

# A Proposal for Your Planning: Make Worship Central



**LIFE  
LINES**

Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.  
District President

Since we are publishing *Lutheran Life* only every two months due to escalating postage costs, we have expanded the number of pages and added a special focus for each issue. This time we are focusing on parish planning.

**A congregation's worship life should be central to the planning process ... If worship attracts the greatest number of people and collectively results in the greatest expenditure of time, should not this receive the top priority in a congregation's life? And, when this is rightly emphasized, it can provide perspective and impetus for the other activities which we plan.**

As my contribution to this subject, I am recommending that a congregation's worship life should be central to the planning process. Isn't worship where the greatest number of members and visitors gather at one time? Isn't worship on the schedule every week throughout the year? If worship attracts

the greatest number of people and collectively results in the greatest expenditure of time, should not this receive the top priority in a congregation's life? And, when this is rightly emphasized, it can provide perspective and impetus for the other activities which we plan.

When it comes to planning, there are many things which influence us. In my experience, the school year provided substantial input for the planning process. The youth Confirmation program was affected by the school year. Many a congregation's organizations meet during the school year, but not during summer vacation. A congregation's fiscal year often impacts when a congregation will stress stewardship of money and the development of its ministry spending plan (budget).

Congregations living in rural areas will have their activities influenced by what the farmers must do and when they must do it to grow their crops

or gather the fruit of vine and tree. Congregations living in communities where institutions of higher learning or military installations are located will necessarily need to take into account their impact when it comes time to plan. Many congregations in Florida would be foolish not to take into account the presence of snowbirds.

Here's my suggestion as you do your planning: take into account these various schedules and the influence they bring into the planning process. Consider what needs emphasis in your congregation. Do you need to have a strong emphasis on Bible study to help your members grow to

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maturity in Christ? Do you need an emphasis which helps the families of your congregation do a better job of rearing their children as God's children? Do you need to help your congregation be more externally focused through service in the community and witness to others? Does your congregation have a major challenge in helping people discover the privilege, responsibility and joy of Biblical stewardship? Does your congregation need help in overcoming strife and division and working together as a team? Does your congregation have facility needs to assist you in meeting the needs of your membership and reaching out to the community?

Seeking to answer questions like these and taking into account the "givens" of your setting — schedules, work, school, etc. — prepare you to build your plan for working together in the coming year. My conviction is, however, that no matter what you determine you need to emphasize and do, the key to doing it well as the people of God is your worship life. This is what needs to overlay your plans, provide direction for them, and grant power for implementing them. Let me attempt to share why I believe this to be so.

Our traditional Lutheran worship, together with other liturgical churches, offers two key ingredients for helping us plan well: (1) the church year, which gives us an overview of salvation history into which we have been grafted by God's grace, and (2) a liturgy which draws on rich Biblical language to foster our relationship with God and with one another.

I often wonder whether we know the wealth we enjoy in the church year. By going through the various seasons of the church year, we are helped to know Christ and what it means to follow Him. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and the long Pentecost season each make their contribution to help us grow in our faith, know the story of salvation, receive

its benefits and be taught its meaning for Christian living. The lessons which are appointed for the different Sundays of the Christian calendar give us a rich overview of what is important in the Christian life, reflecting not just an individual's pet themes but the wisdom of the church's mind.

If our worship is that place and time when we intentionally focus on hearing from God, being confronted by His Word to recognize, acknowledge, and admit our sinfulness and being comforted by its forgiveness, grace and power, then it seems to me that we who are involved in worship leadership would do well to expend significant energy into planning our worship well.

We are bombarded with countless stimuli each day. Advertisers exercise great ingenuity and creativity to get our attention and get their message through to us. Messages pop up on the internet. The ads on television have sounds which are striking; colors that are eye-catching. In many ways, it is stimulation overload, but that is the world in which we find ourselves. Because the message which is at the center of our worship is that which can help us make sense of all the stimuli we receive in the workplace, at home, in the community and on the ball field, it is critical that we so couch the message and its context that it has the most potential for getting through to us worshippers.

In view of this, I urge our pastors to be heavily involved in the worship planning process. Meet with your musicians to plan the themes of the worship services so that the selection of hymns and special music re-

**Because worship is this lively connection between God, us and one another, I believe it is the critical component in parish planning. Let this aspect of parish life be given its proper place, and we will find both direction and power for carrying out our responsibilities at home, in the workplace and in the community.**

The rhythm of the church year and the liturgy can be most powerful in helping us make our way through the seasons of life. Whether its focus is the mystery of creation at the beginning of time or the majesty of the consummation at the end, or the journey into between the beginning and the end, the liturgy helps us follow our Lord Jesus on the pilgrimage of faith.

Think of the things we often seek to build into our plans for our congregations: emphasis on stewardship, Christian marriage, family living, responsibility in the workplace, Christian citizenship, Christian education for children, youth and adults, buildings to accommodate these programs. If we want to have the mind of Christ in these matters, won't it help to draw on the wisdom that the church has identified for knowing Christ, His love and His will for our lives — the wisdom which is embedded in the lectionary and liturgy?

enforces the accents of the day. Plan emphases for the whole year so that the "whole counsel of God" is given its due and the worshippers are helped toward genuine Christian maturity. Work with worship participants, so that readers read the lessons well, the ushers are courteous and help people sense that they are welcome, and this event is the highpoint of the week.

Since worship is that dedicated time and place for meeting with God, let us preachers spend the quality time we need to get ready for our sermons, so we sincerely sense its meaning for ourselves and then figure out ways to craft it so that its meaning touches the lives of our hearers. If our preaching is a key component to our worship life, then let us take the time so that we know both our hearers and the Word of God and in this way can make meaningful connections between the two.

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Every congregation is a church in mission, and every member is a missionary; with all of us working together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, empowered by His Gospel to share His love.

Lutheran LIFE is the official newspaper of the Florida-Georgia District/Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Lutheran LIFE is designed to inform LCMS church and school members of the activities, the personalities and resources offered by the Synod and the District. Lutheran LIFE may also provide a forum for Lutherans to express their views and ideas on a wide range of topics. We welcome and encourage editorials, emphasizing that the views and opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the editors or District or Synod personnel. Lutheran LIFE is published monthly, with occasional combined bimonthly issues. Editorials, press releases and photos are encouraged and must be received at Lutheran LIFE publication offices no later than the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to the publication date. While we make every attempt to use submitted information in the next issue of LIFE, space considerations prevent us from guaranteeing that stories will be used immediately. Advertising is welcome; information is available from our production office. Changes of address or new subscriber information should be directed to our production office as well.

District President  
Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael Jr.

Florida-Georgia District Office:  
Lutheran Ministries Center  
7207 Monetary Drive  
Orlando, Florida 32809-5724  
Telephone: (407) 857-5556  
FAX: (407) 857-5665  
www.flga-lcms.org

Lutheran Life  
Editorial & Publishing Office:  
One South Ocean Blvd., Suite 11  
Boca Raton, Florida 33432  
Telephone: (561) 417-5605  
FAX: (561) 417-5606  
e-mail: LutheranLife@aol.com

Publisher, Executive Editor and  
District Public Relations Director  
John List

Editor-in-Chief  
Eileen Bishop

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Chris Utech

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