

A 'Primary Duty' of Your Church?

By Rev. Dan Gilbert, Northern Illinois District President
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It is a primary duty of a confessionally faithful synod that it take an enthusiastic part in all God-pleasing organizations dedicated to the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world. That is the duty of every synod, including our own. It is to join the ranks of that great army of laborers in the harvest field of Christ. For the harvest has long been "dead ripe." It should cooperate with every organization of both home and foreign missions for the spreading of the Holy Scriptures. That also applies to the establishment and preservation of institutions for the preparation of pastors. In short, a synod is to be a living member of the body of Christ, and together with every other living member of that most sacred body in the world, it must do whatever it possibly can to spread Christ's kingdom and wherever possible, to win for Christ and to lead into His sheepfold all those whom Christ has bought with His precious blood, and ultimately lead them in the salvation of everlasting life.

The Great Divide

What do you think of that paragraph above? If you don't like it, I'm not offended; if you do like it, I don't take credit. That's because I didn't write it.

Know who did? (Drum roll): C. F. W. Walther, the first president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, first president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and prolific author of lots of good biblical and confessional books and articles.

I took this quote from his pamphlet, "Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod," available from Concordia Publishing House.

Please notice: Walther says it is "a duty," not "the duty." We have a lot of other duties as well, such as guarding our life and doctrine, caring for our own members, and serving the needs of people both in and out of the family of faith.

But, often we fall into the trap of saying that one thing or another is "the most important thing" in the life of a church. In our Synod it often is the tension between doctrine and mission—which one is more important?

Many of you have heard this from me before, but here it is again: either without the other is total loss, like a bicycle with only one good wheel. No matter how strong the good one is, if one is missing or ruined the bike is going nowhere.

Time Well Spent

I recently spent a Saturday morning and afternoon at Immanuel, Belvidere, for a Rural and Small Town Mission workshop put on by the Synod's national office, and it was time very well spent.

Here's the good news: there were six congregations there. Here's the bad news: there were six congregations there.

We have about 50 congregations in rural or small town communities. (Synod defines that as non-suburban communities smaller than 15,000.)

So, I have to be honest and say I was a bit disappointed that there weren't more at this Synod event, especially since I had so strongly encouraged participation at our recent district convention.

However, there WERE six congregations there, one very large one and five smaller ones, all very engaged, all earnestly and prayerfully seeking to carry out missions, which is a primary duty of a congregation of Synod. They all came away with new ideas and plans for serving their communities. Thanks be to God.

The primary duty that our Lord took upon himself was to rescue lost and undeserving sinners. He paid the price for that on the cross. And he chooses to use us forgiven sinners to take that gift to all our neighbors, near and far.

Questions to Ask

I'm closing with a few questions, and I ask you to discuss them within your congregation—pastor(s), staff, elders, leaders, members:

- Are we carrying out this primary duty as a confessional Lutheran church? And if we say 'Yes,' what are we actually doing?
- Is it part of our prayers at every service that the Lord *keep us faithful and make us fruitful*, bringing new believers to faith in our congregation and around the world?
- Does our budget reflect our engagement in this primary duty of missions? And if not, what do we need to change?
- Do we support and engage in this duty as men and women, boys and girls together in the Northern Illinois District—so that our gifts, talents and resources can partner with those who ask for help in becoming effective missionaries in their communities as well?

May the Holy Spirit guide you as you seek his will for your church.