide relief of tension. For example, the patient may spend 20 minutes contentedly wiping the kitchen counter. If the activity does not seem to be upsetting the patient, let him continue. If it upsets you, try to gently redirect his activity by giving him something else to do.

19. Use gestures when appropriate. Point to objects or demonstrate an action, such as brushing your teeth.

20. Do not argue over the correct answer. Relatives are often confused. He may call you his mother and mean his wife. Also remember he may be speaking his reality. If he says it is winter even though it is the middle of July, it may feel like, look like, and be what "winter" is for him.

21. If you do get angry, use "I" statements as opposed to "you" statements. Example: "I'm feeling angry, I need to rest now," instead of "You make me so angry, I can't stand to be here." Accusing him of causing your bad feelings is fruitless. He can't change his behavior for you. Also, he is frightened to see you angry at him when he feels so helpless. Talk to a friend when you need to blow off steam. Support groups are a great place for this. You will be relieved you did not yell at him after things have settled down.

22. When he is no longer able to communicate verbally, keep talking to him about those things that were important to him, such as yourself, family member, etc. Speak clearly, say names of people he loved, touch him, massage his arms, feet, head and back. Touching is the greatest communicator of love.

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Resources on Aging

Iowa Department on Aging

https://www.iowaaging.gov/iowa-department-aging

Iowa Alzheimer's Association

www.alz.org/greateriowa

Elderbridge Agency on Aging

elderbridge.org

Iowa Longterm Care Ombudsman

https://www.iowaaging.gov/long-term-care-ombudsman

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Death with Dignity vs. Death with Faith
By Rev. Max Phillips

Leader's Guide

About this study…

While many Bible study guides provide the leader answers, this one invites the leader to change his/her role into one of discussion facilitator. With God's help, the discussion among Christian brothers and sisters will be guided to a better understanding of the God-given value of life for His human creatures. In addition, it is my prayer that they will see the subtle but deadly nature of the debate from the enemy.

If the goal is for this to be 45 minutes of study, I have failed. If your time frame is short, I invite you to choose only a portion of the study or use it over the course of several study opportunities. My hope is that the examples used will lead you to a more intimate discussion surrounding episodes of this topic in your own life, family and ministry.

While there could have been many aspects of Human Care while dying, I chose specifically the "physician assisted suicide" issue which is targeting our state for legalization and public acceptance. I urge you to invite your fellow studiers to consider becoming active in the defense of life. For the past year, Perry Lutheran Home and Lutheran Family Service have been in partnership in defending life against this effort to devalue life. In this effort we have worked with many partners and seek even more who stand for the sanctity of life as a gift from the Creator to us. Please consider inviting a team of presenters from these two organizations of our church to come to your congregation to present on this subject and to help make a difference in your community and in the public square. Time is short. The General Assembly convenes in January and there will be a forceful push by those supporting choice in death. Please join us!

To learn more or schedule a presentation, contact Kim Laube (klaube@lfsiowa.org) at Lutheran Family Service or Quinn Adair (quinn.adair@perrylutheranhome.org) at Perry Lutheran Home.

It is my sincere hope that we might all consider how we can better support the dying and their families as individuals and the Church. Please end the study with a discussion on "now what?" May it be a powerful time of brainstorming and a call to action in which everyone can find a role so that we might love others even more, as our Savior loves us.

For more information contact:
Rev. Max Phillips
Executive Director, Lutheran Family Service
Email: rev.max.phillips@gmail.com
Office Phone: 515-573-3138

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CHURCH WORKER WELLNESS

(Leader Guide)

The well-being of those in ministry has a significant impact on the health, growth, and strength of the body of Christ. Well-being among ministers struggling with the everyday challenges of ministry needs to be addressed, both for the good of the workers themselves, and to be good stewards of the ministry. The goal of This Bible study is not only to help our ministers work towards being healthier and happier, but to extend the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all of the places so desperately in need of the love of Christ by taking care of those ministers.

Our Responsibility to Care for Our Body:

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: *"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." (ESV)*

1. Realizing these verses come from Paul's section of this epistle in which he calls believers to flee sexual immorality, he also speaks to the care of the body. Why do we have a responsibility to care for our bodies?

Our need to care for the body comes as a result of the fact that our body is a gift from God. We are stewards of the body as we are stewards of all that God gives to us. In addition, our body is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and as a result we would want the best temple for His dwelling. Having been bought back through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we are actually given the grace and power to honor God with our bodies.

2. What kinds of things challenge appropriate care for our bodies in the ministry?

Answers will vary but there are any numbers of things that challenge appropriate care for the body in the ministry including the sedentary lifestyle that can come about as a result of the amount of time spent in study and preparation, the many meals and lunches provided, etc.

3. In what ways does caring for our bodies contribute to a healthy ministry?

Answers will vary but physical heath contributes to greater energy, greater mental awareness, greater use of time, etc.

Read Romans 12:1: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."*

4. What does it mean to present your bodies to God?

Once again as a matter of the stewardship of God's gifts to us, we present or make available our bodies for use in His kingdom.

5. How is that a matter of spiritual worship?

A Christian life is, above all things, the response of impassioned gratitude and obligation to God's sacrificial giving and forgiving. While ancient worship involved the bodily sacrifice of animals, our bodies used in response to God's grace is also a sacrificial matter of worship.

Dealing With Unresolved Sin and Its Effect on Health

Read Psalm 38:3-8: *"There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart." (ESV)*

6. In what ways does sin affect health, spiritually and physically?

Unresolved sin and guilt can lead to depression, fear, inappropriate behaviors and addictions. In addition, it can and does affect the physical body unless appropriately resolved. Sinful behavior leading to such things as drunkenness or addictive behavior can likewise cause spiritual suffering and physical harm to the body.

7. How can having a "Father Confessor" for private confession and absolution be of great benefit?

As we learn in the catechism "Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts." There is always great benefit in confession and absolution and especially when plagued with some sin or guilt that attacks body and soul. As recorded in James 5:16 "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

8. How does one go about finding a "Father Confessor" in the ministry?

Answers will vary. Hopefully individuals will share their own experience in doing so.

9. At what point should a professional church worker seek professional counsel to deal with sinful and addictive behaviors?

Answers will vary but this ought to happen especially when those behaviors are affecting marriage, family, service in the Church, or one's own faith. Being willing to identify this and acknowledging the issues is critical for professional counsel to benefit the individual.

10. What keeps professional church workers from seeking help? How might this be overcome?

Answers will vary but may include pride, overconfidence or even a misunderstanding of the danger and harm. Encourage brainstorming on how we can raise awareness of the help available and remove the stigma.

Read Psalm 103:1-5: *"Bless the LORD, O my Soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (ESV)*

11. According to the Psalmist, what benefit comes from complete absolution of sin that pertains to personal and ministerial health and well-being?

When personal sin and guilt is forgiven and assured in the complete forgiveness of God for all our sins, we are blessed to be able to move on in His steadfast love and mercy and bless or praise God with our lives in ministry. We can move from being stuck in the pit of guilt to being lifted from that guilt to find the satisfaction of the good things God has for us. This also enables a pastor or professional church worker to also bring the same good benefit to others.

12. Where is the sole satisfaction of good things to be found in our wretched lives?

It is found only in the mercy, love and forgiveness of our God that we personally receive and to which we cling by God's grace.

13. How does this fit in with the ministry to which God has called you to offer others?

Answers should vary and this is a great time for open and honest discussion

Dealing With Stress and Ministerial Health

Read Matthew 11:28-29: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (ESV)*

14. What does it mean that Christ will give rest?

This is the "Noah (whose name signifies rest) rest" which is a protection and security kind of rest especially in times of deep stress and anxiety. Christ is our rest for those that by a lively faith come to him for it; rest from the terror of sin, in a well-grounded peace of conscience; rest from the power of sin, a rest in God, and in his love (Ps. 11:6,7). This is that rest which remains for the people of God (Heb. 4:9), begun in grace, and perfected in glory.

15. What is meant by Christ's yoke being easy and His burden being light?

The yoke of Christ's commands is an easy yoke; it is "chreμstos," not only easy, but gracious. So the word signifies; it is sweet and pleasant; there is nothing in it to irritate us, nothing to hurt us, but, on the contrary, present to refresh us. It is a yoke that is lined with love.

16. How can this promise help in times of stress and anxiety?

Answers will vary and this becomes a great opportunity for discussion and perhaps even personal reflection of how this has proven true in participants' lives.

Read Philippians 4:4-7: "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (ESV)*

17. What does Paul say precedes "not being anxious about anything" and how does that work?

Rejoicing in the Lord precedes not being anxious about anything. It works because in our focus on God and His goodness, our spiritual worship goes toward Him rather than toward ourselves and our anxious concerns.

18. What accompanies “not being anxious about anything”?

Prayer and thanksgiving accompany the rejoicing and laying the anxieties of life on the Lord.

19. Define the “peace which surpasses all understanding” and how it has been experienced in your personal life.

Answers will vary.

Read 3 John 1-4: “*The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” (ESV)*

20. Here we find John praying for Gaius and for his health which accompanies what?

Walking in the truth of God’s Word accompanies good health and wellness for the soul. When there is conflict pertaining to this matter, there is conflict within the church, within the souls of those who minister in the church and that certainly affects the ministerial health and well-being of an individual.

21. What does such prayer for the brethren in ministry suggest to you for their ministerial health and well-being?

It suggests that perhaps we should be praying for the same concern for others. This would be a good time to invite the participants to match up and pray for one another.

22. What do you believe God would have you do as a result of this study?

Answers will vary.

Conclude with Prayer and the Benediction.

An excellent resource that has been utilized in some of our circuits is produced by Shepherd’s Canyon Retreat, a Social Ministry Organization of the LCMS. It is titled *The Pastor-People-Project* and is available from the District office. Please contact Jill Davis (515-576-7666 or jill.davis@idwlcms.org) to request it.

For more information contact:
Rev. Phill Andreasen
IDW Chaplain to Church Workers
Email: phill.andreasen@idwlcms.org
Phone: 712-330-0472

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