



Happy New Year from the Augustana District!

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission is central to Christ's church, it's central to us as individuals as well. As Christians we, as individuals, are part of the body of Christ and so we make up His church. Therefore, as we go, so the church goes. Granted this seems a bit simplistic but, on the large scale, it's true.

If we step back and look at the large-scale body of Christ on earth, i.e. the church, we recognize the vital importance of Jesus' commission to us. As you are going, make disciples and, in addition, baptize them and teach them. This is our calling, our purpose. We do this because "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to" Jesus our Lord.

Christ has authority, he calls and sends his church to go. We know from both the Old and New Testaments that God calls people to 'go' all the time. He calls them to move, to preach, to warn, and to tell. He calls us to go too. The call to some is move, to some preach, to some warn and to some tell. But be assured, he calls us. He calls you. You are called to serve the world. You may serve through serving the church and strengthening those called to move, or preach or tell. You may type or clean or teach. You may share your faith and invitation to God's love in line at the grocery store. Christ has all authority and he has called you into action!

Perhaps you are called into missionary service, or into teaching, or into administration, or into hands-on outreach, or intercession, or writing or singing or ... whatever. You are called to serve and that service results in going, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching. To answer our calls, we are sent by the Holy Spirit, and we are trained and prepared by the people God puts before us. Our preparation includes worship and learning. As Luther said in his explanation of the third commandment, "We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." Worship and learning are integral parts of our callings.

You are called, and remain in training and preparation to fulfill God's call which works for God's plan for his Holy Kingdom. As you go, as you rock the babies, sweep the floor, stand in line at the post office, teach the confirmation class, attend Bible study, change the paraments, walk with your neighbor and serve the Lord, remember that the one who called you goes with you. He is always with you. He loves you and he is with you. So, go. Go make disciples. Baptize, teach, and go some more.

Savior, Jesus Christ, strengthen us as we seek to answer your call and your commission, Amen.

Pastor Becky Hand



Theology, Church, Mission

by Pastor Culynn Curtis



In the Great Commission, Jesus charges his apostles using four key verbs to shape the ministry of the church: Go...make...baptize...teach. Churches of every stripe are coming up with all sorts of ways to be the church in hopes to be “biblical” and “relevant.” They hope their congregational members will be disciples of Jesus as if the two are not already synonymous. Some use community service as an entry point; others engage family and friends in small groups or fellowship events.

Over the past several months, this publication has highlighted the unique and creative ways in which congregations throughout the Augustana District have shaped new ministries and reimaged staff configurations to serve the larger church. It has been inspiring to read about congregations who are facing this new era of ministry by listening deeply to the Holy Spirit, are guided by God’s Word, and creatively engaging in real-life ministry.

At the core of the Great Commission, however, and (not surprisingly) is the expectation that our culture has of “church:” the preacher still plays a vital role. When Gallup asked the question, “Why do people (still) go to church?”, no Lutherans were surprised to read that that 75% of church-goers attend because they want Scripture-based sermons that are relevant for their lives. While the pastor’s ministry is not the only ministry of the church, the church still raises up and calls faithful women and men to preach and teach and to administer the sacraments.

Congregations may be as creative as they want to meet the needs of God’s people—both inside and outside the church, but we still need pastors who are charged to carry out the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Even if the church is socializing in the fellowship hall or serving the community, the church will cease to be the church if there is no voice calling from her pulpits with the saving and life-giving message that for Christ’s sake, God forgives your sins.

Who will we call to be our pastors? Where will they be faithfully trained in matters of Scripture, theology, and pastoral ministry? How is the current generation of pastors seeking to raise up and support new generations of pastors? It is with these questions in mind that the Board for Theology & Ministry will host its annual Theological Conference, February 5-6, on the campus of Sioux Falls Seminary, Sioux Falls, SD. Our theme is “Lutheran Pastors for Changing Times.” This conference is a summons for the whole church: seminary partners, pastors, congregational leaders and members. The conference will engage us—current seminary leaders, pastors who care about congregations, and congregational leaders who care about pastoral ministry—in important conversations about the health, vitality, and long-term ministry of the church’s preaching office...not for the sake of the church alone, but for the sake of the Gospel, so that God’s kingdom will continue to come among us to the glory of God.

¹http://news.gallup.com/poll/208529/sermon-content-appeals-churchgoers.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_content=morelink&utm_campaign=syndication