

**On Fire for Mission:
Healthy Congregations in Mission!**

Wednesday, August 9, 2023 – 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Draft Outline

4:00 – 4:20 (20 minutes) – Bible Study/Devotions – Dr. David Luy

INSPIRE; Randy Stubbs and Choir from Tanzania.”

Theme verses: Ephesians 2:19-22, “¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. ¹”

4:20 – 4:30 (10 minutes) – **INFORM**

Congregational life: Being Healthy Congregations in Mission

VIDEO

Amy: [That’s a wonderful witness to the work our pastors are doing in the Canadian MD as they support the health of all their congregations.](#)

Introduction by David: If there is one thing we know without a doubt, it is that mission and ministry are strong and thrive in healthy congregations! Congregations who are unhealthy find it difficult to come together around a common vision and direction, as they, usually, are occupied and pre-occupied with their own internal tensions and challenges. This is true in any family system and congregations, whether large or small, are a family system. To strengthen mission within our congregations, the first step is to move toward health in every congregation. Here are some indicators which will then lead to individual and small group reflection at your tables, which we hope will provide you with some helpful insight and direction, after convocation, as you return howm to your own congregations!

- a. (AMY) Healthy congregations **have Christ as first place in everything** – he is the cornerstone of the Church! It needs to be said and repeated and taken to heart: if Christ isn’t the center of all we do, then we’ve lost our focus and direction. Having this as a core value is to guide and direct all we do as a denomination, as pastors and as congregations.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 2:19–22.

- b. (DAVID) Healthy congregations understand the **church is a community**—a movement of disciples, seeking to follow Jesus, inviting others into relationship with Jesus.
- i. In the explanation to the 3rd Article of the Creed, Martin Luther taught, “In the first place, he (the Holy Spirit) has a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims, through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.”²
 - ii. In this community of believers, we live together in koinonia, in Christian fellowship, supporting one another, bearing one another’s burdens, and encouraging each other to greater discipleship, maturity, and faith.
- c. (AMY) Healthy congregations have leadership teams which focus on maximizing the gifts of pastor, lay leaders and members for the sake of faithful and effective mission and ministry. It is important to discern each member’s gifts and invite them to work in that giftedness. The Body of Christ functions well when all are working toward the same goal, using the gifts and abilities of all for the sake of the common good. When we fail to do that, it can cause burnout, conflict, and a lack of joy.
- d. (DAVID) Healthy congregations have leaders who foster honesty, straightforward communication and cooperation between pastor, council and congregation. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 4: 15, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” This is the model for healthy congregations where all speak the truth, in love, for maturity as disciples and as community of Christ.
- e. (AMY) Healthy congregations focus on serving the needs of those outside the church building, inviting others into a relationship with Jesus. One learning from the Fresh Eyes for Mission summits has been that many congregations have become inwardly focused. This is contrary to the will of the Lord who said in Matthew 25, “Truly, when you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.” The Great Commission is about going to all nations and peoples, making new disciples, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching people all that Jesus has commanded.
- f. (DAVID) Healthy congregations are generous. They recognize that all we have has been given to us by our heavenly Father, as Martin Luther states in the Small Catechism, speaking about “daily bread,” as “Everything that belongs to the support

² Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 436.

and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful magistrates, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

- g. (AMY) As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. God loves a cheerful giver and will supply all our needs. Healthy congregations look joyfully at opportunities to preach, teach and speak about what it means to be faithful stewards of God’s manifold gifts, as we are called to respond generously with time, talent and treasure.
- h. (DAVID) Healthy congregations see challenges as opportunities. Our human nature often views challenges as obstacles, hindrances or stumbling blocks. Instead of looking at challenges as negatives, what might God be leading us to do differently? Perhaps, in the challenges before us, God is encouraging us to look for new ministry opportunities, to expand our witness to the community, to address the needs of the community, to get creative about how the body of Christ can serve the world, to begin to reach out anew and afresh with the good news of Jesus crucified and risen! Even failure is an opportunity to learn and grow!

4:30-4:50 (20 minutes) **ENGAGE (DAVID introduce table discussion)**

- 2. Table Talk: Current Reality (Being open and honest about the current reality of your congregation)
 - a. On a scale of 1-10, would you describe the health of your congregation?
 - b. Considering the presentation regarding healthy congregations, in what ways is your congregation healthy? What are growth areas for your congregation in this regard?
 - c. It’s been said *“The Church is the only organization which exists primarily for the sake of those who are NOT it’s members.”* (William Temple, former Archbishop of Canterbury.) What does this mean to you? Is your congregation more inwardly or outwardly focused? Discuss ways in which your congregation is more outwardly focused. How can the focus of your congregation be shifted from inward to outward?
 - d. Ask the question “Who would miss us if we were not here?”
 - e. On a scale of 1-10, is your congregation more focused on institutional/organizational issues (1) or being disciples and making disciples (10)? How can you help your congregation to more fully understand and embrace the Great Commission and discipleship-disciple-making?
 - f. What are three things (learnings, insights, strategies, action steps) you can take home with you from this presentation and discussion?

4:50-5:00 (10 minutes) **Healthy Pastor-Parish Relationships Support and Encourage Mission (AMY – bring back together. Introduce next portion with John 21)**

Jesus gives us the mission just as he gave it to his disciple, Peter after his resurrection from the dead.

3. The Mission: **INSPIRE** John 21:15-19 *“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’¹⁶ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’¹⁷ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep...’ And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’!”*

INFORM

- a. **(DAVID)** Healthy pastor-parish relationships develop when all seek God’s will, not individual wants and desires. Mission is supported and encouraged when all know and seek to live Matthew 18-- taking seriously Jesus’ teachings regarding true greatness, temptations to sin, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, seeking the lost.
- b. **(AMY)** Positive, cooperative relationships between pastor and people support and encourage Christ-like love, care and nourishing of the flock. The mission of the Church is to feed and nourish the flock entrusted to our care, and those lost sheep who are not yet enfolded into the Body of Christ!
- c. **(DAVID)** Humble, loving, servants (pastor and people) keep their eyes on Jesus, following Him in mission and ministry. It’s worth noting that after instructing Peter to feed and care for his sheep, the Lord called Peter, again, to follow! To follow Jesus closely and carefully, it is important to remain Christ-centered and Christ-focused!
- d. **(AMY)** Healthy pastor/parish relationships develop when all understand that a pastor is **called** by God, through the congregation, **not hired** as with a secular employee. This may be one of the most important factors in a healthy pastor-parish relationship, leading to fruitful mission and ministry.
- e. **(DAVID)** Healthy pastor/parish relationships are characterized by open, honest, regular communication. Building and nurturing healthy relationships among the congregational leadership team is second only to Christ-centeredness, with feeding the flock with the presence of Jesus in the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments! Open, honest communication develops trust and trust creates an environment which fosters cooperation and consensus-building. Ideally, healthy relationships begin when a new pastor arrives, not when issues arise.

- f. (AMY) Pastors and lay leaders establish and maintain healthy relationships by setting goals individually and corporately, accepting responsibility for evaluation and assessment and being accountable to one another.

5:00-5:20 PM (20 minutes)

4. Table Talk: **ENGAGE** (Amy introduce table talk – be honest as we can't fix what we refuse to see.)

- a. On a scale of 1-10, how would you describe the relationship between your pastor and congregation? Unhealthy (1) or healthy (10)?
- b. Do your pastor and council function as a team for the sake of mission and ministry, or does the relationship sometimes seem adversarial?
- c. Does your leadership team (pastor and lay leaders) participate in regular, scheduled processes aimed at leadership assessment, evaluation and goal-setting? If not, how are goals set and evaluated/assessed?
- d. Why do you think healthy pastor/parish relationships are so important to mission and ministry?
- e. What are three things (learnings, insights, strategies, actions steps) you can take home with you from this presentation and discussion?

5:20-5:40 PM (10 Minutes) **Healthy Congregations are Members of the Whole Body of Christ** (DAVID bring back together. Introduce next section using Ephesians 4)

5. **INSPIRE** Ephesians 4:15-16 *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*
 - a. (AMY) Healthy congregations participate in and support the whole body—locally, regionally and throughout the NALC, communicating and partnering with neighboring congregations whenever possible.
 - b. (DAVID) Healthy congregations understand that we are about “completing” the Kingdom, not “competing” in the Kingdom.
 - c. (AMY) Healthy congregations understand that we are seeking to be faithful in the 21st Century, not a return to previous glory.

- d. (DAVID) Healthy congregations take responsibility for neighboring vacant congregations whenever possible, offering pastoral support and sharing when needed.
- e. (AMY) Healthy congregations are praying for and raising up possible candidates for ministry—whether through regular seminary education, Ordination Under Special Circumstances or the NALC Diaconate.

5:40-5:55 AM (15 Minutes)

6. Table discussions: **ENGAGE (Amy: Now let's talk about our congregations and how we see ourselves, but also being honest about how someone from the outside might observe us.)**

- a. On a scale of 1-10, does your congregation understand itself as an independent, solo, stand-alone congregation (1) or a congregation that is in partnership with other NALC congregations? What might be gained by partnerships locally and within Mission Districts, when possible? What are the challenges facing congregations today? How do you address stubborn attitudes: unwilling to change our time, unwilling to share "our pastor?" Why is this a limiting view of "church?"
- b. Are there vacancies in your area which might be supported in some way by your congregation and pastor? What can you do to create greater flexibility and local cooperation? What next steps are possible in your Mission District?
- c. Develop at least three action steps to help provide pastoral support for every congregation in your Mission District or area?

5:55 – 6:00 PM (5 minutes) **DAVID Wrap-up and closing prayer/worship/song** (Randy Stubbs)