Talking Points with Pastor

Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford
District President

We pray this every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. There is something very earnest and important about praying this petition. Let’s look at the truth that stands behind these five words that Jesus gave us to pray.

**Temptation Seeks to Destroy You Spiritually**

“Lead us not into temptation.” These words encompass the life of every believer. Day in and day out, people of faith battle against temptation. The season of Lent impresses this upon us all the more. You and I are engaged in spiritual warfare. True, it can be difficult to see it sometimes. The spiritual world is not readily available to the naked eye. But that is why we must walk by faith and not by sight.

You see, at its core, temptation seeks to destroy us spiritually. It may confront us in a physical, mental or emotional form. The angry urge to degrade someone, the envy that afflicts our attitude and the lust that overwhelms us all seek to corrupt our being and condemn our soul.

Behind even the smallest enticement, there lurks a darkness we dare not take lightly. The Small Catechism summarizes what the Bible teaches on this:

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*Lead us not into temptation.*

*What does this mean?* God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

This describes the life of every believer. It reminds us what we’re up against: the devil, the world and our sinful nature. It’s a deadly combination. They don’t stand passively by. They attack, harass and oppress.

The devil has been on the offense since the start. In the garden, he launched his attack on Eve:

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” — Gen. 3:1

We know what happened next.

**Relentless. Ruthless. Ready.**

The devil reveals his real goal in every temptation: to play upon our fallen human condition and cast doubt upon God’s Word.

The devil is relentless. If you are tired and worn, the temptation to lose your...
temper is around the corner. If your marriage is struggling, the temptation to give up is coming. If you're sick, get a disease or experience hardship, the temptation to think God has abandoned you will be thrust in your face. The devil is ruthless. He did not hesitate to tempt even the Son of God (Matt. 4:1-11). When Jesus was hungry, Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread. Then he tempted Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God by casting Himself down from the temple wall. Finally, he tempted Jesus with power and prestige, if only Jesus would worship him. The devil is ready. Hunger, pride, desire — Satan had an array of temptations ready to play upon Jesus’ human condition. But each time, Jesus battled the devil — and his corresponding temptation — with the Word of God. And each time, the Word of God won. That tells us something. First, to battle the devil, we must not rely upon ourselves. Second, only the Word of God can defeat the devil. Thus we do well to saturate our lives by daily meditating upon the Word that we might be able to use it upon a moment’s notice.

Jesus—hope and victory incarnate

We have the Word made flesh to lead us forward. In fact, hope cannot be destroyed when Jesus is the very living and breathing hope in us. Baptized into His name, we have been united with Jesus. The Word made flesh has taken up residence in our flesh, and He has told the devil to go to hell. He gives strength to the tired and fortitude to the tempted. He is the source of all hope. Hanging on the cross for the sins of the world, bloodied and beaten, Jesus speaks hope: “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

The power of Satan was vanquished by our Savior’s bitter anguish — by His wounds, by His death and by His mighty resurrection.

For you and me, temptations are sure to come. And giving in to those temptations will surely follow. But He who overcame all temptations brings relief from oppression, forgiveness for trespasses and boldness to fight against the most enticing temptations.

With Jesus, hope is never lost. When we despair, Jesus walks right through death to bring us life. He brings it still today — tangibly even — with His body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. Yes, crucified, dead and buried, Jesus was raised back to life and brings us living hope. Every day, we battle against the devil, the world and our sinful nature. That’s why we pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” even as we trust that the victory has been won. In Christ, there is always hope. In Christ, we always win the victory.
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Williams was installed as pastor of Trinity, Slayton, on Jan. 12.
Pictured are, from left, (front row) Revs. Jesse Baker, Zion, Hardwick; Harold Storm (installer), St. John, Gaylord, and district third vice-president; Williams; Evan Schiller; Charles Boeder; (middle/back rows) Cliff Adair, St. Paul, Pipestone; Shawn Ethridge, St. Paul, Fulda, and circuit visitor; Gary Klatt, St. John, Luverne; Dennis Brech; Robert Moeller, Our Saviour’s, Pipestone, St. John, Trosky, and Trinity, Jasper; James Stefani, Good Shepherd, Marshall; and Matthew Lorfeld (preacher), Immanuel and St. Paul, Blue Earth.

Rev. John Henry was installed as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Northrop, and St. James Lutheran Church, Northrop, on Jan. 18.
Pictured are, from left, Revs. Travis Loeslie, Bethelhem, Morrisstown; Martin Teigen; Tony Bertram, St. Paul, Fairmont; Henry; Adam Carnehl, Immanuel, Fairmont; and Wade Daul, Immanuel, Fairmont.

Rev. Mark Triplett was installed as pastor of St. John, Rushford, and St. Mark, Rushford, on Dec. 13.
Pictured are, from left, (front row) Revs. David Triplett, Concordia, Brockport, N.Y.; Mark Triplett; Peter Haugen, St. Paul, Chatfield; Samuel Morsching, St. Matthew, St. Charles; (middle/back rows) Mark Meier, Messiah, LaCrescent, and Grace, Stockton; Frederick Morck; Richard Moore, St. Martin, Winona; Ryan Eden, Redeemer, Winona; William Meilner, Immanuel, Lewiston; and Loel Wessel, First English, Spring Valley.
Celebrating LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

There are 1,950 Lutheran schools — 92 of which call the Minnesota South District home. If you’re wondering, that breaks down to 46 preschools and early learning centers, 41 elementary schools and five high schools. From urban to rural, large to small, new to old, these schools have this in common: They share Jesus’ amazing love with students and their families as they deliver outstanding academic programs.

The 2020 National Lutheran Schools Week celebration was held nationwide the week of Jan. 26–Feb. 1. This year’s theme, “Joy:Fully Lutheran,” found inspiration in 1 Thess. 5:16-24:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

The week’s theme hymn, “Filled with Joy, in Grace Abounding,” was written by the Minnesota South District’s own Dr. Jeffrey Burkart. The hymn’s text celebrates how God’s love and grace — given to us through Christ’s sacrifice, our Baptism and the faith He gives us — empower us to thank and praise Him through all our days.

Each day of the week featured a different focus on the full blessings of God through Jesus: grace, joy, thanksgiving, peace, faith and hope. Daily devotional activities, special chapel services, spirit days, community projects and special guests all helped bring the theme of “Joy:Fully Lutheran” alive for students and teachers alike.

Join us in continuing to pray for and celebrate the 92 schools that call the Minnesota South District home.
Approaching a ‘cultural tipping point’

By Rev. Fred Hinz
LCMS Public Policy Advocate
Minnesota South and North Districts

As we move deeper into this political season, there are two issues I’d like to highlight: religious liberty and physician-assisted suicide. I choose to focus on these for two reasons. First, because both are integral to the effective proclamation of the Gospel. And second, because both appear to be at a tipping point, with the church in possession of the resources necessary to decisively affect the outcome of these issues if we will only commit to using them.

Religious liberty
In its choice of cases for this current session, the Supreme Court seems to be setting itself up to offer a much more definitive ruling concerning the scope of religious liberty than it has offered in the past. Two cases in particular stand out, namely, the Harris Funeral Homes case (argued on Oct. 8, 2019) and the Little Sisters of the Poor case (yet to be scheduled, as of Feb. 11).

Yet as decisive and as potentially helpful as these judicial decisions may be, what will be even more decisive in the long run is the degree to which the public at large understands and values the concept of religious freedom. That is, any future court decisions in support of a robust view of religious liberty will ultimately be hollow victories unless there is a rekindling of appreciation for the fundamental and indispensable nature of this “first of our Constitutional liberties” in the hearts and minds of our people. I am convinced that pastors and educators in the church have a particularly important role to play in moving us in that direction.

To that end, I’d like to point you to Luke Goodrich’s new book, Free to Believe. I have found it to be exceptionally helpful in understanding the current status of religious liberty in the courts, in digesting the topic from a solidly biblical perspective, and in identifying practical steps that pastors and teachers can take in their local settings to advance the cause of religious freedom. It is easy to understand and remarkable in its clarity and faithfulness to Scripture. If you want to get a handle on the issue of religious liberty in this cultural moment, I highly recommend it.

Physician-assisted suicide
The issue of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) is one that deserves our attention because it, too, is at a critical point and is one in which the efforts of the church can prove pivotal. The idea that it is appropriate to assist people in ending their suffering by assisting them to end their life is one that appalls some and appeals to others in approximately equal numbers. However, studies reveal that the commitment level of many of those favoring PAS is quite “shallow” and quickly shifts to opposition when the many practical and spiritual dangers inherent in PAS are brought to their attention.

At its national convention in July, the LCMS passed Resolution 11-06, clearly expressing opposition to PAS and calling on pastors and congregations to be energetic in informing their members and the community at large about its dangers. This effort, of course, includes preaching and teaching about the issue. Resources to assist in doing so can be found in the resolution itself as well as in the recently distributed bulletin flyer on PAS, which includes links to a variety of helpful organizations, including the Patient Rights Action Fund, the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition and the Minnesota Alliance for Ethical Healthcare. You can find this flyer and other resources at mnsdistrict.org/public-policy.

If you have questions about either religious liberty or physician-assisted suicide, please feel free to contact me at fred.hinz@mnsdistrict.org or 507-317-9634.

God’s blessings to you as you interact with your friends and neighbors concerning public matters on behalf of the Gospel.
**Mission Grant Update**

**Thank you from Camp Omega**

Camp Omega is all about relationships. It’s a place for children, teens, adults, families, congregations and communities to grow in their relationship to Christ … a place for campers young and old to discover and rediscover what life in Jesus means.

Camp Omega promises to leave indelible, life-changing spiritual marks on the hearts of God’s people, as campers of all ages encounter creation, create community, and commune with Christ.

Camp Omega is a place of actions and relationship and helps people realize they can with Christ!

With a generous gift from Joe Holtmeier, founder of Holtmeier Construction in Mankato, the new entrance and parking lot for the Adult and Family Retreat Center is complete. Thank you, Joe! He and his crew are ready to begin the next phase of preparing the area for construction of the new building.

As the Rooted, Celebrating, Growing campaign continues, please accept my deepest appreciation for your willingness to join us on this historic and significant journey. I’m excited and grateful for the generous response by so many like you. Currently, $2.2 million has been raised, the architectural design is complete and Gift-in-Kind contributions of labor and materials are being sought. Groundbreaking is planned for the fall of 2020, or when the remaining $900,000 is received. Thank you for stepping out in faith and helping make this dream a reality.

God has richly blessed Camp Omega over the last 55 years. I firmly believe that in accordance with God’s plan, He has even greater blessings in store for us as we seek to embrace this ministry for all ages. I know you believe Camp Omega’s future because you have already demonstrated your support. The Lord bless you as you continue walking with us as this crucial goal for Camp Omega is accomplished.

**Bob LaCroix**
Executive Director, Camp Omega

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**Taking the challenge**

WML members of Trinity, Waconia, and St. John’s, Winsted, both in the Carver North Zone, joined their respective congregations in an amazing 40-day life-changing experience called The Red Letter Challenge, from a book written by Rev. Zach Zehnder, an LCMS pastor serving in Florida.

Through the words of Jesus, we were introduced to five main principles of being a disciple: Being, Forgiving, Serving, Giving and Going.

The first week was about being with Jesus, spending time with Him. Our doing flows out of who we are and who we become when we spend time with Jesus.

The second week was all about receiving God’s forgiveness and learning how to forgive other people.

The third week we learned we don’t serve God in order to get more from Him. We serve Him because He first served us. Jesus had a heart of service and when we serve, we reflect who our God is.

The fourth week we came to realize our priorities have gotten out of whack and we needed to change our relationship to money. Just as we serve out of a response to God, we give because God gave to us.

The fifth week we were called by God to go outside our comfort zone. When God says, “Go,” He will always go with us.

At the conclusion of the 40 days, we had a Sunday celebration. It was an opportunity to praise God for the amazing ways He worked in and through our congregations over the 40-day challenge. This celebration brought together adults and children who participated in the challenge. All enjoyed food and music.
CSP welcomes new president

Rev. Dr. Brian Friedrich was installed as president of Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP), on Jan. 24. Friedrich, a CSP alum, had served as president of Concordia University, Seward, Neb., since 2004.

Join us in celebrating him and his new ministry at CSP. We pray that God will bless his work at CSP!

Disaster response in a rural/small town

Greetings! My name is Pastor Jim Daub and I serve St. Paul Lutheran Church in Havelock, N.C. I have had the joy of being the pastor here for almost 18 years. On Sept. 13, 2018, our city was hit with the major brunt of Hurricane Florence. It was absolutely amazing to see the power that is in a hurricane. We sustained almost 36 hours of downpouring rain and steady wind speeds of about 50 to 60 miles per hour, with gusts upwards of 100 miles per hour. Our community has about 20,000 residents and a major air station for the U.S. Marine Corps. However, we are the only LCMS church within an hour in either direction.

We truly became an island unto ourselves. Many of the roads were either washed out, flooded or had power lines and trees across them. It was a great challenge for people to get basic necessities, as well as items to help clean and muck out their homes. Many people did not think to have these supplies on hand because Hurricane Florence had been downgraded from a Category 5 storm to a Category 1. The problem for many was that they did not heed the warning and became complacent in the days leading up to the storm. That complacency ended up hurting many people.

We were very blessed to become an unofficial distribution center for supplies for our community at that time. It began with a load of supplies from an Orphan Grain Train truck that was being loaded in St. Louis while we were in the midst of the storm. In addition to distributing the supplies from Orphan Grain Train, I had the opportunity to work very closely with a county commissioner who called me each day to tell me what items he had available and to see how much of it our church family would be willing to accept to hand out to others. We didn’t have major resources to begin with, being such a small parish, but the Lord was able to use us in a very mighty way.

In a webinar recorded Feb. 13, I had the opportunity to share more of my experiences of being in the parsonage during the storm, how we were able to share the love of Jesus with others, and what things we learned to do and not to do in the event of another storm that might hit our coastal area. I invite you to watch the archived recording.

To view Daub’s webinar on rural and small-town disaster response, as well as future and past Rural & Small Town Mission webinars, visit lcms.org/rstm.

Upcoming webinars include "Domestic Abuse in Rural and Small-Town Settings" on March 12 and "re:Vitality" on April 23.