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LUTHER'S PRIESTHOOD  
OF BELIEVERS



A SIMPLE MODEL FOR  
21ST CENTURY DISCIPLES

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# Introduction

This little book is based on the belief that the renewal of the church is grounded in Jesus Christ and in his commitment to work in and through the lives of his followers. When the church recovers this simple truth it will find itself ready to release an amazingly powerful group of people into the world to embody the presence of Christ and to do the work of God in increasingly confident and intentional ways. The vast majority of these people are currently captive to a worldview and a culture that limits their ability to see what God is doing in their lives and the world around them.

While the Reformation was one of the most important periods in the church's history, it is often misunderstood. This is especially true for many Protestants who come from the primary traditions of the Reformation. As a Lutheran, it is clear that many Lutherans take great pride in the insights and outcomes of the Reformation. It represents a time when God's word was recaptured and reclaimed. We hear of heroic people like Martin Luther, who rose up with courage to change the church with bold speeches containing phrases like "Here I stand." It is this almost legendary stuff that is celebrated and remembered as forming the roots of our faith. The same is true for other Reformation traditions. John Calvin, John Huss and others are models of courage and progress. The work

they did seems somehow not only worthy of ongoing attention – in some cases it is almost worthy of worship.

Yet the truth is much more complex. It is easy to forget that the purpose of the Reformation was not to start a new church – it was to reform the old one. Although many Lutherans have seen the Augsburg Confession as a sort of Declaration of Independence or a theological Bill of Rights, the truth is that in 1530 when it was presented it was to be a last ditch effort to stay connected to Rome. Although the content was good, it failed in its original purpose. Like it or not, the existence of the Lutheran Church was "plan B." Only as a result of that failure did further spinoffs occur. The work of other reformers that led to additional traditions – Calvinist, Anabaptist, and others – took place because the church left by the evangelical reformers was fragmented and in a state of flux. There was space and sometimes even a vacuum left behind.

One of the decisions that had to be made occurred when the reformers went to plan B. Prior to that, there had been impromptu decision making and structures were of little concern. But when it became clear that the evangelicals would need to begin their own church, there was little time for a full-scale discussion of ministry and ecclesiology.

Therefore, two things happened that set the stage for ministry within the emerging Protestant churches. First, the structure of the

church looked remarkably like the Roman church from which they came. Lutherans even had geographic areas that were overseen by bishops (renamed superintendents in Germany). Congregations continued to function, now under new oversight, and the pastors initially came from the ranks of Roman Catholic priests. Both the ecclesiology and the clericalism of the Roman church were maintained.

Why, in a movement grounded in the ministry of all the baptized and with a commitment to laity having a voice in their church would these two things both be lost, or at least emphasized to such a small degree?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that the development of a protestant church truly was an unforeseen alternative when the work of reform began. The vision had not included the development of these things within a new system, only trying to integrate these into the reformation of the old one.

When there was no system within which they could place these ideas, a framework first had to be quickly built. To delay would mean a loss of momentum and certain failure. The reformers worked with what they had: a Roman Catholic model, a group of clergy who were not very competent, and an uneducated laity. To wait for the laity to be clear enough to be a resource would take too long. Their development would have to wait. Ordained priests would have to form the skeleton for leadership and ministry.

The repercussions of this are still being felt. Conversations take place among professors, theologians and pastors about the ministry of the baptized, lay ministry or the priesthood of all believers. There is little resistance at the theoretical level. In fact, in theory almost everyone is on the same page. The line between clergy and lay is a thin one and primarily understood around role, gifts and order. There is no hierarchy that can be justified.

Unfortunately, reality often takes place outside of people's theoretical ideas. Structures, values and learned behaviors all reside deep in the system of the church and in the psyche of people – both laity and clergy. Pastors are paid to do ministry. The language is clear. People change professions and leave teaching, engineering, parenting and other things to “go into the ministry.” Seminarians are honored for hearing God's call as they choose to work for the church.

Most others are less affirmed or even ignored by the church when they decide what to do with their lives. It often doesn't even cross their mind that as they choose to become teachers, doctors, farmers or other things that God's work is integral to how they use their time and talents as well. In some ways, we are not so far ahead of the days when becoming a monk or a nun was seen as serving God and everyone else was just working to get by. We almost all know better when we are questioned. But the power of culture and systems is that the

values at the core almost always win the day-to-day struggles of life. The daily work of lay people and the priestly role that all Christians play in their lives is largely ignored.

To be a priest is to stand in the experiential space between God and others. Each of us is not only called to carry on the work of Jesus (like a continuing movement). We are also called to be the presence of Christ who is the mediator between God and humanity. While all of us have access to God's presence, most of us often need that presence to be manifested in the flesh of another person. To take on that role is to be priest for someone. It is a role all Christians are granted in baptism. "United with Christ" (Romans 6), we then serve as "Christ for each other" (Luther).

With that clarification, we now turn our attention to something that Martin Luther wrote about Christians being priests. The sections that follow are based on Luther's reading of 1 Peter's thoughts about the priestly role of those who are followers of Jesus.

# Luther's Priesthood of All Believers

Martin Luther was very clear that being an ordained priest did not give one any special access to God. As he read the Bible and reflected on life within the church he recognized that the power of Jesus Christ came as a gift to all Christians, not as a privilege for some. While Luther saw priests as important for the life of the church, especially as a group to give clear proclamation of the gospel for the whole church, he did not see them as having either power or even ability that was not accessible for all Christians. The gift came to the whole church, not to a special few individuals. The charge to be priests came at baptism for everyone.

One of the clearest places to read this material is in Luther's commentary on 1 Peter 2:4-10. In his commentary on this passage he sees Christ as the high priest and the gospel transforming each of us into priests as well. The text of this chapter reads:

Coming to him as a living stone, rejected by mortals, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in scripture '*Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed.*' This precious value,

then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, '*The stone which the builders rejected has become the very cornerstone.*' and '*a stone of stumbling and rock of offense.*' for they stumble because they are so disobedient to the word and to this doom they were appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light; for once you were no people but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

(1 Peter 2:4-10 NRSV)

As he comments on the above scripture passage, you will see that Luther's focus is on Christ first and then on Christ's followers. The reason is that for Luther, being a priest is not about the individual. It is about Jesus. So Luther can say:

Now Christ is the High and Chief Priest anointed by God Himself. He also sacrificed His own body for us, which is the highest function of the priestly office. Then He prayed for us on the cross. In the third place, He also proclaimed the Gospel and taught all men (sic) to know God and Him Himself. These three offices He also gave to all of us. Consequently, since He is the Priest and we are His brothers, all Christians have the authority, the command, and the obligation to preach, to come before God to pray for one another, and to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God.

LW, Volume 30, 1 Peter 2:6

Here we can clearly see that Luther sees Jesus Christ as the one true high priest. It is like

much of Luther's thought to look to the cross to understand what God is up to. At the cross we see Jesus offer himself up for our sake as a sacrifice. At the cross we see Jesus pray – even for those who have hung him there. And at the cross we hear Jesus declare God's promise of eternal life and the word of the gospel.

These are the three functions of a priest for Luther: sacrifice, prayer and proclamation. Because we see them in the life and death of Jesus we know that they are integral to his own ministry and identity. Because Jesus is the “High and Chief priest anointed by God Himself” we know that his ministry is the model for all priestly ministries. Luther finds these to be the essential core of priestly ministry because, even at the cross, Jesus cannot stop doing them. They are central to his identity and so intrinsic in who he is that he continues to carry out this work, even with nails in his hands and feet, thorns pressed into his forehead, and in the midst of painful gasps for air as he hung, slowly dying on the cross.

Because we are joined to Jesus as his brothers and sisters we are granted the authority to carry on this work and also charged with making sure it happens. This is the job description for the “priesthood of all believers.” Each person is connected by faith to the ministry of Jesus and called to preach, pray and sacrifice in Jesus' name. It is this connection that Luther makes and which gives us insight. When he states, “all Christians have the

authority, the command, and the obligation to preach, to come before God to pray for one another, and to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God” he makes the move from Jesus' ministry to ours.

It is worth noting that Luther is very focused here. Luther doesn't see this as a question of gifts where some are good at praying so they should pray, some are good at speaking so they should proclaim, and some are better at living sacrificially so they should act. No! Luther clearly sees this as including “all Christians!” While how we carry this work out will vary with our personal contexts, gifts, skills and life's work, everyone is to do all of these aspects of the work. And the authority to do this for Luther also comes with the responsibility to do it, so in addition to encouraging us to believe we have the authority, he also wants to be sure we hear that we have “command” and “obligation” as well. This is not optional material. This lies at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

# Proclamation

Proclamation can take many forms but at its most basic it involves speaking the gospel - sharing it with the neighbor. It is oral and involves the use of words. The old adage, often attributed to St. Francis is, “Preach the gospel always. Use words if necessary.” There is little evidence that St. Francis said this, nor is there much in the Bible that would point to words as somehow optional. The gospel is ultimately a message. It comes as good news. It is something to be shared and is grounded in the story of Jesus. Words are usually necessary.

This is not to say that our actions are unimportant. Of course they matter. A message with integrity will match the actions of the person who bears it. Many regard the actions of the disciples after the resurrection as the primary “evidence” for resurrection. It changed their lives. People who fled or denied Jesus before the cross were now boldly going out and telling about him. Something pretty big had changed in their lives! The gospel, when believed, is the basis for a whole new way of living. But that does not mean that actions replace words. In fact, the word about Jesus brings about new ways of living. We will explore this further in the next section on sacrifice.

In spite of this fact, many mainline Christians today would say that their primary

witness is in how they live their lives, most with no attention to how they use words to share the gospel. When asked about how they witness in daily life the most common answers seem to be, “I try to be a good person,” “I try to be honest and helpful,” and “I try to treat people nicely.” The assumption is that being honest and helpful is a witness. There are flaws in this thinking.

The first flaw is that if you don’t tell people why you are honest, nice, etc. that they are unlikely to figure out that it is because of Jesus. People who don’t know the story of Jesus and don’t know of your commitment to him have no basis to hear the gospel in the actions of seemingly kind-hearted folks. Words are needed in order to make the connection. A second flaw is that there are plenty of seemingly nice and honest people out there doing as well or better at kindness than many Christians. I heard anecdotally that the average atheist gives away slightly more money to charities than the average churchgoing person. If performance alone is the message, then believing in God the way many Christians do does not seem to increase generosity.

Other flaws include, do we assume that God only acts in Christians? Do we assume that the best witness to God is based on life performance goals alone? And does the moralism that many equate with this actually preclude the bold witness and courageous actions that God calls forth as the reign of God breaks in to a world that misses God’s work

often? Much of what we have defined as action for witness are simply reflections of the culture in which we find ourselves or of values that are held across many human lines. God is bigger than the church and more powerful than our good deeds.

In order to be effective in our priestly roles in the world, each person will need to be equipped to speak. Luther believed that the way to the heart is through hearing. We are addressed by the gospel as a message that comes from outside of us, directed by God to us. God speaks to us and we receive. This is consistent with the message of Paul in Romans, “How can they believe what they have not heard?”

(Romans 10:14)

To be effective at this work, then a recovery of biblical literacy will be essential. This will involve reacquainting people with the biblical story. More people in our congregations have seen Charlton Heston carry the Ten Commandments down the mountain on a movie screen than have actually read the book of Exodus. It is essential that we begin to help people reconnect with the story of God’s involvement in our world and begin to study, devotionally read, and to discuss the biblical message.

A second emphasis will come as we discuss the Christian story together. Traditional education has a teacher who teaches and students who listen. This means that only one person practices speaking – the “expert.” The

others listen and take in knowledge to one degree or another. If they speak, it is primarily to ask a question so the speaker can speak again and add clarity to what he or she said. But at the end, the students may not have learned to articulate what they have heard and may not practice speaking. This means that they will be forced to speak for the first time when they are publicly functioning as witnesses. We all know that almost no one feels confident the first time they do anything, even for practice. To expect people to learn by listening and to then succeed by speaking with no practice is a delusional assumption. Good teaching will both give information and provide time for dialogue.

*People will not do in life situations what they have not practiced in the church first!* This is true for praying with people, telling faith stories and most of life’s activities for which the church is equipping people in mission. Leaders would do well to ask themselves, “If we want people to do this during the week, have we given them both instruction and time to practice when they have gathered on Sunday?”

Another key aspect of proclamation comes in testimony. Often when I talk about faith stories people will say, “I don’t think I have one.” Of course they do. A few minutes of discussion and thought about a few questions and they quickly see it. But most people have never been asked to think about how faith matters, where they have experienced God at work, which people have been the hands or



voice of Christ for them, etc. Again, helping people think about their stories and giving them tools and time to share when they gather is essential if they are to actually do this when they are apart.

Finally, people need to be reminded that many circumstances are chances for proclamation. These are often short and situational and may involve only a few words or sentences in the context of a much larger conversation. That means that while the pastor knows ahead of time the text and content of the sermon and even when to give it (usually right after the congregation is seated following the gospel lesson!), people in the field do not have that luxury. Preachers can “prepare a sermon.” But people in the field need to “be prepared” to speak contextually as situations arise. Helping them learn to do this in clear, bold, sensitive and contextually appropriate ways is the task of leadership within the church.

Preparing people takes time and energy. It is often easier to simply have the pastor come and say something to all of us. Done well it can be engaging, informative and helpful. There is nothing wrong with any of those things! However, for people to be equipped to proclaim the good news in their daily lives, the words that the preacher uses to shape the message need to be first words and not last words. The goal is not for the pastor to pronounce something final and for everyone to “ooh” and “aah.” The purpose is for the word to take up residence in

the lives of the people and for the conversation to move from the pastor’s lips to the peoples’ lips.

Post-sermon dialog groups, turn to your neighbor time in the pews, connections to small groups, and many other things are essential if the work is not to end with the sermon, but rather begin. In addition, if the pastor can make space and allow lay members to find chances to share and speak to the faith community, this will model that more than one person here has something to say about how God is at work in the world. Being creative in this allows people to recognize that they do have something to say and to find their own voices for this work.

Another service that congregations can provide is situationally reflecting and role-playing. For example, what are the situations in which people routinely find themselves? What kinds of conversations are they having? What are the culturally shaped norms that define those encounters? Helping people think about what to say instead of the world’s pre-programmed responses can open many doors. So, when someone says, “How are you” (and you are supposed to respond, “fine.”), what can you say instead? One woman decided to say, “I am richly blessed,” instead and found herself having all sorts of new conversations. Another response that someone has found helpful is, “I’m grateful.” It catches people’s attention and points them beyond the superficial ways that we

are often taught to relate to each other in the world.

Ultimately, the church will need to make some significant changes in how it does its work. The longstanding tradition of sitting people facing forward in rows and listening to one person who spent a whole day preparing then talk for 15 minutes is no longer enough. If the pastor can't talk about this without a day a week to get ready, how is a "regular" person ever going to be able to do this? This is not to say that pastors should stop preparing! But it is to say that pastors and other leaders need to change what they are preparing for and what the marks of a good outcome for that work are. If the pastor remains one of only a few who can proclaim, then Luther's charge to all Christians will remain merely a pipe dream.

# Prayer

The first of these functions that we will explore is the call to prayer. For Luther, the gift of Christ's presence in the life of the faithful brings with it an ongoing relationship with God. Through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, Christians are now able to approach God directly – to intercede with God on behalf of others.

Like all actions that Luther sees as “good works” the call to prayer is grounded in the call to love our neighbor. This is an essential aspect, especially in the midst of North American culture.

In the world in which North American Lutheranism must function, there is some awareness of the ability of each individual to approach God. This aspect of Protestant teaching has been internalized well. Many use it as a reason to disconnect from Christian community saying, “I can go to God for myself. I don't need to have some pastor do it for me.”

While this statement is absolutely true, it misses the essence of Luther's understanding of priesthood. A priest is always acting as an agent of God *on behalf of others*. While the presence of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit do mean that we can all speak to God, the gift is not about our right to approach God – at least not apart from our responsibility to bring the concerns of others before God. In other words, the call to acknowledge the right of individuals

to pray is not meaningful in Luther's thought apart from the call to be in community and to live that out in love of neighbor.

This means that while it is wonderful that I can speak to God and raise my concerns, I am charged with praying for my neighbor. This is what it means to be a priest. It is grounded in God's lovingly being present to me and calling me to include my love for my neighbor within that relationship with God. Prayer within the framework of the priesthood of all believers is equally about the right for each of us to pray and about the call to each of us to live out that gift responsibly on behalf of others. Thus, Jesus on the cross did not only pray for himself. He prayed for others, even those who were crucifying him. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The implications for congregations with regard to practicing prayer are obvious. First, prayer needs to be taught as a basic part of the Christian life. Each Sunday when people gather they generally spend a portion of the worship liturgy in prayer. These may be short prayers such as the prayer of the day in the gathering rites. They may be longer times for prayers such as during the prayers of the people.

But leaders need to be challenged with regard to these practices. Who leads these prayers? What modeling is provided? Does it translate into equipping in any way so that people who attend church and are part of these prayers are better able to pray as a result?

It is clear that clericalism is a major enemy of this in the church. Even in the majority of congregations where the assisting minister leads the prayers of the people, the closing petition is led by the presiding minister who often says something like, “Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

What does this communicate? It communicates that while laity may participate in the prayers, the ratification and summation by clergy is still helpful in getting God to listen. By clergy practicing the act of “commending” the prayers, they in a sense stamp their approval on them. Congregations who practice the priesthood of all believers will think how practices like this and others subtly “teach” and what message they bring. They will make adjustments in practice to better model their theology.

In addition, people need space and focus in order to practice this together. As I travel around the country I routinely see people terrified of praying together. Many of them are life long churchgoers who have rarely missed a Sunday. In spite of this, in a church where only three skills are essential (and of which prayer is one of them), few people feel that they have the ability to pray and are afraid to do it in front of others. Again, some of this comes from modeling where pastors have become good at praying aloud with individuals and groups but

have done nothing to equip others. The “skill” of the clergy actually discourages others from trying, for without training many feel inadequate to compete in this area.

A story I have told more than once comes from a story told by Tony Campolo. Shortly after he received his first call as a pastor, a woman in the church came up to him. Apparently his language was too plain and didn’t measure up to the King James language of the previous pastors in the congregation. She told him, “Young man, those are some of the worst prayers that I have ever heard.” Campolo reports responding, “I wasn’t talking to you anyway.”

Helping people to see prayer, not as performance, but as speaking to God is essential. So often in parish life prayer is more about performance than it is about bringing the real concerns of people before a living and active God. Reclaiming that dynamic of real and authentic prayer before God allows people to be real and authentic – often the one thing that performance types of prayers may actually preclude. The wonderful reminder in Romans 8 that “the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words,” can be a helpful reminder that we are not called to find the perfect words when we pray. We are to offer our prayer to the Spirit who will join with us in ways far deeper than even the most flowery and impressive words cannot accomplish. Helping people trust that prayer is something we do WITH God rather

than for an audience will be essential at helping people truly pray together and with and for others.

This means that congregational leaders must foster an environment where people are allowed and encouraged to authentically pray. This may mean small groups and one on one encounters. It will include basic teaching on how to pray and down to earth modeling that helps people see prayer as accessible and helpful rather than distant and contrived.

In addition, healthy leaders will model the priesthood of all believers in their own practices. How many congregations have suffered through cold food at a dinner while they waited for the pastor to come from some conversation and finally say a prayer? Pastors who are equipping will teach others to pray, help others to be competent and confident, and step out of the way to make space for others to share in this work. Asking someone else to be ready to pray before an event is good practice. Freeing them to pray and get things going, even if ordained leaders may not be present for a few minutes longer makes good sense. Being able to participate in a group where laity lead the prayer is essential modeling for pastors who want help people see that all are called to prayer.

Finally, all of this will point people out of the church and into the world. Prayer is not a practice limited to church life. We practice it when we gather so that we can live it when we are sent to be apart. A teacher who understands

that he or she is a priest living that out within the context of a school will soon see praying for fellow teachers, students and their parents as a part of their work. It may not be in the job description, but all who live out their priesthood will recognize that they fail to do their work unless they are praying for the people they encounter in their daily lives. Secular vocations, seen through the lens of the priesthood of all believers, are simply venues for Christians to saturate the world with prayer and to bring the concerns of the world before God.

This means that people need to be taught to pray in two ways. The first is in a general sense. We should routinely be praying for the well-being of those persons to whom we are sent. Regular prayer will include regular concern for the people to whom we have been called to be neighbor. The second prayers are more specific. People routinely have issues arise: someone they love is sick, they lose a job, someone dies – the list is endless. Good teaching about prayer will teach people how to both sustain an ongoing prayer life about the general things that are always present and also how to be intentional about raising specific concerns for those in specific circumstances.

Various ways of praying need to be affirmed in order to help all people become intercessors in meaningful ways. People need to be equipped and able to practice this in their life together. People are unlikely to be effective doing in daily life what they have not even

practiced when they have gathered as a church. If people are not praying regularly during the week, it is often a failure of leadership that has neither taught them nor provided places for them to practice. What are the odds of succeeding at something if you haven't been equipped and have never practiced?

# Sacrifice

Living a cross-centered and servant oriented life is the outcome of a transformed life. The Augsburg Confession shows that as a justifying faith is received (Articles 4 and 5) then what follows is a transformed life (Article 6). The result is a new way of being in the world, grounded in the confidence of God's redeeming love in Christ, and then oriented in a new obedience in love toward the neighbor.

It is impossible to simply spiritualize the Christian life within a Lutheran framework. The incarnation is all about a God who comes down into the world, shares in it even to the point of death, and persists in that love by coming back in the resurrection. This world matters. It is not simply praying or preaching in some disconnected spiritualized way. It is grounded in Christ's encounter and commitment to this world. This continues in our lives as we live out our identity as Christ's body in the world.

Of course, since this is grounded in the cross of Jesus we are immediately confronted with the reality that this is a costly calling. Christians will not be like everyone else. They will be bearers of crosses, taken up in faith, lived out for the sake of the world and as an expression of our love for the neighbors God has given us. This is a reflection of the Christ who died for us and is in us.

All faithful action for Luther is therefore lived outwardly in our love of neighbor. While faith directs us toward God, action is directed toward the world. We are called to be instruments of God's love. Therefore, the way we live our lives becomes the vehicle for mission. Mission is not a special emphasis – it is the essence of life itself.

This was the radical nature of Luther's priesthood of all believers. It honors the daily work of every person. Family, school, jobs, households, neighborhoods were all vehicles for the Christian to live out a faithful life. God claimed the believer in baptism; called them into a ministry of prayer, proclamation and sacrifice; and then used the daily activities they performed as the context for mission. Everyone's work became holy and special. In fact, there was nowhere and nothing in which the Christian was not called to live out their faith.

Oddly enough, being sacrificial may be one of the most helpful aspects of being a part of what God is up to in the world. Combined with proclamation, sacrificial living demonstrates that the words spoken by the church have a deep integrity and the power to transform. While many in our context are thinking about how to get more, the Christian is preoccupied with how to have less. And this is done, not for the sake of some pious, self-righteous outcome where the focus is on how wonderful the Christian is. It is done out of a

desire to be the ongoing presence of Jesus and to carry on the work of Christ in our time.

This becomes the place where people see how transformational faith in Christ can be. While prayers and pious words can be dismissed on their own, when they are backed by a transformed life that is grounded in sacrificially living for the sake of the world and the neighbor, then the actions call for a second look. The life of the person who understands his or her life's work to be priestly in nature, regardless of the occupations and roles they carry out, is a constant witness to the work of God that may have become tangible in Jesus but continues in our own time in the life of Christ's followers.

A caveat here. Just as sacrificial choices give visual cues and integrity to the verbal work of the priest in prayer and proclamation, so the reverse is also true. A "good life" that demonstrates care for others is not a witness apart from the telling of the larger story that creates it. Just as words without deeds are empty and easily dismissed, deeds without words are easily misinterpreted or left to their own. It is the willingness to pray, the clarity of speech and the integrity of sacrificial actions that make the priestly ministry happen.

There appears to be a shift happening in our culture among younger people. There is a willingness to have fewer things, to downsize homes, and commute less in order to have more time for things that matter. Suburbs are not

growing like they once did and many young people are moving back into the city where, despite the fact that higher costs mean less ability to have as much, these people are choosing lives with fewer things. This is in response to the world in which they grew up where people pursued lower costs in order to have bigger homes and more things but at a cost of less time for families, activities, etc. The spiritual hole that they are responding to is a real gap in their lives. And a faith community that can help them make sense of this and reframe their angst and choices in light of what God is up to in Christ will offer a great service to this generation. Sacrificial living, the willingness to intentionally give up something in order to further a greater good, is a paradigm that can be helpful at helping many people reconnect with a gospel that has been somewhat sanitized by our culture.

The church needs to equip people to make sacrificial choices. The call to be an alternative to the dominant culture is essential. As people spend money on all sorts of things they don't need, can Christians live lives that waste less and become more generous for the sake of their neighbors? When others assert their rights can Christians freely give up theirs to express care for someone else? When others are too busy, can Christians step forward and give up time to be the church that is willingly, even enthusiastically, joining in with God's mission in the world?



This is not just within church activities. This is a lifestyle – a way of doing all things. In fact, many Christians spend too much time serving in the church and miss many chances to be servants in the world because they have become members of a Christian ghetto. If the church is to equip people to live sacrificial lives then it must also be sure to point them outward toward life and not keep them turned in on the church.

Ethics, time management, stewardship, lifestyle choices, use of talents, and all sorts of things are at play here. A healthy ministry will help people who are living out their priesthood in their vocations by giving people the tools to navigate their situations and make good choices. They will help people ask, “What is Christ calling me to do now?” when others might simply look for the easiest way out.

# Concluding Thoughts

The church needs to begin by reclaiming vocation and equipping people to carry out their priestly work in the midst of that vocational work, whatever and wherever it may be. While many congregations have “youth ministers,” few see the teachers who teach in the public schools as doing that work. The truth is, they are the front lines of youth ministry in our world. Few see the person who works in the water department, the delivery person, the lawyer, or anyone else as doing ministry – especially as priests in the world. But Luther is clear – your context defines the work you do but your calling is to pray, proclaim and sacrifice for the gospel within that work. The church will employ few of us but all of us are called by God to vocations in a variety of places in our lives. Are we praying for the people we encounter? Have we learned to talk to them about what God is up to in our lives and in theirs? Do our lives sacrificially reflect the impact of Christ in the midst of our actions and choices? Or do we look and sound pretty much like everyone else?

An effective church in mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will equip people for these basic tasks. It will teach people to pray and help them discover what that means within their life’s work. It will help them hear God’s story and then equip them to share it in their daily conversations. And it will help people discern

what Christ is calling them to do and support them as they make sacrificial choices in their lives. This kind of church takes the vocation of each baptized person with utmost seriousness. This kind of church sees the world as the venue for mission and sees church as an equipping and sending point from which the work happens. This kind of church is a vehicle for advancing God’s reign and participating in God’s kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.”

# Questions for Discussion

Since a booklet like this is designed to help people reflect on the practices they currently do in their church life, discussing this with others is an essential part of the work. It allows people to integrate what they read about and to both challenge and enlighten others in the shared work of making sense of the work we do together. You can do this in at least two ways:

One, you can have a single session where everyone has read the booklet ahead and then spend time debriefing what was read and talking about the current ministry practices of the church. Then reflect on the content and think of new things or modifications that could be done to make the congregation more effective at equipping people to proclaim, pray and sacrifice in their daily lives.

Two, you can break the book into four sessions. Read the Introduction and the Priesthood of All Believer's section and discuss the ideas that are there. Then spend one session on Proclamation, Prayer and Sacrifice. This will allow for time to reflect, and time for a group to process things over a longer time. The results will most likely be the chance for more new ideas and also more time to think about actually using them. Good ideas are only worth as much as the will to implement them!

Whatever format you choose, the following questions can frame your discussion.

In your current setting, what ways do you equip people to:

- Proclaim
- Pray?
- Sacrifice?

What ideas do you have about how you could better help people to:

- Proclaim?
- Pray?
- Sacrifice?

# About the Author

Dave Daubert is a second career pastor who has served in congregational, synodical and churchwide ministry positions. Today he leads Day 8 Strategies, which works with congregations, judicatories and other organizations throughout the United States and Canada. He is one of the leading consultants for church leadership and renewal in mainline and progressive churches in North America.

You can find more about his work by visiting the web site at [www.Day8Strategies.com](http://www.Day8Strategies.com). There you will also see more information as well as other books and resources from Dave.

He is a frequent keynote speaker, trainer and workshop presenter. He is the author of the books *Lutheran Trump Cards*, *Living Lutheran*, *Reclaiming the 'V' Word*, and *Seeing Through New Eyes* as well as several articles appearing in *Net Results*, *Emphasis*, *The Lutheran*, and other publications.

In addition, he is pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Elgin, IL where he lives and works with his wife Marlene (a social worker/diaconal minister at Zion Lutheran Church). They have two dogs and two grown children.