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# The Household Prayers of Doctor Martin Luther and Daily Devotion at Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin

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For My Household

# CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS .....	vii
ABSTRACT.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER TWO .....	10
HOME AND PERSONAL DEVOTION IN SCRIPTURE.....	12
DEVOTIONAL PRINCIPLES IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS .....	22
SUMMARY.....	29
CHAPTER THREE: .....	30
THE PROJECT IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	30
THE SPIRITUAL CONTEXT: MODERNITY, POSTMODERNISM, AND DEVOTIONAL HERITAGE .....	31
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF THE HOUSEHOLD PRAYERS .....	34
THE SCHOLARLY CONTEXT: THE GROWING STUDY OF PRACTICE IN RELIGION AND THEOLOGY .....	45
SUMMARY.....	53
CHAPTER FOUR:.....	54
THE PROJECT DEVELOPED .....	54
DESIGNING THE TOOLS OF EVALUATION .....	57
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT.....	59
SUMMARY.....	69
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY .....	71

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	84
SUMMARY.....	92
Chapter SIX: .....	94
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	94
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	103
APPENDIX A:.....	107
TEXT OF THE HOUSEHOLD BLESSINGS AS FOUND IN THE SMALL CATECHISM (CONCORDIA, 1986).....	107
APPENDIX B: .....	109
EDITIONS OF THE SMALL CATECHISM USED IN AMERICA THAT CONTAIN THE HOUSEHOLD BLESSINGS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER BY SPONSOR (FROM ARTHUR C. REPP, SR.).....	109
APPENDIX C: .....	111
SURVEY QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO THE PROJECT .....	111
APPENDIX D:.....	115
QUESTIONS PROVIDED TO JOURNAL KEEPERS .....	115
APPENDIX E: .....	117
SURVEY ANNOUNCEMENT AND COVER LETTER (TEXT).....	117
APPENDIX F: .....	119
PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOURNALING EXPERIMENT USED IN PARTICIPATING CONGREGATIONS .....	119
APPENDIX G:.....	120
EXPLANATION OF JOURNALING, FIXED INSIDE JOURNALS .....	120
APPENDIX H:.....	121
RELEVANT SURVEY RESULTS COMPILED AND CORRELATED .....	121



## ABBREVIATIONS

BOC	Book of Concord
ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Versions



## **ABSTRACT**

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This major applied project explores the use of Martin Luther's household prayers in Christian devotional practice. Published in the Small Catechism of 1529, the household prayers (morning, evening, and table prayers) have enjoyed varying usage since that time. This study researches whether or not they may serve as a devotional resource for contemporary believers. After addressing the Biblical and theological foundations of home devotion, the literary background of the prayers, and historical studies in religious practice, the paper presents field research conducted through surveys and a journaling experiment. It concludes with recommendations for using and teaching the prayers today.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

I did not know it then, but this project began twenty years ago, in the summer of 1997, as I completed a quarter of clinical pastoral education at the Mayo Foundation in Rochester, Minnesota. Every day, I visited ten or more patients, each with a different set of illnesses. Their faiths and conditions differed, but most of them shared one thing in common: they would rather be somewhere else, and they wished things would move faster. “Where is that doctor?” “Why was the test delayed again?” Time can pass slowly in a hospital, and even more so when spent alone. How do patients keep their patience?

For a chaplain, they had me, and I was no chaplain. I had never ministered at the sickbed before that summer, and I wondered daily if I was actually helping anyone or just making them suffer more. I came with some sense of how to pray and share Scripture for the comfort of souls—I had even prepared myself for hard conversations about suffering and loss—but I had not prepared for many of the simpler questions people asked: “I’m so bored. What should I do?” “I’m trying to keep my mind occupied.” “I want to stay in touch with God, but it’s hard. Do you have any suggestions?”

“Do you pray?” I asked one man.

“Not really.” He shrugged. “I mean, sometimes, but I never really learned how.”

To another patient, I suggested reading. “I could get you a devotional,” I offered.

“I can’t read anymore. My eyes!” She settled back in the bed, resigned.

When I gave the same suggestion to another woman, she pointed at a small booklet that

provided her with a brief Scripture reading and paragraph of reflection for each day. “I already did my devotion,” she said, and her eyes seemed to add the next question: *So now what?*

Most people coped by staring at a television set, loud, blaring, and uninspired. I understood that choice—I, too, can turn to television when I want an easy distraction after a long day. But the shade of a deeper need hovered over the patients, a yearning for companionship and rest as they awaited a new battery of tests or slowly recovered from surgery. Family members could not always come, and I, the young non-chaplain, had other rooms to visit. Time dragged on.

Then I began to notice something. The patients who complained less of boredom or loneliness (and who stared less at the TV) seemed to come from religious traditions rich in devotional practice, such as the Roman Catholic church or Pentecostalism. They had learned specific ways to pray, whether it be saying the rosary and prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus or praying with spontaneity and singing spiritual hymns. These devotional practices did not necessarily rely on literacy or eyesight, and they mirrored the faith and character of the religious community to which the patient belonged. To my regret, I rarely met a similar ardency of devotion among the Lutherans in my care, and it led me to wonder: What are the devotional resources of the Lutheran church?

In particular, I wondered if the Lutheran tradition had devotional practices unique to its confession of faith that could help people inhabit the passage of time and even find comfort in it. Do Lutherans have a particular way of embracing the whole day with prayer? Do we have practices of prayer that bear the stamp of our faith and community, such as Roman Catholics and Pentecostal Christians seemed to have, or do we simply borrow and develop prayer as it seems best to each of us? Most of the devotional habits that I knew in the Lutheran church centered around “reading a devotion” once a day. But what happens when our eyes fail, and we can no

longer read? Or when we find ourselves confined to a sick bed, with nothing else in the room but a television set? How do Lutherans heed the Apostle Paul’s admonishment to “redeem the time” when it comes to prayer?<sup>1</sup>

I had no answers to those questions, and the questions would return quickly once I entered the parish. There, one of my first pastoral visits brought me to an army veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A thoughtful man who cared deeply about the Christian faith, he wondered if I, as a new pastor, knew of any Lutheran devotional resources that would provide him with more “meat” than he was getting from such daily devotionals as *Portals of Prayer* or *Christ in Our Home*. In the absence of finding any himself, he had settled on a United Methodist resource. Confronted early with my own ignorance, I had to confess that I did not know of any. Yet I soon found that he was not alone in his question: many members of my congregation expressed their wish for a more robust and soul-nourishing daily devotion, both in terms of daily reflections and daily prayer. In that hope, they were echoing the request of the earliest disciples: “Lord, teach us to pray.”<sup>2</sup>

In response, I began gathering a little arsenal of devotional resources to share with my congregation, and one in particular captured my attention. As often happens for Lutheran pastors, it came from the work of Martin Luther himself. Preparing the curriculum for my first confirmation class, I was reviewing Luther’s *Small Catechism* and happened across the household prayers that the great reformer appended to the end. They include a brief rite for prayer after rising from bed, giving thanks before meals and returning thanks afterwards, and prayer before going to bed (Appendix A). I had encountered them as a child myself, and I

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<sup>1</sup>Eph. 5:16 (KJV). All other Scriptural quotations come from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>2</sup>Luke 11:1.

remembered my curiosity at finding these prayers that my family never used. At the time, they had struck me as more of an historical artifact than something that I would include in my own devotions, but now they looked different. Here was a resource that I would not find anywhere else in the Christian family. Could these household prayers serve as a basis for the practice of prayer among Lutherans? In particular, could they help form a devotional habit, anchored safely in the Lutheran confession of faith, that would sustain souls throughout the passage of a day, not only in times of health and ease but also during periods of suffering or illness?

Aside from teaching the prayers to my confirmation students, my first opportunity to test that question arrived at the second congregation that I served, Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin, where I still serve today (thanks to the patience of its beloved people and their gracious Lord!). There, in 2006, I developed a devotional fellowship, or society, called *Coram Deo*.<sup>3</sup> The members of this society committed themselves to using “the *Coram Deo* path,” a daily regimen of devotion built around Scripture reading and Luther’s household prayers. As part of this path, members of *Coram Deo* would receive a booklet explaining the household prayers as well as a monthly newsletter with further reflections on devotion. To my surprise and joy, more than 70 people joined this fellowship, including many people from beyond the congregation.

That fellowship has now engaged its worthy calling for nine years. In that span of time, a good number of *Coram Deo*’s original members have expressed their general appreciation for its path of devotion, and new members have joined; at the same time, some of the members have discontinued their participation, citing a variety of reasons. One of these reasons is dissatisfaction with the path itself. “It just isn’t my style,” cited one demitting member. Others have remained members, but struggled to use some of the prayers. “Does God really ‘satisfy the

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<sup>3</sup>Roughly translated, the Latin phrase *coram Deo* means “before the face of God” or “face-to-face with God.”

desire of every living thing’?” one member frequently asks, citing the mealtime prayers. These questions and struggles have prompted further reflection for me. Knowing that devotional styles can vary with personality, and that the prayers themselves come from another time and place, I had to ask: Can the household prayers, set within a broader devotional life, still nourish and speak to the people of my congregation?

Investigating that question could have many benefits. At its simplest level, knowing how the household prayers did or did not help the people of Zion would help me know whether or not the prayers “have legs” — can these prayers from the past still speak for believers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The answer to that question would help me make wise pastoral decision as I tried to set forth a wholesome path of devotion for my parishioners. Yet it also struck me that this investigation could help other leaders of the church. How frequently do Lutheran pastors or school teachers attend to the household prayers? Sometimes, the demands of a particular ministry do not allow a pastor or teacher the opportunity to experiment with new approaches or test their effect. Perhaps my experience at Zion, however bound it may be by geography, history, and social make-up, could help others either appreciate these prayers anew or consider better alternatives. Finally, investigating the use of the household prayers among contemporary believers could illumine devotional practice more broadly. Do people’s reactions to these prayers point to the character of the prayers themselves or to how contemporary people understand the task of devotion in general? As much as making wise decisions for my own pastoral practice remained the primary goal of the project, other benefits could follow.

In the end, the research spanned over two years and branched into three different trajectories. The first trajectory focused on bibliography, history, and the study of religious practice. I explored the origin and history of the household prayers (which necessarily included

an investigation of their use over the centuries) as well as the work of others who have researched trends in domestic piety. I discovered that scholarly reflection on these particular prayers of Luther is scant, but what does exist helps to clarify their value as a theologically-rich devotional resource. Moreover, the low amount of published study on this topic underscores the project's value for future endeavors. It not only provides a bird's-eye view into one pastor and congregation's experience with the prayers, but it also gathers into one place the relevant contributions of many different scholars.

The project's second branch of research involved a survey of people who either belonged to the Coram Deo devotional society or had left it quite recently. This written survey, sent via mail, included both Likert scale questions and open-ended questions. It asked participants about all aspects of the Coram Deo path, including not only the household prayers but also the resource used for daily Scripture readings, the monthly newsletter, and a homegrown devotional practice involving remembrance of the cross at noon. Not all of those components relate to the present question, and so they will not be discussed in this paper; only those portions relating to the household prayers themselves will receive attention here. Of more than sixty surveys sent, thirty-three were completed and returned. What those results report regarding the people's use or non-use of the household prayers may help us see which of these prayers have proven the most permeable to modern homes and hearts after ten years of use.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, ten people of varying ages and levels of church participation were recruited from outside of Zion Lutheran Church to use the household prayers for thirty days and journal their experience.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this activity was twofold: 1) it helped free the project of the personal

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<sup>4</sup>Participants were also given the opportunity to be interviewed following the survey for the sake of more in-depth and personal analysis. Only two persons took advantage of this option, and their comments did not relate to the household prayers. They are therefore omitted from this study.

<sup>5</sup>In one instance, a married couple chose to keep just one journal, written by the wife but including their

attachments between pastor and congregation that can sometimes skew a study, and 2) it provided fresh and more in-depth commentary from people experiencing the prayers either for the first time or in a new and more reflective way. In addition to being provided with journals for their use, the participants also received periodic emails from me with questions to help guide their thought and writing. These participants embraced the challenge with admirable spirit and provided some of the project's most interesting material, recording thoughts on language and habit, the realities of modern home life, and inner, personal concerns. In many ways, their commentary helped to confirm most of the survey's result while shining a different light on other portions of it.

Various limitations and assumptions have shaped the outcome of my research and deserve mention. Located in north-central Wisconsin, my congregation's membership exhibits a broad range of ethnic backgrounds and social classes, but the majority of participants in this study were educated Americans with Anglo-Saxon ancestry. That demographic reality necessarily limits immediate application of the study's results to other populations. Nevertheless, the work presented here leaves the door open for similar research among different groups. For example, it could provide a model for exploring how Lutherans from a Native American or Hmong background experience the prayers. How are these prayers received in contexts less affected by European immigration, and how well would they wear among people with a deeper connection to oral culture? I leave those questions to other researchers, trusting that the spiritual unity of Christ's church makes my research relevant to all members of His body.

I should also note that the journaling portion of this research only extended for 30 days. As some of the participants observed, they had just grown accustomed to the household prayers by

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combined thoughts, resulting in nine journals.



the conclusion of the study, and what they had disliked at the start of the month they had just begun to appreciate. It may therefore be that a longer period of research would produce different results and serve as a better indicator of how well these prayers would or would not find a home in contemporary practice.

Finally, I come to this research with certain assumptions born of the Lutheran Confessions and my pastoral commitments, and these assumptions shape its perspective. First, as a minister publicly committed to the Lutheran church's symbolic statements, I do not subject the household prayers to much theological scrutiny in this paper. They are simply part of my church's catechism. Their theological rectitude and implications may well deserve treatment or challenge in another venue (I have often explored their theology in articles written for the *Coram Deo* society), but for the sake of this present work, I simply assume their truth. The concern here is whether or not they express that truth in a way that can still nourish today's believers. Moreover, I do not question whether or not written and memorized prayers may play a role in Christian devotion. Lutherans believe that God hears our prayers for the sake of Jesus alone—we do not capture or “earn” His hearing by the manner of our prayer—and therefore, we accept both written and spontaneous prayers in the life of devotion. So for this study, I am not asking whether or not devotional regimen in general serves the church—as we will see, some of my participants had their doubts!—but whether or not this particular one does so. If it proves unhelpful, then in the freedom of forgiven, grace-hardened sinners, I would have us all throw it out, however much I have come to the project with a love for these prayers.

Behind that love stands one further belief, shared by many Christians: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. How a person or household prays shapes that person or household's belief, and that formative influence of prayer makes this study all the more important. Klemet Preus states the

case well in his book, *The Fire and the Staff*:

Our doctrine will always affect our practice. And practice will always influence doctrine. The two are like the husband and wife in a marriage. They always end up changing each other. Good or bad, right or wrong, sensible or weird—doctrine and practice always shape and reflect each other. If you change one, the other will change . . . . Church practices are not all equal in importance. Some are essential, some simply desirable, and some are wrong. There are different reasons for why this or that practice might be defended or rejected.<sup>6</sup>

Should we defend (or rather, commend) these household prayers, or should we reject them? Can they still speak to—or perhaps I should say, can they still speak *for*—the congregation that I serve and for today’s Lutheran church more generally? To that question I now turn, beginning with a deeper exploration of the project’s Biblical and theological foundations.

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<sup>6</sup>Klemet I. Preus, *The Fire and the Staff: Lutheran Theology in Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 108.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The duty of family worship, and the cultivation of personal piety and private devotion, are highly important and necessary to the formation of true Christian character, and it is believed that the counsels and suggestions herein given will serve as valuable aids for building up such a character, rich in faith and good works.<sup>1</sup>

These words appear in the introduction to a short book entitled *Lutheran Manual and Guide*, by Frederick Conrad and his brother, Victor, in 1897. They dedicated most of their book to explaining the Lutheran church's history and public life, but under the heading "Tables of Christian Duties," they dedicated fifty pages to the subject of home and personal devotion. Most of those pages present the reader with devotional resources, including excerpts from the Small Catechism, a broad selection of hymns, additional prayers, and a short reflection on Christian parenting. The chapter is significant for demonstrating the importance placed on private devotion at the time of the book's publication. Its authors stood in a tradition of Lutheran commitment to domestic piety that started with Luther himself and extended through such figures as Gerhard, Spener, Arndt, and Loehe.

Understanding that tradition's theological foundations will help place this project in proper perspective. As I noted earlier, the question is whether or not Luther's household prayers, set within the context of a broader devotional life, can still nourish the people of my congregation and other modern believers. Yet to speak of a "broader devotional life" invites reflection as to what this devotional life is and how Luther's prayers may function within it. Moreover, the very

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<sup>1</sup>F. W. Conrad and V.L. Conrad, *Lutheran Manual and Guide* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), iv. The Conrads included truncated versions of the household prayers.

act of investigating this question assumes that I, as an ordained minister of the church, have an interest in how my people pray in private and may seek to influence it. On what basis do I think so? To address these matters, we turn to the primary sources of Lutheran theological reflection, Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

In so doing, I take up a subject that has received little reflection in pastoral theology, and this absence deserves some initial commentary. Over the past century, liturgical theology has flowered as scholars from many different denominations have articulated theologies of public worship, and these liturgical reflections occasionally reference points of contact between worship and the home. Also, the domestic piety of Christians has received increased attention among some historians and sociologists of religion (a subject explored further in Chapter Three). Yet virtually no one has given systematic *theological* attention to this subject in the past several centuries. The pastoral theologies of C. F. W. Walther (1872), John H. C. Fritz (1932), and George Kraus and Norman Mueller (1990), all three of which have helped to form generations of pastors, treat private devotion tangentially if at all, and mostly in reference to the pastor's well-being. Perhaps the subject resists systematic study, and rightly so, given the sanctity of the home and the wide-ranging practices found there. Yet the home has always figured prominently, if not pre-eminently, in Christian devotion—the very first believers worshiped in their homes, as did wealthier Christian families in late antiquity—and the correct teaching of domestic prayer concerned theologians as early as Hippolytus and Tertullian. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, concern for the devotion of individuals and families would blossom into such classics as *The Imitation of Christ* and *Pilgrim's Progress*. Far from being a side-interest of Christianity, home and personal devotion has often been a prime source of vitality and growth, and therefore, it may deserve more theological attention than it has received. The following

pages, treating the Biblical and confessional foundations of devotion piety and the ministry's interest in it, will hopefully contribute to this cause.

First: what exactly are we researching when we look for “devotion” in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions? By itself the term “devotion” presents something of a challenge, calling to mind Augustine's proverbial comment on “time”: we all know what it is until we try to define it.<sup>2</sup> Does it refer to various *practices* (“We have devotions before going to bed”) or to a religious *attitude* (“She's very devoted to her church”)? Like the term “sacrament,” “devotion” is a Latin-based word to which the church has attached various understandings across the centuries. In its narrow and perhaps original sense it refers to the making of a religious vow, yet it clearly enjoys broader usage today. So what is it?

Perhaps the added descriptors, “home and personal,” as well as the phrase “broader devotional life,” clarify the question and provide the most practical answer. It would seem that most people, upon hearing the term “devotion” in those contexts, would recognize that it refers to such practices as prayer and Scripture reading that take place outside of public worship within the daily rhythms of life. That diurnal practice will form the focus of our Biblical and confessional investigation. Just as modern liturgical theology has worked to unearth the theological foundations of worship as it already exists, so will I seek to do the same for home and personal devotion.

### **Home and Personal Devotion in Scripture**

Holy Scripture contains few prescriptions for devotional practice beyond the public worship of Israel and the church. This lack of Scriptural comment may partially stem from a

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<sup>2</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11, Chapter 14.

more permeable distinction between “public” and “private” (or even between “public” and “home”) than is found in most modern societies. God’s first conversation with man and woman focused on childbearing and food, perhaps the most intimately domestic activities imaginable, and Scripture’s first examples of cultic worship are the personal offerings of Cain and Abel.<sup>3</sup> These personal offerings would continue through the time of the patriarchs—we may recall Noah’s sacrifice after the flood and Abraham’s covenantal sacrifice—which makes them precursors to the sacrifices at God’s temple in Zion, many of which were conducted in response to personal and family events.<sup>4</sup> So also did Israel’s public observance of the Passover find its primary locus among families in the home; the domestic piety of Daniel prompted a public scandal; and the psalms have their roots in the religious experience of such individuals as King David, Moses, and a host of unnamed Israelites.<sup>5</sup> As noted earlier, early Christians celebrated the resurrection not only in the temple but also (and even primarily) in their homes.<sup>6</sup> In both testaments, devotion seems to flow liquidly between the domestic and public realms, making it difficult to isolate a Biblical vision of “home and personal devotion.”

Yet at one significant juncture in Israel’s life, God did set forth prescriptions for domestic piety, and the content of these directives help illumine other Scriptural examples and terms—it may even set a pattern or standard for Christian devotional theology. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses gathers Israel on the east side of the Jordan River just before the start of conquest. Memories of the tribes’ apostasy at Mt. Sinai may linger in the background, but they recede in the face of assured victory. The moment swells with anticipation: God’s promise of a rich land will soon

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<sup>3</sup>Gen. 1:28, 4:3–4.

<sup>4</sup>Gen. 8:20, 15:9–21. For personal sacrifices at the tabernacle or temple, we may recall the offerings for healing from skin disease (Lev. 14:10–14) and the purification of new mothers (Lev. 12:4–6).

<sup>5</sup>Exod. 12:1–14; Ps. 22, 23, 90; Dan. 6:10–11.

<sup>6</sup>Acts 5:42.

become sight! Yet before Israel moves into her inheritance, God gives her a simple command: “Remember the Lord your God!” It comes to explicit expression in Deut. 6:12–14: “[T]ake heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name. You shall not go after other gods.” These verses echo a theme sounded earlier, starting already in Deut. 4 and repeated through chapter 5:

[G]ive heed to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you, and do them; that you may live . . . . Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen . . . make them known to your children . . . . Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you. (Deut. 4:1–2, 9, 23)

Lest Israel should grow self-satisfied with Canaan’s bounty, God commands His people to remember Him, His words, and His mighty works. Significantly, He commands this remembrance to take place in the domestic setting of families.

Except for Passover, it’s probably the first example of prescriptive home devotion in Scripture, and it involves three components: 1) elders leading youths, 2) teaching God’s words, and 3) telling God’s history. God details these three hallmarks of Israel’s devotion:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates . . . .

When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Deut. 6:6–7, 20–22.

God appoints the home and family as the context for this instruction and story-telling, all of it for the sake of loving “the Lord your God with all your heart and all of your soul and with all of your might.”<sup>8</sup> The language is acutely devotional in nature, setting forth practices for the home to observe, and as one of the sole instances of God prescribing such practices, it holds implications for developing a theology of devotion.

First and foremost, this devotional regimen appointed a goal and means for Israel’s homes. God wanted His people to remember and love Him with their whole being, and to foster this life of faith He enjoined on them the tasks of teaching and telling. He says nothing of prayer or song, and while that absence certainly would not exclude such activities (how could Israel love the Lord with their whole being without calling upon Him in prayer and praise?), it does highlight the fundamental movement of this devotion: from God to Israel in the sharing of His words and history. Only through that divine initiative does Israel find itself in love with God, thus anchoring Israel’s devotion outside of its own heart, mind, and soul in God and His gifts—as the final sentence of the chapter underscores: “And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God.”<sup>9</sup> Israel finds its righteous life, not in itself, but in the words that God gives, which then serve as a means by which Israel remains bound to God.

Do we find this pattern at work in other portions of Scripture? We do, and the psalms provide a helpful example. There, prayers of thanksgiving very quickly turn into a recounting of God’s “wonders,” whether those wonders be the destruction of enemies, the restoration of health, or the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and its subsequent occupation of the promised land.

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<sup>8</sup>Deut. 6:5.

<sup>9</sup>Deut. 6:25



Psalm 105 provides perhaps the most quintessential example, with its historical review of the patriarchs, Exodus, the subsequent conquest:

Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name;  
make known his deeds among the peoples!  
Sing to him, sing praises to him;  
tell of all his wondrous works . . . .

He remembers his covenant forever,  
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,  
the covenant that he made with Abraham,  
his sworn promise to Isaac,  
which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,  
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,  
saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan  
as your portion for an inheritance” . . . .

So he brought his people out with joy,  
his chosen ones with singing.  
And he gave them the lands of the nations,  
and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil,  
that they might keep his statutes  
and observe his laws.  
Praise the Lord!<sup>10</sup>

This psalm of thanksgiving does not merely recite a believer’s happiness or joy in the Lord (though the psalms do include such reflection), but it focuses more acutely on God’s might and external works—it moves from God to the believer, that the believer may likewise turn to God. This focus on the Lord’s acts not only appears in psalms marked for communal use, (as Psalm 105 may have been), but also in psalms of a more personal nature. In Psalm 116, a believer thanks God for hearing him during a time of illness, and Psalm 41 recounts God’s care for the believer both at the time of illness and in the face of enemies. Other causes of praise and devotion within the Psalms include the law, God’s anointed king, Jerusalem and the temple (“the

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<sup>10</sup>Ps. 105:1–2, 9–11, 44–45

house of the Lord”), the cosmos, and God’s steadfast faithfulness, mercy, and almighty power.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, of course, the psalms beat with Israel’s joy in the Lord Himself, the source of all these things. The point here is that Israel’s devotion seems to center on the *telling* of God’s glory for the sake of Israel loving the Lord with its whole being. It takes hold of the Lord through concrete persons, events, and gifts that He brings to its experience.

This movement from God to the believer and back again, made possible by God’s words and works, continues in examples of personal devotion found in the New Testament. We see it already in the way that believers relate to Jesus in the four gospels, where believers don’t simply “think about” Jesus: they *have* Him. Thus God sends the Bethlehem star to draw the magi out of their homeland to the Christ-child. Jesus brings His healing power to a town or village, and crowds push forward to touch Him. His preaching announces a woman’s forgiveness, and in her joy she takes hold of His feet and worships them. His voice reveals His resurrection to Mary Magdalene, who must then be warned from taking hold of Him. He walks with the disciples to Emmaus, and the disciples plead with Him to “abide” with them for supper, whereupon His thanksgiving and bread-breaking opens their eyes. Jesus presents Himself to the disciples as bread to eat, light by which to see, and water to drink.<sup>12</sup> In each of these examples, devotion to Jesus is expressed through the “having” of Him, touching, possessing, and being near Him, and this impetus to have Him stems from His own ministry of word and deed. Scriptural examples of devotion certainly include the power of memory and personal feeling, but its driving force is the Lord Himself as He is concretely and externally present to His people.

Within the New Testament church, this pattern of devotion is made explicit from its earliest

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<sup>11</sup>See Ps. 19, 2, 84, 87, 148, 96 respectively.

<sup>12</sup>Matt. 2:1–12; Mark. 3:10, 5:27; Luke 7:36–48; John 19; Luke 24; John 6:25ff, 7:37ff, 8:12.

days: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)<sup>13</sup> While this passage specifically speaks of communal devotion, it reflects the general character of devotion that we have thus far found throughout Scripture: piety takes shape around the external gifts first given by God. In this case, those external gifts are where the Risen Lord has promised to be present: in the Word (Apostles’ teaching), in the church (the fellowship), and in the Holy Communion (the breaking of the bread and the prayers). We have no reason to think that personal or domestic piety in the New Testament would take on any different character. The few examples that we have of personal devotion in the New Testament church portray the disciples praying or singing hymns, such as Peter on the rooftop or Paul and Silas in prison.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, this personal prayer appears to be governed by “the hour[s] of prayer” (cf. Acts 3:1), suggesting that personal piety drew its patterns from the community first. Hymns also came from the communal assembly, an example of which may be found in Phil. 2:5–11, a hymn focused on the person and work of Christ. As in the Old Testament, personal piety in the New Testament seems to find its spirit in external gifts, received through God’s dealings with the larger community.

None of these Biblical examples prescribe a certain kind of home and personal devotion, but they do set forth a pattern for it. We now find this pattern confirmed when we look beyond these direct examples to a constellation of Biblical terms associated not so much with devotional practices as with devotional attitude. The first salient term is the Hebrew adjective *הָרַם*. While not tightly connected to the subject of personal piety, this term is often translated as “devoted” in English editions of the Bible, and so it deserves some comment. The word appears in the Old

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<sup>13</sup>This is my own translation.

<sup>14</sup>Acts 10:9, 16:25.

Testament within the context of both consecration and conquest. In its “softer” sense, a land released in jubilee is “devoted” to the Lord.<sup>15</sup> More harshly, a city conquered by Israel is “devoted to destruction.”<sup>16</sup> In the latter case, the phrase “to the Lord” is sometimes inserted, resulting in the English translation “devoted to the Lord for destruction,” and giving an almost sacrificial cast to the destructive event.<sup>17</sup> To be devoted is to be sanctified and wholly committed to the Lord, even if by fire and the Lord’s consuming wrath. Even given the term’s light connection to home and personal devotion, it nevertheless confirms the outward trajectory that we found in our earlier sources: both the “hard” and “soft” uses of the term point the believer to a person or thing outside of himself.

Another term sometimes translated as “devotion” in the Old Testament is the term *חסד*, as we see in the English Standard Version’s translation of Jer. 2:2: “I remember the devotion (*חסדך*) of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness.” In other contexts, and especially when applied to the Divine Majesty, *חסד* is translated as “faithfulness” or “loving-kindness.” In either case, it is a term that directs the one who has *חסד* outside of himself and towards another. More importantly, it further illumines the character of this bond as one marked by tenderness and commitment, worthy of a bride and her husband. The devotion here imagined is not selfish but self-opening, leading a nation to follow her God into the wilderness, or God to love His people despite their wayward lives. Such devotion finds its life outside of the devotee.

Testifying to the unity of the Scriptures, language from the New Testament continues the Old Testament emphasis. One important term is the Greek verb *μένω*, especially as it is used in the gospel according to John. Many scholars have commented on the theological nature of John’s

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<sup>15</sup>Lev. 27:21.

<sup>16</sup>Num. 21:3; cf. Deut. 2:34, 7:2.

<sup>17</sup>Josh. 6:17.

writing, assigning his gospel the symbol of an eagle because this gospel, of all the gospels, has language that “soars.” Yet from another perspective, the gospel of John is as much *devotional* as it is theological. Here Jesus presents Himself most clearly as the One to follow, trust, adore, worship, fear, love, cling to, and even eat and drink. Jesus is the Gift in whom all other gifts find their meaning, as John’s use of the verb μένω makes especially clear. From the start of his gospel, μένω appears as the verb of choice for those believers who have been met by the Lord in some way, and who now stay with Him. The experience of the Samaritans is typical: “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay (μῆναι) with them, and he stayed (ἔμεινεν) there two days.”<sup>18</sup> This usage gives the term a devotional cast, illustrating the piety prompted by Christ’s advent and ministry: His arrival, and the word about Him, leads others to abide with Him.

In John 15, this meaning becomes explicit. Jesus bids His disciples, “As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now abide (μείνατε) in My love. If My commands you keep, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and abide in His love.” (John 15:9–10)<sup>19</sup> These words follow upon His earlier bidding, “Abide in Me, and I in you,” and “If a man abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit.” (John 15:4–5) As God commanded the Israelites to love Him with their whole being, Jesus bids the disciples to abide, remain, or rest in Him, with the promise that they do so by attending to the commands He’s spoken to them. Also, we should note that Christ’s call for His disciples to abide in Him occurs within the context of an existing relationship: “as the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you.” The devotional abiding

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<sup>18</sup>John 4:39–40. See also John 1:38–39, 2:12.

<sup>19</sup>This is my translation.

does not create a relationship, but deepens and sustains the relationship forged within God Himself, and for just that reason, it enjoys permanency, leading to the production of fruit, or ministry and good works, that “should abide.”<sup>20</sup> Through the advent of Christ’s words, the devotee finds himself bound to God, both body and soul, even as the Israelites loved God with their whole heart, mind, and strength by teaching His statutes and telling His story.

This view of the believer’s devotion to Christ is found in at least one other salient New Testament term, προσκατερέω, from the base word καρτερέω (to persevere, endure) which may in turn include a shortened version of the verb τηρέω (to keep, guard, watch). This term is used in Acts 2:42, where the early believers are described as “devoting themselves” to the apostles’ teaching and breaking of the bread. With its base root of “persevere” and “endure,” the word has a decidedly long-term feel to it, suggesting that the devotion here described was one of abiding in the apostolic ministry for the sake of “enduring to the end,” the goal so often emphasized in other New Testament books.<sup>21</sup> As with John’s use of the term μένω, the focus is upon continuing in a relationship already established, and the goal is as long-term as the Last Day.

Taken together, our brief look at the words חרם, חסד, μένω, and προσκατερέω help us in developing a theology of devotion. While the terms are not used purposely to illumine home and personal devotion, they do indicate a general expectation regarding the attitude of Christian devotees, as well as the goal of their piety and the means of securing it. Devotion leads the believer beyond himself to the Lord, who deals with the believer through His words, works, and gifts, present ultimately in the Gift of all gifts, Jesus, God-with-Us. By these means, God works the faith and love He desires, that His people may arrive at His goal, which is that they abide in

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<sup>20</sup>John 15:16.

<sup>21</sup>Eph. 6:13; Col. 1:22–23; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26.

Him to the very end. These goals and means suggest the proper theological context for devotion. Rather than a way of establishing the believer's relationship with God, devotion is God's work of continuing and strengthening that relationship in the hope of His desired outcome for all believers. Such language invites a further investigation in the Lutheran Confessions, and the related articles of justification and ministry.

### **Devotional Principles in the Lutheran Confessions**

The household prayers appear in the Lutheran Confessions, appended at the end of the Small Catechism.<sup>22</sup> There they keep company with a collection of documents that echo the notes and melodies we've already heard in Holy Scripture: the prime focus on God's action, His Word as the means by which He works both faith and love, and the believer turning away from himself to God. These emphases are hallmarks of the Lutheran faith. As the Lutheran Confessions explicate these doctrines even further, they show us the proper place of home and personal devotion, and Luther's household prayers in particular, within the work of the public ministry. Understanding this placement of personal piety within Lutheran systematic theology is important, primarily so that the pastor (or parochial school teacher, or parent, and whoever else may teach devotional practices to others) may free devotion of those pitfalls associated with works-righteousness.

Throughout their pages, the Lutheran Confessions maintain a certain theological order or hierarchy of values. First and foremost, they seek to set forth the article of justification by faith and its related article, the righteousness of Christ. The Formula of Concord comments on the close connection between these two subjects: "Thus, the righteousness that out of sheer grace is

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<sup>22</sup>Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 363–64.

reckoned before God to faith or to the believer consists of the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ because He has satisfied the law for us and paid for our sins.”<sup>23</sup> Faith justifies, not because it is a virtue in itself, meriting God’s favor, but because by it the believer receives the righteousness of Christ.<sup>24</sup> Justification is forensic, originating and sustained outside of the sinner in the merciful economy of God. This foundational assertion matches what we have seen in Scripture: God only commands the Israelites to remember Him after first calling Abraham, remembering His descendants, and then freeing and leading them to the promised land; so also does Jesus invite the disciples to “abide” in the love of Father and Son that already surrounds them. The grace of God, setting forth His own righteousness, favor, and love for the sake of those who lack it, comes first, and this primacy holds tremendous comfort for the sinner: the One who greets him in Jesus Christ already comes to him in the spirit of friendship and mercy. Any devotional practice that mirrors this confession of faith and builds upon it promises to console believers throughout their days and lives.

From the assertion of Christ’s righteousness alone, the Lutheran Confessions go on to explain the ministry’s role in creating such faith: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments.”<sup>25</sup> Faith does not come or live on its own, but only through means, specifically the words and works of God, shared in all the different ways that God gives. This understanding of God’s *media* also reflects what we saw in Scripture: God enjoined the Israelites to teach His statutes and story; the psalms praised God with accounts of His mighty works; Jesus drew followers to Himself through His preaching, healings, and even a star in the sky; and He finally invites His disciples to abide in Him through the commandments

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<sup>23</sup>Kolb, *BOC*, 564.14.

<sup>24</sup>Kolb, *BOC*, 564.13.

<sup>25</sup>Kolb, *BOC*, 40.1–2.



He spoke to them. Both Scripture and the Confessions place an emphasis on God's public ministry. With that emphasis in mind, we may arrive at a simple definition of home and personal devotion: it is the use of the means of grace beyond the context of public worship. Only by using these means, appointed by God Himself, does the believer take up a devotion that dwells in the Lord's own righteousness (His words, His works, His gifts, Himself).

In that definition, we may recognize why public ministers of the Gospel have an interest in the home and personal devotion of their people and may even seek to influence it. Called by God, through His church, to preach and teach the Gospel and to administer the sacrament in accordance with it, they are called to care for the consciences of their people, securing those consciences in the righteousness of Christ alone. Christ Himself lays down this apostolic ministry upon His resurrection, and so it has come down to pastors today: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19–20) A pastor's interest in his people's conscience cannot be his own, but must be driven by the Lord's own care for sinners, namely, His desire that they die to sin and come alive to the kingdom established and secured by His blood. Devotion is no mere add-on or decoration to this New Testament ministry! It is a further expression of it, exercised by families and individuals in their daily lives, making it an essential component of their daily service before God. Thus a pastor (or other public servant of the gospel) cares for his people, who are the Lord's own people, when he cares for how they use the Word within their personal arena, helping them to see and hear in that Word the gift of Christ's righteousness.

Finally, the Lutheran Confessions go on to assert the necessity of spiritual renewal in the life of the believer:

After we have been justified and reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God, to pray for and expect help from Him, to thank and praise Him, and to obey Him in our afflictions.<sup>26</sup>

Here is a simple description of the devotional life. Domestic and personal piety is not only a means by which God preserves His people in the righteousness of His Son, but it is also a fruit of that righteousness. Christ Jesus, at work in the believer by His words and in the power of His Holy Spirit, so secures the conscience in His mercy that the conscience turns to Him in prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and obedience, which in turn promises only to deepen and confirm the abiding relationship with God, grace upon grace. From the righteousness of Christ to the faith-creating ministry to the renewal of believers in Christ: so do the Lutheran Confessions proceed, and so may our devotions.

Some might object that this high appreciation of devotion runs the risk of pietism. But what is this risk of pietism? The risk of pietism is that a believer so focuses upon his interior state that he becomes *incurvatus in se* (“curved in on himself”) and relies on his spiritual exercises for merit before God—that is, he sets his heart on the *doing* of them, thinking that by doing so he earns or confirms something for himself. Yet what we have unearthed so far is the exact antidote to this disaster. We have discovered a pattern of devotion focused upon the external gifts of the Righteous One and drawing its muse from the public ministry. The Lutheran Confessions remind us that this public ministry is the avenue, not only of justification, but also of the good works and renewal that follow upon justification—sanctification depends upon the Holy Spirit, who works through means! Therefore, it is entirely appropriate for the church’s ministry to concern itself with devotion, as much as it concerns itself with sanctification. Increased commitment and love towards the Lord, it must be remembered, are *good* things, as are *good* works. To attend to the

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<sup>26</sup>Kolb, *BOC*, 140.125.

means of these blessings is not (necessarily) self-righteousness, but a duty of all ordained ministers. Indeed, it is precisely to help his flock avoid self-righteousness, and to focus upon the real, objective gifts of the Lord, that a pastor must attend to the form and content of home and personal devotion.

The Lutheran Confessions, themselves drawn from Holy Scripture and confessing its truth, have thus provided the framework in which we may now pause and fully appreciate the place of Luther's household prayers within a broader life of devotion. For 500 years, these prayers have offered the pastor a mainstay for introducing his sheep to the rudimentary structures of workaday piety. It contains three basic rites: 1) the morning blessing; 2) the evening blessing; and 3) the table blessing. Each one, as we shall see, bids the believer to abide in the righteousness of Christ by teaching him to *use* the means of conveying that righteousness daily. The fact that Luther focused upon these three blessing is itself significant: each one coincides with a time customarily used for attending to one's own bodily requirements (preparing for the day, taking nourishment, and resting). To mark such moments of self-concern with God-centered devotion already hints at the theology at work in the prayers, a theology that finds life not in the believer but outside of him, in God.

Yet there is still more to say. The three household blessings, and in particular the first two, follow a particular pattern. At morning and evening, the pattern is as follows:

- 1) Triune Invocation and Sign of the Cross;
- 2) Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer
- 3) A Personal Collect (designated as optional)
- 4) Setting at once to the appointed task.

(In the case of the morning blessing, the singing of a hymn is also suggested as one sets to work.) This pattern is significant in several ways. First, it opens and closes the day by connecting the believer to Holy Baptism as the devotee clothes himself with the Name and cross once poured over him at Baptism. Not the believer's name, but God's name, starts the day, as well as the physical sign of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. God's grace and mercy, as well as the believer's reception of that grace and mercy, are thus confessed. Use of the Apostles' Creed deepens this baptismal connection and serves in a similar way to the divine injunctions in Deuteronomy: it tells the history of God in a simple summary, so that the believer hears God's word and mighty works first, before he opens his mouth in prayer. The blessings move from God to the sinner, and only then from the sinner to God.

Mention of the creed prompts a second point: both blessings hang upon practices experienced at corporate worship. Recitation of the Creed and praying the Lord's Prayer come directly from the church's liturgy, and make this moment of domestic piety an echo of the gathered assembly, so that the devotee is not only given God, but also communion with God's people. The Creed and Lord's Prayer also underscore the morning and evening blessings' dependence upon Scripture and the church's confession of faith—that is, they stem from resources external to the believer, and not from the believer's own thoughts or hidden revelations. At the same time, the believer's personal context and tastes are acknowledged in the collects, the selection of a morning hymn, and the encouragement to engage work or go to sleep in good cheer. The believer does not pray in a vacuum, but in a particular situation that includes its own idiom, music, and responsibilities. Thus the believer's personal life is taken seriously, though not left to itself, being reconstituted, as it were, in the external gifts of Baptism, Scripture, and church.

A similar pattern is seen at work in the mealtime prayer:

- 1) Gathering at the table with folded hands
- 2) Psalm verses and the Lord's Prayer
- 3) Collects of Thanksgiving.

This pattern is the same for both asking a blessing (before the meal) and returning thanks (after the meal). As in the blessings for morning and evening, the mealtime blessing hangs upon resources external to the believer and drawn from the church's worship and Scripture. Psalm verses replace the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer retains its pre-eminency (the modern Christian may especially note how frequently Luther teaches us to recite the Lord's Prayer: from morning to night, and assuming three meals, it would be a minimum of eight times each day!). In contrast to the morning and evening blessings, the additional prayers are not noted as optional for meals, and are simply brought forward from Luther's pre-Reformation piety. At mealtime prayer, the church's tradition inveighs even more heavily than at bedtime and rising.

What we find, then, is that the Small Catechism equips its readers with a style of personal devotion that relies heavily on resources outside of the readers themselves and thus reflects the Scriptural and confessional focus on God's grace and righteousness. Rather than encouraging personal innovation or reflection on inward thoughts, Luther's household prayers appear as a further application of the gifts and worship experienced within the Christian church. This approach makes further sense when we remember some of Luther's teaching in prior sections of the Small Catechism. Addressing the Second Commandment, he states that believers facing both trials and great blessings should call on the Name of God.<sup>27</sup> He also teaches that faith only comes through the Holy Spirit at work in the Word and the church, and that Christians learn the daily

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<sup>27</sup> Kolb, *BOC*, 352.4.

pattern of faith (i.e., dying and rising) from Holy Baptism.<sup>28</sup> As with her worship, evangelism, and teaching, the Lutheran church's approach to devotion appears to be externally focused, that is, theocentric, sacramental, and churchly.

### Summary

While home and personal devotion appears to have received no systematic treatment or definition within the Christian tradition, we find a devotional ethic at work in Holy Scripture that the Lutheran Confessions also reflect. The devotion of Israel centered on retelling the words and works of the Lord as a means of nourishing Israel's relationship with the God of its ancestors. So also did the early church "devote" itself to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers of the community, even as Jesus had taught His apostles to abide in His words. The Lutheran Confessions echo these Scriptural accents, emphasizing the external righteousness of Christ, the ministry of Word and sacrament, and the working of faith and holiness through these tangible means. This devotional ethic not only illumines the theological perspective of Luther's household prayers, but it also provides a theological rationale for why public ministers of the Gospel might turn to them as one pastoral tool for encouraging the church's devotional life. Yet now we must ask: have Lutheran pastors always relied on these prayers? What contemporary challenges may question their continued use, and how might the scholarly efforts of others help us understand and address those challenges?

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<sup>28</sup> Kolb, *BOC*, 355.6–356, 360.12.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE PROJECT IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

I am surprised that I never knew about these prayers. I went through my catechism a little bit in my confirmation class, but we only went over half of it and the prayers weren't part of it. I wish we spent more time in the Catechism [sic] so I would've at least known that they were there. I know that my dad never learned about them in his confirmation class, but my grandma had to memorize them.

This single quote, from a teenage participant in the journaling portion of this project, captures the spotty usage of Luther's household prayers across the past century. Not only contemporary Lutherans in America, but also Lutherans in times past, have sometimes embraced and sometimes ignored these prayers. That inconsistent reception forms part of the context for this project, which aims at discovering whether or not these prayers may still form a lively component of home and personal devotion for my parishioners as well as their Lutheran brothers and sisters. Even though the morning, evening, and table blessings resonate with the Biblical witness and confessional theology, is there something about their structure or language that resists reception? Luther himself counseled his readers to ignore his suggestions for devotion if they did not work—Christians are free in the mercy of God to use or not use any particular prayer. So even though these prayers appear in the symbolical books to which Lutheran pastors subscribe, has their time past? Should pastors forego trying to teach or commend them to their people?

My field research, presented in chapters 4 and 5, will begin formulating answers to those questions. In this present chapter, I will explore the context in which that research took place. As noted earlier, part of the context is historical: these prayers have social and literary layers that

will help explain how they have come to us and how the church received them over time. Knowing their origins and subsequent reception will not only highlight their literary and pastoral genius, but it will also help interpret the results of my field research and suggest some pastoral principles for encouraging use of the prayers today.

Moreover, this project took place within a particular scholarly context. Over the past several decades, interest in the social history of Christians, including their devotional practices, has increased, even though published, scholarly reflection on the theology and practice of domestic piety remains low among Lutherans—within our confession of faith, the emphasis remains on producing devotional resources, a very worthy endeavor in itself. Both that paucity of reflection among Lutherans and the growing interest in religious practice among scholars make this present work timely and valuable. By focusing on a particular devotional practice among Lutherans from theological, historical, and practical perspectives (including firsthand reactions to its use), this study makes a small offering to the social history of Lutherans while also promising to illumine foundational questions of how pastors may encourage devotion within the church.

Finally, this research into the use of the household prayers took place within a challenging spiritual context marked by not only the growth of postmodern sensibilities, but also, it seems, a resurgence of modernity as some circles turn more and more to the natural sciences as the final arbiter of truth. In many ways, the challenge of this latter context provides the whole reason for the project: can devotional language from the sixteenth-century Reformation still speak for souls marked by the conflict of modernity and postmodernism? I will therefore treat it first before reviewing the relevant historical and scholarly data.

### **The Spiritual Context: Modernity, Postmodernism, and Devotional Heritage**

Today's Christians, and perhaps even more, today's Christian pastors, remind me of a



Lutheran pastor I met while still attending seminary. A passionate lover of historic liturgy, he omitted no part of the Communion service, chanting them all, and wore full vestments (alb, stole, and chasuble) despite serving in a very old church building that had no air conditioning and very few windows that could actually open. At the same time, he had a large family: a wife in the final trimester of her sixth pregnancy and five young children who, taking advantage of their mother's weariness, would run through pew after pew throughout the service. Watching my pastor friend labor in these three conditions—the demands of liturgy, the heat, and the unruly children—was almost entertaining. There he stood, draped in three yards of silk and a bolt of polyester, hands outstretched, trying to chant the Gospel as sweat pooled in his eyes and his children whooped and hollered in the pews. Dare he wipe his eyes? Scold the children? Should he just keep chanting? He was three persons in one, a pastor, an uncomfortable man, and a father, their conflicting demands skipping across his face like deer on the run. Finally, he seized up, shook the sweat away, and yelped at his wife: “Gigi! The children!”

What has such a scene to do with this project? Any pastor seeking to commend a wholesome life of devotion to his people faces a threefold challenge. Like my young friend at worship, he has in his possession a rich Christian tradition of speaking and praying the Gospel, with all of its unique history, symbol, and doctrine, first formed in a particular, ancient culture and now dressed in the history of several intervening centuries. It is a beautiful thing, this devotional heritage of the church, a cathedral with more niches and transepts than a pastor will ever explore in his span of service, and it carries its own demands of discipline, learning, and stewardship. But it is not the only challenge that he faces.

At the same time, a pastor and his people live in the heated conflict of modernity and postmodernism. On one hand, modernity's certainty beats down on the believer like the burning

sun as both the scientific disciplines and their interlopers point at the mystery of our faith and say, “How? It cannot be.” E. Glenn Hinson captures the realities of this conflict in an article entitled, “The Problems of Devotion in the Space Age.” He notes the erosion of church authority in the face of scientific advancement—“the secular city operates on another set of standards and with other institutions or forces in control”—and suggests that the root problem is a “loss of transcendence.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, inherited ways of devotion can appear and sound naïve, not to mention immaterial. Can the heritage bear the heat?

On the other hand, postmodernism is children in the pews, on the loose and testing all boundaries (including the boundaries of science), even pressing past them to embrace a worldview marked by relativism and pluralism.<sup>2</sup> This mindset “finds modernity’s focus on propositional truth too narrow” and takes a new delight in “symbolic communication and . . . story, metaphor, and myth.”<sup>3</sup> Yet even so, postmodernism does not give the church’s devotional heritage an easy pass. It places it alongside the world’s panoply of religious traditions, relativizing its message and subjecting its call for loyalty to doubt, seeking a common truth that transcends its actual symbols and metaphors. Postmodernism, as many have suggested, is simply modernity’s child, expanding the authority of Descartes’ proposition, “I think, therefore I am,” to subject science and faith alike to the individual’s mind. Where does an inherited devotional path stand in such a context—or does it stand at all?

Every Christian, and certainly every pastor, steadily negotiates this question within the Christian life. Seeking to commend prayers as old as Luther’s household prayers demands

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<sup>1</sup>Glenn E. Hinson, “The Problems of Devotion in the Space Age,” *Review and Expositor* 71, no. 3 (Summer 1974): 295, 297.

<sup>2</sup>Joel P. Okamoto, “Lutherans Speaking the Gospel into Postmodern Ears,” *Concordia Journal* (April 2001): 102. Okamoto marks relativism and pluralism as two features essential to postmodernism.

<sup>3</sup>Okamoto, “Lutherans Speaking the Gospel,” 102

serious consideration of the challenge that their language presents to today's believers. Are the people whom a pastor serves more bound by the narrative of modernity, postmodernism, or the church—or all three at work in varying measures? What will a modern mindset think of the table blessings' assurance that God provides "food in due season" to "every living thing," or of the morning and evening prayers' request for angelic protection against the "evil foe"? Will a postmodern mind receive the structure and discipline of the household prayers willingly, or will it militate against such formal prayer? These kinds of questions, drawn from the philosophical study of contemporary thought, inform this study and help articulate the challenges that it hopes to meet.

As Kenda Creasy Dean, quoting Walter Brueggeman, states in her book, *Almost Christian*, the church must be "a bilingual community, conversant in both the traditions of the church and the narratives of the dominant culture."<sup>4</sup> God Himself, she contends, took up this task of "translation" by becoming flesh for the sake of the world. For pastors to keep in step with the Spirit, develop such bilingualism, and employ it in commending traditional devotional prayers, they must listen carefully to the language spoken around them. How are their people hearing the tradition? How do they translate it? How are they hearing the prayers that their pastors may commend? As we will see, the surveys and journaling experiments conducted around the household prayers provide some direction for this task of cultural translation. Hopefully, it will help foster a devotion that can both withstand the heat and engage the children.

### **The Historical Context: Learning the Language of the Household Prayers**

We cannot translate languages that we do not know. Not only speaking a language but also

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<sup>4</sup>Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 112.

understanding its history and grammar—you could say, the culture from which it springs—prepares us to make a more faithful translation of its texts. So it goes with the household prayers that Luther included at the end of his catechism in 1529. While bearing the imprint of the pastoral and reforming spirit at work in Luther, their structure and content did not originate with him but grew out of a much larger history and church culture to which Luther was an heir. Moreover, their reception and use in the centuries following their publication holds some tantalizing parallels to their usage, or non-usage, today. Delving into this fuller historical context of the prayers promises not only to help us appreciate them as a literary creation but also to consider different ways that pastors may interpret and commend them to their people.

With his concern for domestic piety, Luther stood in good and ancient company. While we find few if any apostolic directives regarding prayer apart from the gathered assembly, a slew of personal prayer manuals appeared at the turn of the third century (coinciding, perhaps, with the creation of more public spaces for Christians worship). Written by such leading lights as Hippolytus, Tertullian, Origen, and Clement, these volumes serve as a sort of “first layer” to the linguistic archaeology of prayer.<sup>5</sup> In them, we find several points of contact between the household prayers of the catechism and early Christian practice. First, the early church fathers also focused on morning, evening, and mealtime as times for prayer. Almost all of the church fathers carefully explain that true prayer should be “without ceasing,” and many of them also commend the third, sixth, and ninth hours (9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m.), a Biblical pattern that would become formative for the monastic tradition. Yet Tertullian observes that these prayer hours occur “in addition of course to our statutory prayers which without any behest are due at

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<sup>5</sup>Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53.

the coming in of daylight and night,” a sentiment echoed in Hippolytus and Cyprian.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, Hippolytus commends prayer at the evening meal, and Tertullian also found it “seemly for the faithful not to take food . . . without first interposing a prayer.”<sup>7</sup> It appears that by the third century, Christians had come to view morning, evening, and table prayer as normative expressions of the sanctified life—part of devotion’s dialect, we might say—and Luther’s household prayers stand in this tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Two additional points of contact between the catechism’s prayers and the early church are the Lord’s Prayer and the sign of the cross. The *Didache* first enjoins a daily use of the Lord’s Prayer upon believers, teaching that it be used three times a day.<sup>9</sup> Tertullian viewed this prayer as “a plan of prayer” that Jesus has “marked out for the new disciples,” as did Origen, and Cyprian went as far as to write one of the first tracts on the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>10</sup> Hippolytus had particular affection for the signing of the cross, encouraging married persons to sign themselves with their

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<sup>6</sup>Tertullian, *Tract on Prayer*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1953), 35. Hippolytus, too, commended several hours of prayer, but only in addition to morning (after washing the hands) and in the evening, both of them times for which he appointed the use of specific psalms by the household. *Apostolic Traditions*, trans. Burton Scott Easton (Cambridge: University Press, 1934), 54–55. Cyprian connects morning to the resurrection of Christ and evening to Christ as “the true Sun and the true Day.” D. Richard Stuckwisch, “Principles of Christian Prayer from the Third Century: A Brief Look at Origen, Tertullian and Cyprian with Some Comments on Their Meaning for Today” *Worship* 71, no.1 (January 1997): 8.

<sup>7</sup>Bowes, *Private Worship*, 55; Stuckwisch, “Principles of Christian Prayer,” 7. Bowes comments that already by the time of Justin Martyr, devotion surrounded the Christian table as believers ate bread from the Lord’s Supper in their homes.

<sup>8</sup>Dikran Hadidian refers to a “steady and consistent tradition in regard to morning and evening prayers,” stemming from Jewish practice. “The Background and Origin of the Christian Hours of Prayer,” *Theological Studies* 25, no.1 (March 1964). That pattern would also appear in the desert fathers, as we see in the writing of John of Apamea (or John the Solitary, AD 400–450), who wrote in his “Letter to Hesychius,” “Such, then, should be your daily aim throughout life: each morning you should look back on your service during the night, each evening look back on your service during the day.” *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, ed. and trans. Sebastian Brock (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1987), 95–96. Bowes points out that the Jewish domestic practice included the Shema and 10 commandments recited morning and evening, with a benediction said over the evening meal (Bowes, *Private Worship*, 53).

<sup>9</sup>Carl A. Volz, “Prayer in the Early Church,” *A Primer on Christian Prayer*, ed. Terence E. Fretheim, et al. (St. Paul: Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, n.d.), 99–100.

<sup>10</sup>Stuckwisch, “Principles of Christian Prayer,” 3.

“moist breath” so as to cleanse themselves of any sexual impurity; he then admonished all believers to “imitate [Christ] always, by signing thy forehead sincerely; for this sign of his Passion” defends against the devil if made in faith.<sup>11</sup> Tertullian joined Hippolytus in this reverence for the sign of the cross and commented that it could suffice as a mealtime prayer; the Syrian father Evagrius, writing some time later, urged its use as the first step in stilling the mind before prayer and avoiding sloth.<sup>12</sup> In retaining both these features in his own recommended prayers, Luther was speaking a devotional language common to the ancient church that relied on Scripture to provide both its chief prayer and its most common, tactile sign.

Yet if we are linguistic archaeologists, digging through the devotional history of these prayers, we have more layers to go. Two scholars have published detailed reflection on the sources of the household prayers, Albrecht Peters and Timothy Wengert. Of these two, Peters is the most thorough (with Wengert likely writing for a more popular audience). Echoing the prior work of M. Reu, Wengert simply notes that the prayers come from “the traditional breviary” and that such features as the Lord’s Prayer, Creed, standing and kneeling, and the sign of the cross were standard among Christians (as we have seen already in the patristic age).<sup>13</sup> Peters not only gives more flesh to this source material—according to his research, the morning and evening collects do not appear in the Roman breviary in the exact form that Luther provides, thus begging the question of what precise material he used—but he also spends some time unpacking the literary construction and poetic beauty of the prayers. Both lines of inquiry, the historical and the poetic, will help us to take up the “devotional tongue” of the Small Catechism.

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<sup>11</sup>Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions*, 55–57.

<sup>12</sup>Volz, “Prayer in the Early Church,” 102. Evagrius, “Admonition on Prayer,” *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, ed. and trans. Sebastian Brock (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1987), 70.

<sup>13</sup>Timothy Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 164.

With respect to the source material of the morning and evening collects (both of them beginning with the words, “I thank you, my heavenly Father”), Peters first notes the resonance of their concluding sentences (“Into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul . . . . Let your holy angel have charge of me . . . .”) with the language of the psalms and gospels: “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Ps. 31:6); “He has given His angels charge over you, so that they keep you in all your ways” (Ps. 91:11); and “the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him” (Ps. 34:8). At the end of the prayer, “evil foe” is reminiscent of statements in Matthew 13:28 and John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11, as well as Luther’s own hymn on Psalm 46, composed a year or two prior to the catechism (and so in 1527 or 1528).<sup>14</sup> Luther’s devotional language is Scriptural language, as we would expect.

Yet this reliance on Scriptural language for the morning and evening collects may have grown from an intermediate source, Luther’s experience in the monastery. Peters specifically references the prayer offices of Completorium (Compline) and Prime. Completorium used both Psalm 91:11 and Psalm 31:6 prior to bedtime; it’s traditional collect, *Visita quasemus*, asked for angelic protection; and the appointed hymn referenced the “foe,” even as the *lectio brevis* included the reference to the devil in 1 Peter 5:8. The office of Prime had similar calls for angelic protection, including a collect asking that God “send [His] holy angel to us, who may protect us, so that no enemy will ensnare us on our way,” and another one traditionally ascribed to Jerome (*Pro custodia diei siquentis*) that asked that God’s “holy angel of the heavens may attend us.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps most interestingly, Prime would be celebrated by the monks directly before going to

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<sup>14</sup>Albrecht Peters, *Confession and Christian Life: Commentary on Luther’s Catechisms*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 237.

<sup>15</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 239.

work, that they may go to it “joyfully.”<sup>16</sup> If these similar prayers did, indeed, influence Luther’s composition of the household prayers, we have thus found Luther himself engaged in a task of translation, not only from Latin to German, but from cloister to Christian home.

Nothing if not thorough, Peters goes on to reach behind Luther’s monastic experience to morning and evening collects of the medieval, Carolingian, and patristic ages that may have been known to Luther. Their similarities are so compelling as to deserve reprint here. From the *Rosetum exercitorum spiritualium et sacrarum meditationum* of Jean Mombaer (a follower of the *Devotiona moderna*), published in 1494, comes this morning prayer, preceded by the sign of the cross and ending with a commendation to Mary:

I give you thanks, most merciful Father, who deigned to guard me this night through Your great compassion and I pray Your immense mercy that You allow me thus to pass through the coming day, insofar as my service pleases you, through Christ our Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Sign of the cross, thanksgiving for protection, petition for help in pleasing God, and commendation: if Luther did not know this prayer in its specific wording, he certainly knew its devotional grammar or pattern. So it goes for this prayer, appearing in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries:

I give You thanks, Almighty Father, who deigned to guard me in this night. I pray Your mercy, most holy Lord, that You allow me thus to traverse the coming day in Your holy service, with humility and discernment, as our service is pleasing to You; and provide me today with the highest patience to show grateful service to You. Send, I beg Lord, Your angel to patrol about us and snatch away from us the godless who circle around us, so that we can run the way of Your commands, apart from all errors, without our foot stumbling.<sup>18</sup>

Again we see the pattern of thanksgiving for protection, petition for help in pleasing God, and a commendation into the care of angels. This prayer was found in Latin collections of prayers as

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<sup>16</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 238.

<sup>17</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 240. Peters reports that E. Sander found this prayer in 1937.

<sup>18</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 241.



late as 1561, suggesting that Luther would have known it, as he may also have known this evening prayer attributed to the Egyptian monk Macarius, who died about 390:

Holy angel of God, my guardian in wretched body and soul, forgive me everything, whatever I have saddened You with all the days of my life and what I have sinned on this day. Guard me in this night and save me from every misdeed and suggestion of the adversary .<sup>19</sup>

With all of these prayers, whether they directly influenced Luther or not, we see a developing devotional language and pattern that echo in the household prayers of the Small Catechism and that may prove helpful today.

Peters has less to say about the source material for Luther's mealtime prayers (referred to as the *Benedicite* [before meals] and *Gratias* [after meals]). He simply notes that they both come from the Roman tradition and appeared in a Roman hymnal, *Gotteslob*.<sup>20</sup> He does mention that the *Benedicite* has a definite prototype in the *Missale of Bobbio*, published in the 700s.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, Luther sought to translate the prayer traditions that he knew from the larger church, and possibly his own monastic training, into the home. Rather than branch into a new devotion of his own imagining, he carried forward the structure and language of inherited patterns that reached as far back as the patristic age, and interpreted them anew for the fledgling evangelical ministry. Such pastoral work, in which Luther sought to bridge the tradition and his present time, reflects the aims of this present project.

It also demonstrates his poetic skills and underscores the importance of poetics for authoring the church's devotion. Alone among the scholars whom I researched, Peters pauses in his analysis to appreciate the beauty of the morning and evening collects. First, and citing a work

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<sup>19</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 241–242.

<sup>20</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 247.

<sup>21</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 248.

by Christhard Mahrenholz, he observes that the morning and evening collects share a common poetic device that assists memorization. As he describes it, “each is constructed in the middle section, with an artistic intertwining to form a chiasm”:

I thank you, my heavenly father . . . . protected me . . . .  
    . . . . and I ask you, that you would . . . .  
for into your hands I commend . . . . Amen.

Only the intervening sections change.<sup>22</sup> Two further features enhance this poetic structure: Luther frequently used two German words to define one Latin term, and he chose language with similar vowel sounds, contributing to what we would call assonance in English. One example, cited by Peters, helps illustrate this melodic German: *macht an mir finde* and *Sunden und allem ubel*.<sup>23</sup> When Luther translated the Latin church’s devotion into evangelical home devotion, he did it with careful attention (or perhaps innate connection) to the language of his neighbors. The language is almost playful, which would make the prayers especially attractive to children, as Wengert maintains.<sup>24</sup> This latter observation brings us to the question of reception: how did the evangelicals of Luther’s time and in the following centuries embrace or neglect these prayers? Was Luther’s devotional “translation” successful, and what does its measure of success suggest for the questions of this project?

With those questions, we arrive at another layer of the household prayers’ history. Broad publication of texts does not always imply broad usage, as any pastor who has handed out hundreds of Bibles, catechisms, and *Lutheran Book of Prayer* volumes knows. Yet between the hearts of Lutherans in past centuries and today’s researchers stands a heavy curtain—as Kim

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<sup>22</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 236–37. The work by Mahrenholz is *Das Gebet des Einzelnen und der Gottesdienst der Gemeinde*, published in 1965.

<sup>23</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 243. We might also note the consonantal repetitions (“m” and “l”), on which Peters does not comment.

<sup>24</sup>Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms*, 164.

Bowes observes, “private devotion is hard to see.”<sup>25</sup> This inaccessibility of actual usage leaves us to explore the public availability of these prayers, which can give some indication of their general popularity. On this subject, few scholars seem to surpass the work of Johann Michael Reu (1869–1943). Paul Johnston contends that Reu was and is the undisputed American authority “when it comes to the knowledge of authors, editions, and contents of early versions of Luther’s Small Catechism,” and we find two distillations of this authority in *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism: A History of Its Origin, Its Distribution, and Its Use*, written on the occasion of the catechism’s jubilee year in 1929, and a tightly-packed review of the catechism’s editions, both in Germany and abroad, in *The Lutheran World Almanac for 1928*.<sup>26</sup> This project does not require a full review of these works, but they do provide a few highlights regarding the early public reception of the household prayers and thus an historical prelude for their reception and use today.

Reu maintains that the Small Catechism, first published in chart form in January 1529, may not have originally included the morning, evening, and table prayers, although it seems possible, as an early reference to them appears in a letter written by Joseph Levin Metzsch on March 7.<sup>27</sup> In any event, Bugenhagen’s edition in the spring of 1529 included the table blessings but not the morning and evening blessings, but Luther’s high German edition on May 16, 1529 contained all three; their absence in Bugenhagen’s work may have partially motivated Luther to issue this latter edition.<sup>28</sup> According to Reu, the household prayers and Table of Duties may have even

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<sup>25</sup>Bowes, *Private Worship*, 9.

<sup>26</sup>Paul I. Johnston, “Reu’s Understanding of the Small Catechism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 7, no.4 (winter 1993), 425. J. Michael Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism: A History of its Origin, Its Distribution, and Its Use. A Jubilee Offering* (Chicago: Wartburg, 1929). J. Michael Reu, “The Small Catechisms,” *The Lutheran World Almanac for 1928*, ed. O. M. Norlie (New York: National Lutheran Council).

<sup>27</sup>Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*, 20–21.

<sup>28</sup>Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*, 21–22, 23.

appeared in chart form earlier than the sacraments because Luther would have considered them to fit more naturally into a book for children, along with the historic trio of commandments, creed, and Lord's Prayer. If correct, that observation may identify the initial and primary audience for whom Luther provided these prayers.

A subsequent edition in the summer of 1529 also contained the household prayers, and thereafter they enjoyed a variable frequency of appearance in both German editions and other translations. From Reu's comments, it seems that they did not appear in the celebrated 1531 edition in high German, but they did appear in Latin translations of 1529.<sup>29</sup> In 1550, they appeared in a Slovenian-language edition of Brenz's catechism, and in 1593, they appeared in a polygot edition (German-Latin-Greek-Hebrew).<sup>30</sup> Early editions in Danish appear to lack them, but what Reu regards as the "official" Danish edition of the sixteenth century, issued in 1538 by Petrus Palladius, bishop of Seeland, included them, and this edition was repeatedly published in Denmark and Norway through 1662; the reprint of a similar edition in Swedish, including the prayers, appears in 1572 and was used for decades thereafter.<sup>31</sup> The household prayers even made their way into the French language in an edition printed in 1529, and we know that Dutch editions included and retained the prayers for several years, as it was in this form that the Small Catechism first reached America in an Amsterdam edition from 1671.<sup>32</sup> For almost 150 years, then, the household prayers were known across Europe and into America, suggesting that they enjoyed some popularity among the people who used these catechisms. Would this popularity survive the move to a new, immigrant context within an ethnically diverse America? Do the

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<sup>29</sup>Reu, "The Small Catechisms," 45, 47.

<sup>30</sup>Reu, "The Small Catechisms," 48, 50.

<sup>31</sup>Reu, "The Small Catechisms," 53, 54.

<sup>32</sup>Reu, "The Small Catechisms," 57–58. Reu, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*, 275.

household prayers come to today's believers with the *imprimatur* of past generations?

Here we shift from the work of Reu to Arthur C. Repp, Sr., who published a book detailing editions of the Small Catechism printed in America from the colonial era through 1850.<sup>33</sup> He is not especially concerned about the household prayers, and he acknowledges that for some editions we cannot know the full contents. To summarize his findings briefly, it seems that editions of the Small Catechism produced either through or by the Pennsylvania Lutherans and the Lutheran churches associated with the Henkel family included the prayers; their frequency lessened as Lutherans moved further into the nineteenth century and away from synods more deeply connected with their German roots.<sup>34</sup> In particular, the prayers would often be removed in favor of newer, longer, and more emotionally-laden prayers as the “New Measures” of that century influenced Lutheran pastors and congregations.<sup>35</sup> This situation seemed to change with the influx of new immigrants, in particular the Saxon immigration, as these populations demanded a more rigorous connection to their devotional heritage. In fact, in 1850, a committee of the Missouri Synod rejected the official (1844) edition of the Pennsylvania Ministerium on the basis that, while it included the morning, evening, and table prayers, it “omitted several sentences” and “made some additions” to them.<sup>36</sup> Apparently, the Saxon Lutherans had sufficient

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<sup>33</sup>Arthur C. Repp, Sr., *Luther's Catechism Comes to America: Theological Effects on the Issues of the Small Catechism Prepared in and for America Prior to 1850* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow and American Theological Library Association, 1982).

<sup>34</sup>A more detailed list of the editions for which we have certain information on this subject may be found in Appendix B. Because Repp did not always clarify which editions did or did not have the household prayers, a thorough investigation would require more study of primary sources. As a note of historical interest, both Reu and Repp observe that the first literary document written in a native American tongue, Delaware, was the Small Catechism, including the morning, evening, and table prayers.

<sup>35</sup>Repp, *Luther's Catechism Comes to America*, 206. He cites the sorry example of the South Carolina Synod, which had abandoned catechetical instruction by 1846.

<sup>36</sup>Repp, *Luther's Catechism Comes to America*, 75. Repp finds it hard to know what omissions and additions the committee had in view, as the 1844 Pennsylvania edition matched the edition in the Book of Concord used at that time.

attachment to the household prayers as to resist changing them.

Yet perhaps this Saxon tenacity (and American laxity) with regard to the household prayers unearths something significant about their “cultural translation.” Could it be that the poetic beauty earlier noted by Peters, and so friendly to childhood memorization, is lost as a church moves from immigrant roots into English-speaking America, thus making these prayers less fitted to daily use? When Luther wrote them, he almost certainly did not envision himself penning a devotional regimen for all times and places—as noted earlier, he would tell those who sought his devotional counsel to ignore his advice if it did not help. Perhaps Luther’s prayers simply do not have “feet” on American soil. Today, they appear in most editions of the *Small Catechism*, especially those produced by the Saxon immigrants’ daughter institution, Concordia Publishing House. Yet as the quote at the start of this chapter suggests (itself written by a Missouri Synod youth), they enjoy little popularity. In the face of modernity, postmodernism, and historical change, has their usefulness for my congregation and others ended?

Peters notes that, very soon after the catechism’s appearance, evangelical Germans began adjusting the proposed table prayers to their own practice, reciting only the psalm verses before and after meals and foregoing the Lord’s Prayer and collects of thanksgiving.<sup>37</sup> This one insight into the actual use of the prayers, already in Reformation Germany, may point a way forward to how pastors may model their use and understand people’s reaction to them. It also points to the scholarly context in which this work takes place, to which I now turn.

### **The Scholarly Context: The Growing Study of Practice in Religion and Theology**

On a shelf in my study sits a very thick book that I have not yet fully read: *Lord Jesus*

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<sup>37</sup>Peters, *Confession*, 247.

*Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* by Larry Hurtado.<sup>38</sup> In it, Hurtado surveys the actual practice of Christians in the first decades following the resurrection, and on the basis of that devotion seeks to shed new light on the church's confession that Jesus is God. A fascinating book, it represents a growing field within social history and religion: the study of practice. Both social historians and theologians have sought to look at the diurnal conduct of different religions in order to better understand it. Since this present project seeks to understand the domestic use of the household prayers among the people at Zion Lutheran Church and their fellow believers, it contributes, if in a very small way, to this field. A closer look at its current state will therefore place the project within its scholarly context.

With respect to social history, postmodern interest in symbol, local habits, and culture has combined with modern investigative techniques to research popular practices and then interpret what they indicate about the practitioners' beliefs, values, and condition—we could say, this discipline studies religious practice as a kind of language, asking, “What do the behaviors of believers tell us about what they believe, fear, value, etc.?” One particular branch of study looks at domestic devotional practices. Margaret MacDonald of St. Francis University in Nova Scotia and Halvor Moxnes of the University of Oslo trace the flowering of this discipline to the publication of two articles in 1997, “Families in the New Testament: Households and House Churches” (Carolyn Osiek and David L. Bach) and “Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor” (Halvor Moxnes).<sup>39</sup> Thereafter appeared a great many articles, dissertations, and books on the subject, exploring everything from devotion among

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<sup>38</sup>Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>39</sup>Margaret MacDonald and Halvor Moxnes, “Domestic Space and Families in Early Christianity: Editors' Introduction,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 27, no. 1 (2004): 3.

Jewish families in the New Testament period to the social origins of church architecture. The very helpful work of Kim Bowes on private Christian worship and religious change in late antiquity has already been referenced earlier in this paper. MacDonald and Moxnes, with their primary interest in the New Testament, do not mention that scholars have also applied this study of devotional habits to the present day, featuring such subjects as the domestic piety of women in the antebellum South to devotional identity among immigrants to America.<sup>40</sup> The diversity of subjects points to a broad and growing interest in how Christians express their faith away from the public assembly, even as I seek to explore my own congregation's use of Luther's prayer at morning, evening, and mealtime.

A particularly helpful volume of presentations related to this project was published in 2014 for the Ecclesiastical History Society, collecting a series of papers read at that society's 2012 and 2013 meetings.<sup>41</sup> One paper, *Relationships, Resistance and Religious Change in the Early Christian Household* by Kate Cooper, underscores the importance of devotional study. While some may view home and personal devotion as private, almost quietist affairs, Cooper recognizes that "devotion can be dangerous" for at least two reasons: 1) differing devotions within a household can divide the family and critique parental authority, and 2) a household united in devotion becomes a home resistant to societal change, and even a local leader or shelter when public authorities fail.<sup>42</sup> As Bowes argues in her work, home devotion can even serve as a

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<sup>40</sup>Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008). Mary Clark Moschella, *Living Devotions: Reflections on Immigration, Identity, and Religious Imagination* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2008).

<sup>41</sup>John Doran, Charlotte Methuen, and Alexandra Walsham, ed. "Religion and the Household: Papers Read at the 2012 Meeting and the 2013 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society." *Studies in Church History* 50 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2014).

<sup>42</sup>Kate Cooper, "Relationship, Resistance and Religious Change in the Early Christian Household," *Studies in Church History* 50 (2014): 8–9, 21–22.



bulwark against ecclesiastical authorities, as proven by the nervousness of early bishops towards domestic worship and their attempts to regulate it.<sup>43</sup> That observation guards this present project from being trivialized: by attending to the home and personal devotion of Zion Lutheran Church and its resources, I am attending to the health of my congregation's homes in the face of a changing society and an often wayward denominational authority. As we confront moral and doctrinal challenges to the faith in both our society and our church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the concern isn't leisurely—"What will please or enrich us?"—but vocational: How shall I help my parishioners follow the Pioneer and Perfecter of their faith?<sup>44</sup>

Two additional articles helped to place Luther's prayers in a broader context. Both focus on the publication of Christian household manuals in early modern England, with Richard Whitford's *Werke for Housholders* (published in 1530) holding particular interest for us. Alexandra Walsham discusses *Werke* as part of a broader collection of literature, including tables of the Ten Commandments and the "lords praier" published on broadsheets to hang in the home.<sup>45</sup> According to Walsham, the Council of Trent viewed such work with great suspicion, and some interpret its edicts as an attempt to suppress such work in favor of a more regulated life among Roman Catholics.<sup>46</sup> Again, we see the threat (and thus, the potential value) of a robust home devotion over against a church authority. Lucy Wooding echoes the location of *Werke* within a larger outpouring of devotional materials, but she especially contends that it, perhaps like Luther's prayers, grew out of Whitford's monastic experience.<sup>47</sup> We then find a partner, and

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<sup>43</sup>Bowes, *Private Worship*, 3, 16, 53.

<sup>44</sup>Heb. 12:2.

<sup>45</sup>Alexandra Walsham, "Holy Families: the Spiritualization of the Early Modern Household Revisited," *Studies in Church History* 50 (2014): 128–29.

<sup>46</sup>Walsham, "Holy Families," 148–49.

<sup>47</sup>Lucy Wooding, "Richard Whitford's *Werke for Housholders*: Humanism, Monasticism, and Tudor

thus a further confirmation, of Luther's conservative approach to devotion, bringing forward the church's heritage and translating it for contemporary usage, and this model may prove helpful for the final recommendations of this present project.

If the social study of Christian devotional behavior has inspired historians, it has occasionally touched upon theological work, as well. Earlier, I referenced the flowering of liturgical theology in the past century. Like social history, this discipline also studies religious practice, but its focus lies mostly with the conduct of public liturgies—again, citing Bowes, “private devotion is hard to see.” Yet while hard to see from an academic or theoretical study, much of parish life is dedicated to it: teaching children to pray and hear the Word extends throughout their parochial years, as does a pastor's efforts to equip parents and others to lead their children in this task. Marriage, divorce, sickness, approaching death—it all calls for changes and care in home and personal devotion, and when a pastor finds himself invited into these times of transition, he has the opportunity to influence that devotional life. As much as a liturgical theology, the church may well need a devotional one.

Thor Hall, a Scandinavian Methodist who taught at Duke University, perceives this importance of devotion and wrote about it in his book, A Theology of Christian Devotion: It's Role in the Modern Religious Setting.<sup>48</sup> He opens with words that are startling but salient to this project:

Devotional literature is in danger. It is in danger of losing its grasp on the life of the Christian community, and it is in danger of missing out on the task of communicating Christian faith in a time and place like ours. It is in danger because of what it has

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Household Piety,” *Studies in Church History* 50 (2014): 161.

<sup>48</sup>Thor Hall, *A Theology of Christian Devotion: It's Role in the Modern Religious Setting* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1969).

become in itself, and it is in danger because of what is happening in the church and the world.<sup>49</sup>

Pointing to such great devotional classics as the *Confessions* of Augustine, *The Imitation of Christ* by Kempis, and *True Christianity* by Arndt, Hall laments that today's church seems unable to produce "the close integration of Christian understanding and practical devotion" that these authors represent.<sup>50</sup> In response, he calls for a new perspective on Christian theology and living, in which academics and lay believers alike view all of their work "devotionally," that is, with a certain ardency and wholeness of spirit. In many ways, his work presents a potential critique to my research: Hall wants to resist what he calls "modern devotionalism," focused on daily exercises and habits, which he fears threatens to separate devotion from the rest of life.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, he echoes the concern of patristic authors, namely, that however one prays, it must be with one's whole heart and mind, reconciled with enemies and with God—that is, with one's full being caught up in faith. Luther himself is oft-quoted to the effect that the best prayer is whatever prayer comes "from the heart." With this concern duly noted, it does not eliminate the need for giving such ardency wholesome forms which it may use to good effect.

Among Lutherans, direct theological reflection on devotion is slim. One interesting attempt appears in The Abiding Word, an anthology of doctrinal essays written to celebrate the Missouri Synod's centennial in 1945 and published in 1946.<sup>52</sup> In a chapter entitled "The Use of God's Word in the Home," the author, A. F. Miller, defines "family" or "private" devotion as "the reverent contemplation of God's Word and the offering of true prayer in the family circle or by

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<sup>49</sup>Hall, *Theology of Christian Devotion*, v.

<sup>50</sup>Hall, *Theology of Christian Devotion*, vi.

<sup>51</sup>Hall, *Theology of Devotion*, vi, 4.

<sup>52</sup>A. F. Miller, "The Use of God's Word in the Home," in *The Abiding Word: An Anthology of Doctrinal Essays for the Year 1945*, ed. Theodore Laetsch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1946).

individual Christians, apart from public worship.”<sup>53</sup> He then goes on to list the essential elements of such devotion: God’s Word, prayer, and faith, led by the father among the family on a daily basis.<sup>54</sup> Thereafter, the author engages a host of practical concerns that lead to the neglect of family devotions, peppered with a good deal of anti-Romanism, before listing the reasons not to neglect it: 1) it is a divine service (though God serves us, we also serve Him in our devotions, the author explains), 2) it is divinely commanded (Miller convincingly cites Deuteronomy 6:6–9, Joshua 1:8, Colossians 3:16, and Ephesians 6:4), and 3) it bestows divine blessings (wisdom, knowledge, faith, sanctification, the conviction of Lutheran doctrine, the resistance of evil doctrine, interpretation of the times, domestic harmony, and comfort).<sup>55</sup> He then concludes with a few practical comments about how to do it, essentially urging the family to take care in its planning.<sup>56</sup> All in all, while some of the language (and a continual critique of the Roman Catholic Church) may sound dated, the author states what many pastors might say today if asked similar questions about devotion. The article’s significance lies in showing one attempt to systematize the theology and practice of devotion and to give theological rationale to the pastoral task I am investigating in this project. Why teach wholesome, Word-drenched prayers to the parish and see if they “take”? Because life in the Word is the goal of devotion generally, as this Word nourishes and preserves the believer in the gift of Christ’s righteousness.

Other treatments of home and personal devotion focus on historical material or theological meditation. Robert Kolb has shown how many Lutheran leaders in addition to Luther viewed the catechism, including its prayers, as “the basis for discipline and good order within the

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<sup>53</sup>Miller, “The Use of God’s Word,” 85.

<sup>54</sup>Miller, “The Use of God’s Word,” 85–86.

<sup>55</sup>Miller, “The Use of God’s Word,” 97–100.

<sup>56</sup>Miller, “The Use of God’s Word,” 100–104.

household” as well as an introduction to prayer and the articles of faith.<sup>57</sup> He has also highlighted Nikolaus Von Amsdorf’s conviction that Christian parents should emphasize the Sunday sermon at home.<sup>58</sup> Such articles help to affirm the devotional character of the catechism and also develop some features of what a “broader devotional life” may be. In addition to these features, we may point to a plethora of devotional literature among Lutherans, from Johann Gerhardt’s *Sacred Meditations* (1603) to the *Treasury of Daily Prayer* published by Concordia Publishing House (2008). Lutheranism does not lack for devotional spirit and resource. The question before us is whether or not one component of it, these household prayers from the sixteenth century, still hold up to twenty-first century use.

One final article deserves mention. In 2002, Glenn Borreson, pastor in Holmen, Wisconsin, published an article in *Word & World* entitled “Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers as Baptismal Spirituality.” This article represents one of the few articles focused so narrowly on one part of the household prayers. Borreson’s thesis is that the morning and evening prayers flow from Luther’s baptismal spirituality, a point that he elaborates for each feature of the prayers (sign of the cross, creed, Lord’s Prayer, etc.), and that these prayers are able to address “the hunger of people, even Christians, yearning for an authentic life with God” because it “connects us with faith’s primordial experience: dying and rising, becoming a new creation in Christ.”<sup>59</sup> Borreson contends that Luther’s household prayers can, in fact, be “translated” into a devotion that speaks for today’s believers, at my congregation and others.

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<sup>57</sup>Robert Kolb, “The Layman’s Bible: The Use of Luther’s Catechisms in the German Late Reformation” in *Luther’s Catechisms ~ 450 Years: Essays Commemorating the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979), 21.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Kolb, “Parents Should Explain the Sermon: Nikolaus Von Amsdorf on the Role of the Christian Parent” *Lutheran Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (August 1973).

<sup>59</sup>Glenn L. Borreson, “Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers as Baptismal Spirituality,” *Word & World*, 22, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 62–63.

## Summary

The ancient and medieval roots of these prayers make them an interesting choice for contemporary Christians shaped by both modern and postmodern worldviews. Will some believers, steeped in the modern dismissal of metaphysics, find the prayers' language too arcane? Will other Christians, inspired by the postmodern emphasis on diversity and the individual, militate against memorized prayers with strong ties to a particular community? Luther developed his household prayers in conversation with a longstanding devotional heritage and rich linguistic tradition, yet their subsequent history among Lutherans in both Europe and America suggests that they may not speak to all times and places. Researching their use among today's believers will contribute to the growing study of religious practice, and it also promises to address an apparent gap in "devotional theology" among Lutherans. At the very least, it will provide me with a clearer perspective on whether or not I may use these prayers to good effect within my own ministry.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROJECT DEVELOPED**

The ministry has continued to bring me into many hospital rooms since my summer at Mayo Clinic. In some of the rooms, the Holy Spirit has caused good words to blossom ahead of me: hymns, prayers, and confessions of faith that well up from grace-hardened sinners even as they face death. In others, the sufferer lies like fallow ground, stricken, awaiting the imperishable seed and gentle dews of God's gospel. In His wisdom, He can minister and show His mercy to both, but a particular joy and contentment marks the sickbed where God's Word has put down roots. Can the household prayers of Luther's *Small Catechism* contribute to that joy? Does it make sense for me to continue using them as a pastoral tool at Zion Lutheran Church—will they find a home in the daily practice of my congregation?—and may my experience help inform the practice of other pastors? The research of this project aims at determining some initial answers to those questions, informed by the theology, historical experience, and scholarly work presented in the prior chapters.

Although conducted over the course of just one year, the research presented in the next two chapters really had its foundations in a project begun ten years ago, inspired already by some of the theological reflection presented in Chapter Two. There we saw how both Scripture and the confessions lead believers away from their own efforts to the works of God, and in particular the gift of Christ's righteousness, conveyed to His people by His Word. Hoping to lead my parishioners on that same path, that their joy may not rely on themselves but on grace alone, I established a devotional fellowship called *Coram Deo* in 2007. From the outset, I was careful to

put the goals of *Coram Deo* in proper perspective: it did not represent a righteous standard to reach, much less a model of Christian perfection, but one path to which people may continually return as they seek consolation and strength in the sure gifts of God. God's Word figured prominently in the devotional regimen to which members pledged themselves, including daily readings in the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau's four-volume devotional set, *For All the Saints*, and a monthly newsletter with guides for using that set, a monthly schedule for psalm readings drawn from Zion's hymnal (*Lutheran Book of Worship*), and further Scriptural meditations.<sup>1</sup> Also, and in keeping with what we found in Luther's own translation of medieval practice for the home, I commended to the fellowship a devotional pause at noon each day, remembering the crucifixion of Christ, based on the collect of the day for Good Friday. But most salient to this project, the *Coram Deo* path included the use of Luther's morning, evening, and table blessings. Long before this present study, those prayers had struck me as solidly grounded on the external gifts of Holy Baptism (invocation, sign of the cross, and the Creed) and God's Word (the Creed, Lord's Prayer and psalm verses), and their simplicity and poetry, noted by Peters, suggested that people would find them easy to learn and use. To each household joining the fellowship I provided a small pamphlet with theological reflections on these prayers. I was surprised to find little published reflection available (as I noted in the last chapter's review of the subject), and it felt good to contribute something, however differently I might write that booklet today. It then remained for us to see where "the path" led us.

Almost ten years later, the fellowship has retained a tenaciously devoted core membership of approximately fifty members, plus several others who have joined not only from within the

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<sup>1</sup>Had Concordia Publishing House's *Treasury of Daily Prayer* existed at that time, I would have probably used it instead.



congregation but also from neighboring churches and even beyond Wisconsin. Yet the membership has proven variable as some people have joined and then discontinued, citing a variety of reasons, including disaffection for the prayers used. In addition, and as the society approached its tenth year, I did not know the extent to which its members actually used the prayers. Did the prayers themselves prove helpful for them, or did they rely more on the *For All the Saints* readings and newsletter? The historical work of both Reu and Repp would suggest that I might find a wide and variable practice, and occasional conversations pointed to the same. As we saw in the growing study of religious practice, ascertaining the details of devotional habits can serve as one indicator of what modes of the Christian life actually find shelter among God's people. It can also provide a snapshot of how people shaped by the competing narratives of the church, modernity and postmodernism are negotiating that battle in their daily experience of the faith. Do these prayers have contemporary "legs"?

The time for evaluation had come, and this project provided an appropriate avenue for accomplishing it. Learning how members of *Coram Deo* experienced these prayers promised to accomplish several objectives for me, the congregation, and possibly the larger church. Personally, I hoped to gain a more sensitive understanding of how my people experienced and thought about prayers, so that I might improve my devotional leadership. Luther composed his prayers, as Peters demonstrated, with an "ear" for how his people experienced language, as well as for the realities of their daily life. Listening to the impressions of *Coram Deo* members would test my own sensitivity in this same regard, which could assist my ministry well beyond *Coram Deo* in counseling, teaching, preaching, and visitation—not to mention in my own home! Perhaps I would find new ways to employ the household prayers and interpret them to the souls in my charge, or perhaps I would learn that their value in my congregation had run its course,

either for now or forever.

This evaluation promised to help my congregation in other ways, too. The results could point to necessary adjustments in the Coram Deo path that would improve its reach and benefit both its current membership and those who had not yet joined it but who might do so. Our paths of devotion often call for new life, after the pattern of our Lord's own death and resurrection. Perhaps some components to the Coram Deo path, in particular its use of the household prayers, needed to die, while new ones had to emerge, and maybe this "conversion" would help the fellowship reconnect with those members who had left it but who might still be seeking a source of devotional encouragement. Finally, the process of reflecting on their experience and sharing it might serve as a moment of self-examination for the Coram Deo members themselves, with subsequent blessings for their practice of the faith. Had some even forgotten about the household prayers? A time of self-reflection might help reacquaint them.

Finally, and as a subsidiary benefit, I hoped that a review of Coram Deo's experience with the household prayers would serve as one historical marker from which other pastors and congregations could gain wisdom regarding the contemporary use of these prayers. The apostle Paul warned Timothy about those who might follow every "wind of doctrine"; part of those windy currents can be the ever-changing gusts of devotion that blow through Christ's church. A lack of theological and practical bibliography on these prayers, and on the broader subject of home and personal devotion, can leave pastors and congregations vulnerable to devotional currents that do not serve the large task of remaining firmly established in the gift of Christ's righteousness, conveyed to us by God's ministry.

### **Designing the Tools of Evaluation**

With these hopes in mind, I developed a twofold approach to the research. First, I wanted

to collect raw data on the practice of Coram Deo members. Did they use these prayers or not? Had they once done so and then discontinued? What did they appreciate, and what did they dislike? What challenges did they face, and what blessings did they receive? To this end, I developed a survey with a total of forty-three questions that covered all aspects of the Coram Deo path, with each component of the path receiving its own section of questions. Thus the morning, evening, and table blessings were each distinguished from the other and received separate, guided reflection. In the same way, questions would be asked about the individual parts of each blessing (invocation, creed, Lord's prayer, collect, etc.) to give more detailed information and determine what sorts of personal modifications people may have made to the prayers in practice. To aid this reflection, and in case some participants no longer used the household prayers or had modified their use of them, the survey included, at the start of each section, a copy of the prayers as they appear in the Small Catechism. Linkert scale questions were generally used; space was also provided for participants to write comments. The survey would be conducted anonymously with the results collected and coded by a retired, post-secondary instructor of mathematics and statistics. I submitted a copy of this survey with an explanation of its audience and use to my advisor and MAP proposal committee for review, and it was subsequently approved. A copy of the survey questions pertinent to this study may be found in Appendix C.

In addition, and in order to provide the research with a broader perspective, I wanted a means for more personal and firsthand reflection from those who used these prayers, especially those using them for the first time. Coram Deo represented the reactions of one specific audience who had enjoyed almost ten years of usage; what of a different audience with less familiarity? To gain this information, I developed a journaling project whereby I would provide journals to

members of other Lutheran congregations who would then use the prayers for a month's time and record their reactions. The journals would have no self-identifying marks beyond what the participants would provide themselves, and I would supply them with questions throughout the month to aid their reflection. These guiding questions would help the participants take up each part of the household prayers in turn. At the end of the month, they would return the journals to me for my reading and evaluation. As with the survey, this journaling proposal and examples of the questions were submitted to my advisor and MAP proposal committee and subsequently approved. A copy of the questions can be found in Appendix D.

Taken together, these two tools of evaluation promised to yield differing but complementary results. The survey would collect data regarding current usage of the prayers after almost a decade of exposure to them. Its questions would capture how participants had interacted with each piece of the household prayers, how they may have accommodated those prayers to their personal use, and what benefits or challenges they perceived in them. This information, in turn, would help me identify trends in the prayers' use and so understand how helpful of a pastoral tool they had been. Noting these patterns of use might also suggest modifications to how I teach them (or don't teach them) or suggest avenues of further study. In contrast, the journals would not only collect data on practice, but also the impressions and thoughts of the people using them. These reflections would allow me to consider potential reasons for how people use the prayers as well as increase my understanding of how people conceive of the devotional task. This insight would aid me in my work as a "devotional translator," in the spirit of Luther, within my own ministry.

### **Implementation of the Project**

After designing the tools and receiving approval of their use, implementation proceeded

relatively quickly. The Coram Deo mailing list included not only current members but also some others who had chosen to participate no longer in the actual path of devotion. I chose to include them in the mailing of the survey. This decision allowed for people who had an ostensibly negative reaction to the prayers to participate as well as those still committed to the Coram Deo path. Mailing and collection of the survey were handled entirely by staff members at my church. The survey, a letter explaining the project (Appendix E), and an addressed, stamped return envelope were sent to names on the mailing list in early October of 2015. No items sent in the mail allowed for marks identifying the participants.

Prior to this mailing, I had alerted all potential participants of the survey's future arrival via a special mailing with the Coram Deo newsletter. With sixty persons on the list, I hoped for at least a 30% response. To my general satisfaction, the survey received a 50% response: over the course of two-and-a-half months, thirty-three surveys were returned and forwarded to the coder. Subsequent reminders of the survey did not yield further responses. The coder waited another four months before coding the surveys received. Her raw data may be found in Appendix H. Upon completion of the coding, the original surveys were placed in a secure storage box.

The second phase of this project began in November of 2015 and ended in April 2016. Contacting colleagues in the ministry through email, I requested their assistance in recruiting journaling participants. A copy of the public announcement that I provided them for this purpose is found in Appendix F. I encouraged them to open the project not only to persons actively engaged in the life of the congregation, but also to people who may hover more at its margins; I also encouraged a wide variety of participants in terms of age, gender, and family situation. About a month passed as I waited for responses; I hoped for at least ten participants.

In the end, exactly ten volunteered. They came from a wide geographic spread in the state

of Wisconsin, and they represented a broad range of ages and a respectable balance of gender. All the participants had received post-secondary education, with the exception of the one teenage participant, and incredibly, six of the ten are teachers. In order to help the participants start the project, I met with each of them, usually on Sunday afternoon at their home congregation, to gather brief biographical information and provide them with the necessary materials. I explained to them that their personal identities (name and contact information) would be kept private and confidential, and that I would store the completed journals in a secure box in my office following the project. A brief explanation to this effect was also taped on the first page of each journal (Appendix G). A short biographical summary for each participant, based either on my conversation with them or on information they provided in the journals, follows. For each one, I have assigned a name that is not the participant's real name, for ease of reference in subsequent reflection.<sup>2</sup>

**Michael.** A retired public school teacher who now drives a school bus, Michael is an active member of his church and married to Meredith, with whom he has children. Raised a Baptist and once active in Quaker fellowships, he has enjoyed "settling down" in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America because it retains his Protestant sensibilities while also appealing to his long-held admiration of Roman Catholic liturgy. He reported a general contentment with his existing devotional practice, which appeared rigorous: 1) prayer at midnight (due to insomnia) or early morning, thanking God for the new day and new opportunities; 2) prayer for persons on a healing list that Michael maintains; 3) prayer throughout the day for guidance, protection, and forgiveness; 4) prayer at meals; 5) Scripture reading at night; and 6) a prayer at bedtime,

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<sup>2</sup>For these biographical sketches, I have relied on my personal conversations with each participant as well as material provided in the first entry of their journals, in which I asked them to provide any personal background information that they wished, including their devotional history.

thanking God for the past day and opportunities.

**Meredith.** Meredith describes herself as having a “restless mind,” and like her husband, Michael, she has worked in public education all her adult life. She is close to retirement age. Also active in her congregation, she was raised in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and reports being glad to now belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Like her husband, Meredith stated that she was already happy with her practice of devotion at the start of the project. She relies mostly on hymns and anthems, memorized Bible verses, or informal conversation throughout the day. She noted that she and Michael don’t often pray together at home due to differing schedules.

**Denise.** In her 40s and married with children, Denise attends the same church as Michael and Meredith, where she is active. Like them, she is also a teacher. She was raised in a Roman Catholic home and became Lutheran (ELCA) upon marrying her husband, who did not participate in the study but who was, by Denise’s estimation, supportive of it. Denise expressed a desire for a more robust devotional life, both personally and in her family. She grew up reciting memorized prayers at bedtime, including the “Hail Mary” and “Glory Be” (the Gloria Patri), and sometimes she will still rely on these prayers. Because she, too, is a teacher, home and personal devotion look different in her home during the busier school year than it does during the summer.

**Bob.** Bob is a grandfather, retired businessman, and active ELCA churchgoer in his mid-70s who was raised in a devout Lutheran household where his mother taught him to pray and led daily devotions every evening. He recalls one childhood pastor emphasizing home devotions, but he does not remember whether or not that pastor mentioned Luther’s household prayers, nor did he know them at the start of the project. Bob was unique among the participants in that he suffers

from an incurable, usually fatal illness. This illness resulted in a hospital stay towards the end of the journaling period, providing a unique opportunity to observe the value of these prayers for one who suffers physically as well as his spouse. At the start of the project, Bob's devotional practice consisted of a shared time of Scripture reading and prayer with his wife, observed after breakfast, which included use of the devotional booklet, "Christ in Our Home," two different Guidepost books, and free petitions offered alternately by his wife and himself. If his wife and he had houseguests, either family or friends, they would invite these guests to join them.

**Barbara.** A steady companion to her husband, Bob, Barbara is an active churchgoer and retired health insurance professional. She was raised on a farm with a mother who taught children in a one-room schoolhouse. Barbara credits this busy schedule with the absence of household devotions in her childhood, but she also remembers realizing the need for such devotions when she was eight or ten years old. During that time, she began practicing them irregularly by herself. As a wife and mother, she joined her husband in leading the family to pray before meals and bedtime, and sometimes they held family devotions, though not consistently. In addition to her devotional regimen with Bob, Barbara has also engaged in home Bible study and additional devotions by herself.

**Tyler.** At sixteen years of age, Tyler stands as the lone teenager in this project. He lives with his father, mother, and several younger siblings, all of whom attend church regularly at a congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He participates in both sports and drama at school. With the encouragement of his grandmother and the general approval of his parents, Tyler has considered becoming a pastor when older but is unsure of his future hopes. His existing devotional practice included the prayer "Come, Lord Jesus" at meals and praying "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" with his parents every night. He also reported knowing the Lord's



Prayer, and stated that he prayed “on a daily basis.” He looked forward to the project in the hopes of “adding more prayers to my memory.”

**Peter and Pauline.** I list Peter and Pauline together because, while they both agreed to do the project and Peter served as the “information gatherer” at the beginning, it was Pauline who kept the journal, reporting primarily on her experience and some of Peter’s. Peter and Pauline are both in their early sixties and newly married to each other—Pauline’s first marriage, to a man whom she describes as abusive and atheist, ended in divorce—and they both work as school teachers and musicians in a parochial grade school. Since Pauline provided more background information on her devotional life than many of the participants, it receives a lengthier description below.

Pauline was raised in a devoutly Lutheran home and attended Missouri Synod schools for all 16 years of her education. She remembers praying “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep” at bedtime and “the common table prayer” at meals; she never heard her parents pray spontaneously as a child, and she still dislikes doing so today. Pauline reports having “fallen away” from both the church and her faith during her marriage. “To my present grief, I did not raise my children in the faith,” she writes. Only upon her divorce did she return to the church, invited by her brother to an All Saints Sunday service that “somehow . . . rekindled” her faith—“My heart was pierced.” Her existing practice of devotion, shared with her husband (and, I should emphasize, unknown to me at the time of their recruitment), is robust by any standard. She emphasizes praying for a stronger faith (“knowing mine was not strong when I thought it was”) and singing the evening blessing’s collect every night with her husband in a setting by Jan Bender. As teachers and musicians, both Peter and Pauline teach Bender’s setting of Luther’s table prayers to the choir children. They therefore brought to this project a familiarity with the

household prayers unknown to other participants.

**Katelyn.** Katelyn teaches world history and English in a large public school system. Twenty-eight years old, she is recently divorced and lives in an apartment with two cats. Like Pauline, she provided a large amount of background information at the outset of the project. A very infrequent attendee at a larger ELCA congregation, she reports having several doubts regarding the Christian faith, in particular the accounts of the flood and the virginity of Mary. At the same time, she states that she has “gotten past the extreme questioning and indecision” of her early twenties and now holds to a “blend of Lutheran Christianity, traditional Buddhist philosophy, and tendencies towards agnosticism.” She believes Islam is a beautiful religion and criticizes official Roman Catholicism for being beholden to “old white men,” though she looks favorably on Pope Francis. Born and raised in a home of active Lutherans, she would pray and sing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” with her mother at bedtime as a very young child; as she grew in years, her mother read daily devotions to her that came in the mail from a devotional subscription service. In her teen years and as a young adult, she still prayed every night, although without her mother’s supervision. She still prays nearly every day at bedtime, except when she and her new boyfriend sleep together or when traveling with friends. She prays conversationally, based on “whatever’s on [her] mind.” She does not pray before meals unless she is with her family. She dislikes praying in public.

**Oscar.** Raised on a farm, Oscar teaches with Peter and Pauline at a parochial school and is just over sixty years old. He reports being happy, the father of two adult children and the grandfather of five. His devotional life centers on reading, done as part of an early morning stop at McDonald’s for coffee, especially during the school year as he heads to work. At the time of the project, he was reading *God Grant It*, a daily devotional drawn from the sermons of C. F. W.

Walther. In the past he had read commentary on the Apocrypha and a lectionary that read the whole Bible in a year. He also uses the *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, and his wife and he read together each day from *Portals of Prayer*. They say thanksgiving before meals.

Taken together, the participants in this study all represented “insiders” to the Lutheran church, though with varying degrees of familiarity and attachment to its language and expressions of faith. Only three, Peter, Pauline, and Oscar, had prior knowledge of Luther’s prayers, and of those three, only two, Peter and Pauline, used them. The others reported not knowing them (though, as we shall see, two participants later recognized them from prior experiences). They were divided evenly in terms of gender, and while most of the participants were in their sixties and seventies, one was in her forties, another in her twenties, and one was a teenager. No children participated in this study, and only one participant, Denise, had children at home as she completed it. That absence of children and its implications will be reviewed in the next chapter.

Except for Peter, Pauline, and Oscar, who asked to pick up the journaling materials at my congregation, and Katelyn, with whom I communicated exclusively by post and email, I traveled to the home congregations of the remaining participants on Sunday afternoons to brief them regarding the project and provide them with the journals. In Tyler’s case, due to his age, I met not only with Tyler but also his parents, who at first considered undertaking the project themselves but then demurred. The journals were simple, wide-ruled composition books, with a note from me re-explaining the project in the front cover, and then copies of the household prayers pasted on the following pages for the participants’ use. Two of the participants (Bob and Barb), used the project as part of increased Advent devotion; Michael, Meredith, and Denise completed theirs in late-winter, after Christmas; and the remainder undertook the project during

Lent and early Easter. With all the participants, I shared the questions to guide their journaling via email. From the start of the project until its conclusion, I did not meet with them personally. Tyler, Oscar, and Peter and Pauline returned their journals in person; Michael and Meredith, along with Denise, all deposited their journals with their pastor, from whom I received them; and the rest returned their journals by mail. As promised, I held them, and continue to hold them, in a secure box in my study.

When reading the journals, I looked for several phenomena. First and perhaps most importantly, I looked for how the participants described the effect of these prayers on what I would call their “sense of the faith”: did they believe that these prayers spoke for them? Did they, in fact, match their beliefs about God and Christian living, or did they seem to speak an alien message? My theological commitment, that devotion help preserve believers in the external gifts and righteousness of God, prompted this concern.

Related to this theological investigation was a linguistic one: what did they think about the actual language? Was it easy to use; challenging but enriching; or just too foreign to contemporary tongues? Given what we witnessed in the household prayers’ American reception (steady use in colonial America, followed by varied use and neglect until a new wave of immigrants emphasized their value), it would prove interesting, I thought, to see how Lutherans more thoroughly Americanized and “Anglicized” than earlier generations of Lutherans might react to these prayers’ language. It might also unearth some hints as to how modern or postmodern narratives were influencing the participants’ interpretation of their faith and of this devotional regimen.

In addition to these more theological concerns, I watched for the effect of these prayers on schedules and for any possible ways that the participants began to adapt them to their personal

use. Again, the historical data would suggest that these prayers were never “canonical” in the sense that Lutherans strictly adhered to their form—as Peters reported, evangelical Germans often abbreviated the table prayers to just the psalm verses.<sup>3</sup> How might contemporary believers adapt these prayers, or would they? Would those who resonated less with the prayers try to adapt them or reject them wholly, and what reasons would they give for these adaptations or rejections? Would the table prayers prove too long to be used in their entirety (as I suspected)? Would the participants enjoy or find value in reciting the Creed and using the Lord’s Prayer frequently, or would they find such communal texts odd when appearing in their personal prayers and choose to overlook them? Were the prayers “portable”—that is, would participants find them easy to use in different contexts, including contexts outside of the home? In Christ, all things are free, and how Christians use that freedom in their prayer life can help a pastor introduce wholesome practices to his people with more sensitivity and understanding.

Finally, I looked for ways that the prayers might change the participants. Did these prayers introduce Biblical or theological themes that the ten journal-keepers may not have considered lately, or even known? Would the prayers prove helpful in the task of self-examination or spiritual renewal? And what would the participants’ responses, overall, teach me about the task of home and personal devotion among believers similar to my own parishioners? Would their experience help illumine what pastors should seek to achieve in teaching devotional practices, and how might this insight contribute to the church’s theological reflection on this topic as well as its production of new devotional materials or programs? The journals, kept over the course of only thirty days by ten individuals, would necessarily have limited results, but I looked forward to learning from them.

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<sup>3</sup>See page 45.

## **Summary**

God-willing, the ministry still has many more opportunities ahead of me to tend the sick, the sinful, and the suffering with God's good Word and to lead them on a path that will help secure that Word in their hearts. The survey results of the Coram Deo membership and the insights provided by the journal keepers promised to illumine my way forward as a pastor and father of devotion. I also hoped, at the outset of the project, that the results would help others who might use the household prayers to encourage the prayer life of Christ's church. To those results we now proceed.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**THE PROJECT EVALUATED**

In Bo Giertz's novel, *Hammer of God*, a young seminarian, Savonius, finds himself ineptly prepared to console a dying man, only for deliverance to arrive at last in the prayers and preaching of the lay people around him. On his way home from the deathbed, he asks his driver about the experience:

“Tell me, Peter, how is it that you folks up there at Hyltamalen are so, so . . . I mean that you read God's Word and pray the way you do?” . . . Peter gave sober and matter-of-fact attention to the question. “It began with my wife's mother,” he said. “In her youth she worked in the vicinity of Kalmar and was awakened through the preaching of Elving. He was a pietist and revivalist. There was something special about my mother-in-law; she could sing and speak in such a way . . . . When I learned to know my Anna, it was my privilege to be present on Sunday evenings when her father read from Scriver's *Soul Treasury*, and when we sang together, and that is how I also was led to walk in the way.”<sup>1</sup>

Here and throughout his novel, Giertz portrays the power of a home and personal devotion over against the drifting trends of social and ecclesial history. Where pastors and others fail to distinguish the Word aright, the Word of God still sustains the church, borne on vehicles hammered from an alloy of public ministry and domestic piety.

However idealized Giertz's vision may be, it grows from his pastoral experience in the Church of Sweden and underscores the importance of this study. Without the preaching of the Gospel and faith, home devotion may well become the “modern devotionalism” decried by Hall, empty practices driven by self-interest. But without modes of daily devotion that convey and embrace the pure Word of God, the preaching of Christ may become a memory, and a fading one. Learning how people respond to different devotional habits may help pastors teach and

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<sup>1</sup>Bo Giertz, *Hammer of God*, trans. Clifford Ansgar Nelson and Hans O. Andrae (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005), 30–31.

commend orthodox, engaging, and lifelong devotional practices to the people whom they lead. It was in this spirit that I gathered data on the use of Luther's household prayers among Coram Deo members and ten people reflecting on their use of the prayers for thirty days. How would these prayers fare on the lips and in the hearts of today's believers?

### **Findings of the Study**

Participants in the survey responded to three sections of questions on the household prayers (morning, evening, and table blessings) that asked not only what portions of those prayers they did or did not use, but also which portions they either attempted to use, and then discontinued, or never attempted to use at all. In general, their answers showed more engagement with the morning and evening prayers than with the table prayers, and more use of shorter prayer components than longer ones.

Responding to questions about the morning prayers ("Prayers Upon Rising" in the survey), slightly less than half of the thirty-three participants (fourteen) indicated that they used the sign of the cross and invocation ("In the name of the Father . . . .") daily, as well as Luther's morning collect ("I give you thanks, heavenly Father . . . ."). An additional eleven people said they used the sign and invocation occasionally or weekly, and thirteen people said the same concerning the collect. By far the least popular components of the morning blessing were the Apostles Creed and Luther's admonition to go to work "joyfully, singing a hymn": seventeen people (over fifty percent of respondents) did not use the creed at all, and sixteen did not use hymns at all; another dozen reported using them occasionally or weekly, and only three used the Creed every day, whereas six sang every day. The results are summarized in Figure 1.



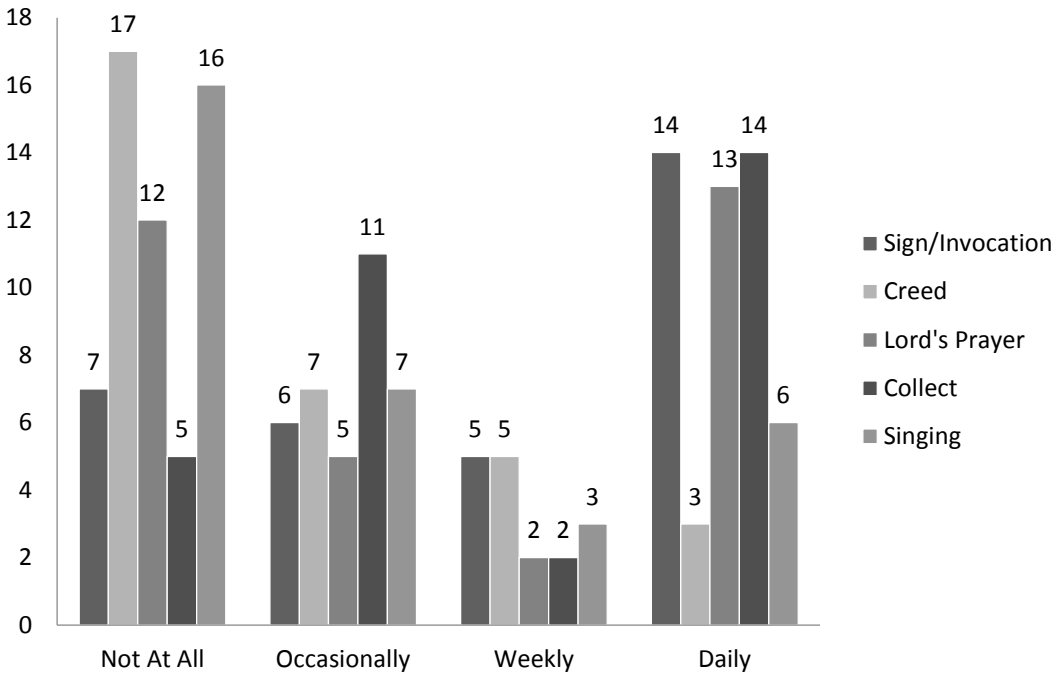


Figure 1: Usage of Luther’s Morning Prayers among Survey Respondents

Readers will note that the Lord’s Prayer received essentially equal usage and non-usage, with twelve persons choosing not to use it at all, and thirteen using it on a daily basis, while another nine people used (or did not use it) occasionally. Again, these results only reflect morning prayer usage.

Questions regarding the evening prayers yielded similar, if slightly elevated, results. Participants reported an even lower use of the creed at bedtime, and they reported a lower use of the Lord’s Prayer, too, while use of the sign of the cross, invocation, and evening collect remained similar to numbers found in the morning. Luther does not recommend singing a hymn in the evening, and the survey did not ask if the participants heeded his response to go to “sleep at once and in good cheer” (Figure 2).

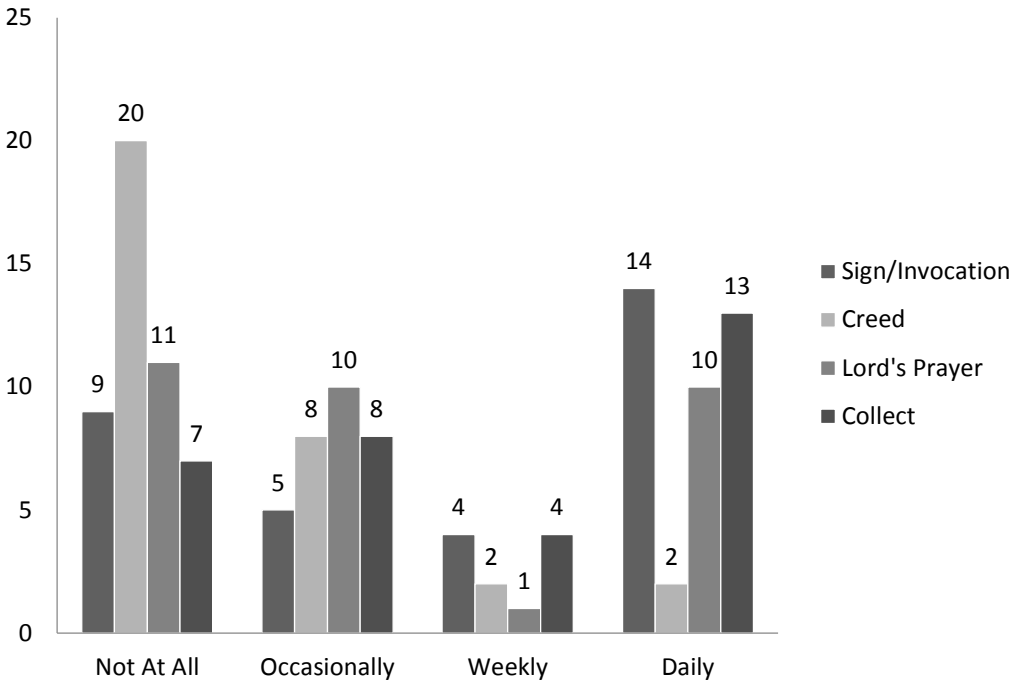


Figure 2: Usage of Luther's Evening Prayers

We therefore find, with respect to the morning and evening prayers, approximately 60% of respondents using the sign of the cross, invocation, and collects in some fashion, with most of their users employing them daily, and a similar percentage of people not using the Apostles Creed at all. Use and disuse of the Lord's Prayer was almost evenly split.

Did people try to use the Creed and Lord's Prayer, and then choose not to do so? In fact, thirteen people reported not trying to use the creed at all in the morning (fourteen in the evening); nine attempted to do so before discontinuing it (but only four in the evening). It would appear that slightly more people tried to engage the Creed in the morning than the evening. The Lord's Prayer enjoyed broader engagement than the Creed: only seven people in the morning and eight people in the evening never attempted to use it, and much smaller numbers discontinued using it after trying it (Figure 3).

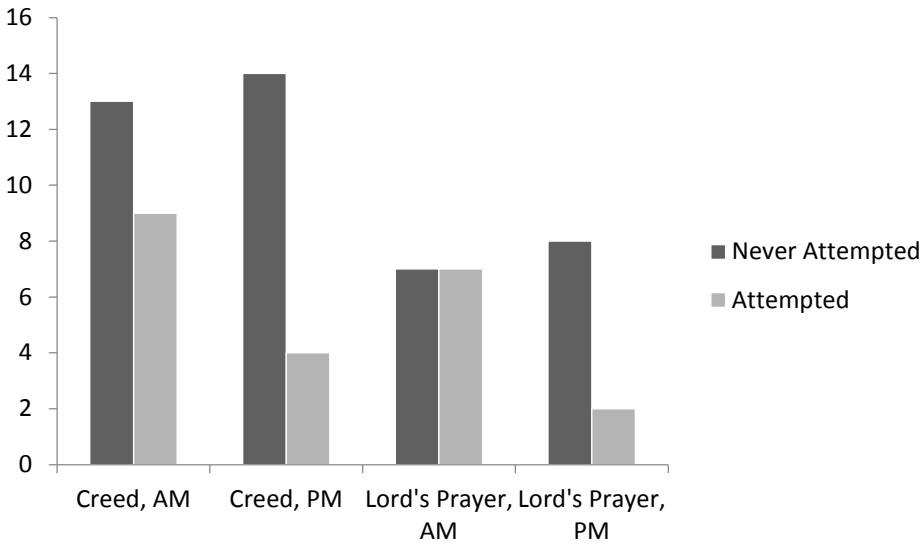


Figure 3: Disuse of the Creed and Lord’s Prayer in Morning and Evening

Altogether, disuse of the Creed remains high. The only portion of these prayers disused at a similar level was singing in the morning. Very few people never attempted or discontinued using the collects (“I thank you, my heavenly Father . . .”).

It is good to pause here and remember that “use” and “disuse” are not necessarily value-laden terms, at least not by theological or pastoral standards. Justified by faith in Christ Jesus alone, Christians may choose to use or not use a particular form of prayer, especially at a particular time. Their choices may indicate areas where pastors may wish to devote renewed labor, but that kind of reflection belongs to the following section on evaluation. The results reported here simply reflect the use of one particular group of people at the time of this survey.

Results for the table prayers showed similar contrasts of usage as well as a lower overall engagement when compared to morning and evening prayers. Only ten persons indicated that they used “any” of Luther’s prayers at mealtime, either the *Benedicite* (before meal prayers) or the *Gratias* (after meal prayers); twenty reported that they used a different form altogether, and

one person said that he or she did not pray at mealtime at all. Prayers before meals were more popular than prayers after meals: fourteen said that they used “any or all” of Luther’s before-meal prayer daily,<sup>2</sup> whereas only three said that they used “any or all” of the after-meal prayers daily. In contrast, eighteen said reported that they did not use the after-meal prayers at all. The results are summarized in Figure 4.

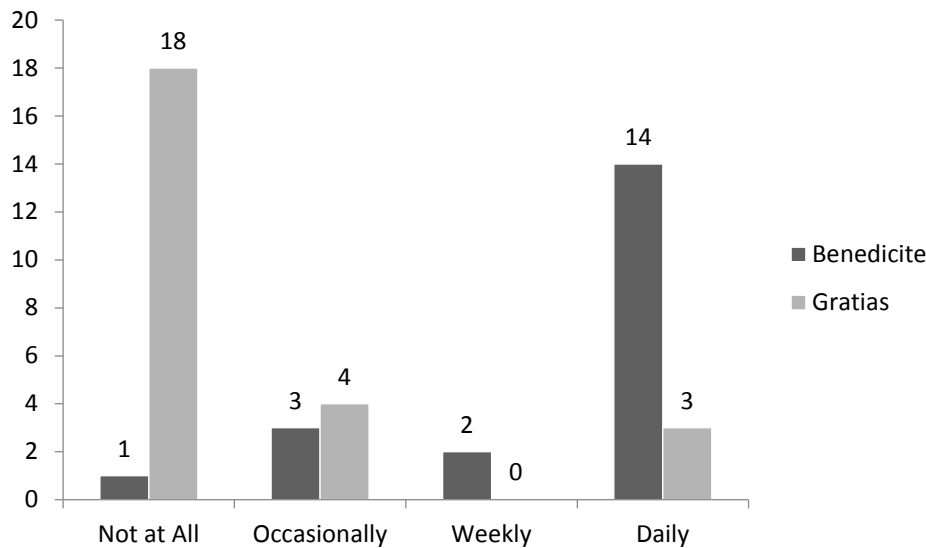


Figure 4: Usage of Any Portion of the *Benedicite* and *Gratiarum* (Mealtime Prayers)

The survey also asked what mealtime prayers participants used instead. The most common prayer named was “Come, Lord Jesus” (eighteen), followed by extemporaneous prayer (four) and other memorized prayers (three). Some reported blending components of the mealtime

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<sup>2</sup>The disparity between this number (14) and the original number indicating that only 10 people used “any” of the mealtime prayers is hard to explain. It may indicate a confusion among some participants regarding the questions.

prayers, such as some of the psalm verses with their existing practice (a few mentioned using the sign of the cross, not listed by Luther).<sup>3</sup>

Very few respondents commented on why they did or did not use portions of the household prayers. Of the comments offered, most fell into one of three categories: 1) time (“I’m not a morning person”), 2) prior habit (“I use the prayers I was taught as a child”), and 3) dislike (“It seems too repetitious. And somewhat unfeeling”). A few also shared that they had forgotten all of the prayers, and the survey had reminded them. One or two had theological qualms, such as not believing the psalmist’s promise that God “gives food to every creature.” Regarding the singing of a hymn, a few said that they did not have any hymns memorized or they “couldn’t carry a tune.” By and large, however, the participants reserved their handwritten, free comments for other portions of the *Coram Deo* path not directly related to this study. For that kind of in-depth reflection, we turn to the journal keepers.

When preparing this next section on the journals, I was tempted to arrange the participants’ comments according to theme—what did each of them say about the morning prayers, table prayers, the creed, etc.—rather than listing them individually. This approach would have the benefit of presenting the results according to the subject matter under discussion. However, each participant had such a singular approach to these prayers and such unique insights that it finally seemed best to summarize each person’s experience by name and to leave all thematic organization for the analysis. We begin with three of the first people to undertake the project, Michael, his wife, Meredith, and Denise, all three of whom attend the same ELCA church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Here may lie one explanation to the disparity referenced in the prior footnote: participants may have thought the original question meant “all,” prompting only ten to respond “yes” because another four “blended” their prayers. It cannot be known for certain.

<sup>4</sup>I feel compelled to say that none of the following summaries capture the full breadth of each person’s thoughts, which were often very frank, thoughtful, and even vulnerable, all of which I viewed as a great gift to me as a researcher and pastor.

**Michael.** The retired public school teacher, driving bus in his retirement, reported an overall favorable assessment of the household prayers. He found the morning and evening prayers the easiest to include in his schedule and the most nourishing to his practice of the faith. The table prayers he found much more challenging due to what he perceived as their formal nature: “If I win the lottery, and, in my new found wealth, start having more formal meals, I would consider [using] the prayers that, as I see them, go along with such a setting.” Nevertheless, he emphasize his appreciation for the “‘attitude of gratitude’ that pervades” all three sets of prayers. “The older I get, the more thankful I am . . . .” He related part of the challenge in the mealtime prayers to the fact that he frequently ate alone due to differing schedules with Meredith. He also returned to the theme of memorization frequently, wishing that he could memorize the prayers more easily. At first challenged by including the creed (and pointing out that the copy in the catechism differed from the ELCA’s most-used hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*), he reported that his appreciation for using it had grown by the end. “With a more regular recitation, I was drawn to think about [it] more and connect with my ties to my church family.” His chief caution, throughout his journal, was the temptation of “empty repetition” in using memorized prayers and the importance of “praying without ceasing” throughout the day.

**Meredith.** Meredith found the prayers “cumbersome and formal,” language that others would echo. A week into the project she reported, “The joy and spontaneity of prayer is stifled. This has become a duty rather than an expression of love.” Yet she went on to say that the “prayers themselves are not the problem: it’s the repetition of the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer.” She had also begun abbreviating the table prayers. In later entries she would express her high regard for the “variety” of the Lord’s Prayer and muse, “I don’t know why I am so resistant to

them,” meaning the household prayers. She chose not to use the sign of the cross, which she believes is “a show for other people.” She also noted that it is “hard to have a routine, when your routine changes so much,” and found the prayers “difficult to retain” or memorize due to their lack of rhyme. Perhaps the most of any participant, Meredith reflected theologically on the prayers, writing at length on the different petitions of the Lord’s Prayer; criticizing Luther’s reference to “the evil foe” as “medieval” and a “cop-out” from taking personal responsibility; and rejecting either male or female language for God.

**Denise.** Denise, raised a Roman Catholic, referenced her Roman Catholic upbringing throughout her journal, comparing and contrasting the prayers. She found the morning prayers easy to use, but noted that she often forgot to use the evening prayers. She wanted the collect to replace her childhood “standby” of “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep,” but she thought that she might rewrite it to make it more suitable for children’s use. She echoed Meredith’s conviction that reciting the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer was “cumbersome.” Prayer before a meal felt “natural,” but prayer after the meal did not. A week into the project she had shortened the mealtime prayers. Her husband, who cooks most of the family’s meals and likes to eat while the food is hot, once told her to “get started on your prayers” ahead of time, and she felt like her prayer project was burdening him. Denise finds comfort in repetition, but fears “automatic” prayer without thought; she found repeating the creed too impersonal and too much like formal worship. She concluded, “I think daily use as a child cements ritual prayer into your soul. One prayer isn’t more right than another—it’s part of a tradition that makes it the right one for you.”

From Michael, Meredith, and Denise, we turn to Bob, Barbara, and Katelyn. Despite differences in location and age, these next three participants echoed similar themes while raising some interesting counterpoints and new thoughts.

**Bob.** Like his wife, Barbara, Bob wrote almost every day while using these prayers. At the outset, he commented that the mealtime prayers seemed “cumbersome,” using the same language that we saw earlier in Meredith and Denise. He focused on how often the Lord’s Prayer is used, which struck him as excessive. A week into the project, he and Barbara had abbreviated the table prayers and were combining the morning prayers with breakfast table prayer and devotional reading. While appreciative of the creed as a devotional piece, he wondered why it was there and commented that it felt too much like a worship service. He also commented that the Lord’s Prayer, due to its all-encompassing nature, cannot be an intimate prayer. Later, Barbara and he read Luther’s letter to Master Peter the Barber, and upon reading it, he said that he understood use of the Lord’s Prayer and Creed better. He liked the morning and evening collects especially, in particular their first words, “I think the opening words of the morning and evening prayers are wonderful. I was taught and have long believed that I am a child of God. I am content with this relationship. Saying these prayers strengthens that relationship.”

Of all the participants, Bob commented the most on posture, noting that his wife and he had begun kneeling for prayer; like Meredith, he wondered if the sign of the cross was just “for show.” However, Bob and Barbara were both unique in retaining their journals beyond the 30-day mark, adding a postscript regarding their continued use of the prayers, and in that postscript Bob commented that he would continue to cross himself and that they were still using the prayers, for which he expressed affection. Twenty-three days into the project, Bob was hospitalized, but he did not reference it in his journal. His wife did.

**Barbara.** Barbara confirmed what Bob also reported, that her father had always used the thanksgiving collect of the *Benedicite*, a fact she had never realized before this experiment. Yet she also echoed her husband’s concern for using the Lord’s Prayer so much, especially in the



table prayers, saying that it seemed like “just rote repetition” and affirming her husband’s thought that the Lord’s Prayer is not an intimate prayer. Using the Lord’s Prayer and Creed so much seemed “redundant” to her. Making the sign of the cross did not feel comfortable, and she reported that Bob and she did not use the prayers when they went other places. At the same time, she appreciated some elements of the morning and evening collects that brought new devotional insights to her: the comfort of asking for daily forgiveness, the protection of God’s angels, and the language of “commending body and soul” into the care of God. She referenced that particular language five times in her journal, once in reference to her husband’s hospital stay, which led to an extended reflection on learning to trust God in the face of uncontrollable dilemmas. She also connected it to Luther’s “evil foe” language, which gave her great comfort in the face of world turmoil and terrorism, “I’m not sure why Luther does not come out and just say the devil, but perhaps the ‘evil foe’ is something we can relate to more closely. That ‘evil foe’ can be any number of threats and temptations that each of us face.”

Barbara stated that she both liked repetition and feared it at the same time, worrying about thoughtless prayer. She was surprised, though, to be struck towards the end of the project by the word “graciously” in one of the prayers; “I thought I had heard all of these prayers,” but she discovered she could hear them differently as she used them. In sum, she believed these prayers encouraged her daily prayer, but only when supplemented by personal petitions and praise of God. In her postscript, she noted that she would continue to use the Creed, and her appreciation for it had grown, but that they had continued to tailor the prayers to their practice.

**Katelyn.** Katelyn’s use of the prayers coincided with the start of a romantic relationship and a bout of strep throat that resisted the first round of antibiotics. Accustomed to praying at night as a child and young adult, she found the evening blessing the easiest to use. She continued

to try using the morning blessing, but after two weeks had discontinued using the table blessings entirely. Using a word we've heard three times now, she found many of the prayers' format "cumbersome." She quoted *Hamlet*—"Words without thoughts never to Heaven go"—and observed that she much preferred praying "based on what is passing through my mind":

I frequently skip the "little prayer" suggested by Luther to accompany the morning and evening recitation of the Creed and Lord's Prayer. I replace it with my own ideas instead. In terms of sentiment, I think I hit most of the same ideas anyway. There's nothing wrong with Luther's prayers, they just don't feel like mine. If religion is meant to be a personal relationship with God, I feel like I need to use my own words.  
*(original underlining)*

She valued memorization of prayers, because it allowed her to pray the prayers with confidence; but she didn't like memorization, because it also permitted her mind to wander. Nevertheless, she found that using the Creed and Lord's Prayer helped her focus on them more. By the end, she reported being bored with the Creed, but not the Lord's Prayer, because it was "actually the words of Christ" and "sums up what Christianity is all about." It is not "a Latin recipe for cupcakes," she offered (referencing a Latin mass she had attended), and "thank goodness we're not Catholic." Throughout the journal, she noted that she did not pray when she and her boyfriend slept or ate together, because he is not "religiously inclined," though he was not "against" her praying. She wondered, towards the end, if she was making it "all about me," and she noted that she seemed to pray more when she was sick.

We now come to our final four participants, Peter and Pauline, Oscar, and Tyler. Peter, Pauline, and Oscar both came to this project with some prior knowledge of the prayers, which made it all the more interesting when they experienced something anew; Tyler had no prior experience and spoke with the sole voice of youth in this project.

**Peter and Pauline.** As explained earlier, I grouped Peter and Pauline together because Peter served as go-between and contributed in some measure, but the writing was all Pauline's in

the end. Referencing an abusive past marriage and loss of faith, Pauline passionately affirmed the value of the prayers throughout her journal, contrasting their faithfulness with her own sinfulness and listlessness. She reflected on their content frequently: “I like Luther’s Morning & Evening Prayers because they remind me first of all that I approach God with thanks,” she wrote at one point. She also emphasized how these household prayers “come to [her] throughout the day”:

It helps me to remember to pray, when I have before me what I know I will use, and it is in my memory. I have also found that these prayers or the Creed will come into my head at other times of the day also—just between other activities throughout the day.

She wrote at length in favor of repetition:

There is something so comforting and reassuring about coming back to something that was so familiar, and now here it is again, just as it was, to sustain you again.

. . . the challenge in repeated prayers is to remain mindful of what is being spoken. But the benefits make it worth the effort. Most really good things get richer and deeper over time. And as years pass, new and different understandings come to us.

Before the project, Pauline had not prayed the Lord’s Prayer daily, but “praying it several times a day feels very good.” Pointing back to a time where she could no longer remember the Lord’s Prayer, she noted that she found it understandable that we would repeat it several times, and noted that “repeated use” made her more aware of her “need, vulnerability, and weakness.” She liked using the sign of the cross because it sets apart the time from the rest of life. She also noted her conviction that, while she never stays focused with any prayer, her heavenly Father accepts her and her praying nonetheless.

**Oscar.** In his succinct and organized reflections, Oscar focused mostly on the content of the prayers and their churchly character. He began with a page of appreciation on the petitions for angelic protection against the “evil foe,” citing Satan as “a very real and dangerous enemy, who continually works in a myriad of ways to separate us from God.” He wrote at length on the Creed, noting that it helps “keep the main thing the main thing” and continually reminds us of

God's true identity. Finally, he liked the "anti-American" character of the table prayers' emphasis on something *given*, not *earned*, and on the connection these prayers gave him with the rest of the church:

Our grandchildren are learning these prayers by rote . . . . Even though we cannot be with our grandchildren daily, it is a comfort to know that they are being taught the importance [sic]. This common prayer provides a connection with them across the miles.

He also believes that praying "prepared prayers" is good because "it limits one's desire to focus only upon oneself" and provides help when "one is unsure how or for what to pray."

**Tyler.** "So far, the evening prayer has been the easiest to use," Tyler wrote at the start of his 30 days. The table prayers, different from his family's custom, "will definitely [sic] take some getting use [sic] to." Yet he would later report, "I look forward to the prayers, and they are not as challenging as I thought they would be. In fact they are really easy. I think the most challenging part is memorizing this prayer." He later commented that memorizing them happened more easily when he spoke them aloud. He had never before used the sign of the cross, but he found himself doing it frequently now whenever he prayed. He said the evening blessing right before going to sleep and the morning blessing right before getting dressed; as for the Lord's Prayer, "Before I started using the prayers I said the LORD's [sic] prayer weekly, but not multiple times a day. I always say the LORD's prayer when it says to. I don't think that using the LORD's prayer is a hard thing to do. I also say the creed, but before this I only said it at church." In the end, his favorite parts were Luther's admonition to go to sleep at once and in good cheer, and to go to work joyfully, singing a hymn. "I actually think it puts me in a better mood."

Clearly a diverse set of voices yielded a diverse set of reflections that nonetheless enjoyed some common themes as well as some divergent, even counterpoised ideas. As I read them, the question kept returning: what do these reflections, along with the survey results, tell me about

commending the household prayers to the home and personal devotion of the people in my congregation? What might they say to other pastors seeking to do the same, and what do they say about the task of home and personal devotion generally?

### **Analysis of the Data**

The project yielded several interesting insights into the practices, faith, and motivations of its participants, and these insights may well help me and other pastors translate Luther's household prayers into contemporary practice. Some questions and methodological blind spots linger (identified later in this chapter), but by and large the data suggests that the prayers remain a viable tool for encouraging home devotion, especially if pastoral care is paid to the sensibilities and challenges analyzed here.

The survey results showed several trends reflected and sometimes qualified in the journals. In general, survey respondents reported a more favorable use of the morning and evening blessings than the table prayers. However, in their use of the morning and evening blessings, over 50% of all participants chose not to recite the Apostles Creed (and an almost equal number chose to forego the singing of a hymn), with use of the Lord's Prayer evenly divided. Well over half of all participants employed the sign of the cross, invocation, and morning and evening collects anywhere from weekly to daily. This data regarding the practice of people engaged with Luther's prayers for almost ten years suggests a high attachment to the "simpler" portions of the morning and evening blessings (invocation, signing, and collect) as well as a high resistance to daily, home recital of the Creed and a mixed reaction to using the Lord's Prayer. Few respondents commented on the reasons for this adaptation of the household orders, although a few cited the prayers' formality (and with respect to singing, several commented that they "couldn't carry a tune"). These few glimpses into the motivations behind the reported habits may

suggest a discomfort with using communal and liturgical practices in the home. It may also point to the abiding value of such traditional actions as making the sign of the cross, and it suggests that Luther's morning and evening collects have continuing value in the present day.

With respect to the table prayers, the survey results pointed to a firm reliance upon prayers learned in childhood, blended in some instances with elements taken from the household blessings. However, these practices generally took place before the meal; the *Gratias*, or after-meal blessing, was resolutely unused by most people, with only three people stating that they used all or some of the *Gratias* daily, and eighteen saying they didn't use it at all. Absent any further explanation, we cannot say with certainty what explains this practice. It may not suggest dislike of the table prayers themselves as much as it points to either the busy schedules of modern homes (after you eat, you *go!*) or the enduring attachment of practices learned in childhood.

The survey failed to ask questions about sharing the household prayers with others. Had some participants taught (or tried to teach) these prayers to others, and in particular, to children? The project generally succeeded in exploring devotional practices among adults and individuals, with some attention to devotion among couples, but it did not measure the success of these prayers among children or larger family contexts aside from a few occasional comments, despite the suggestions of such scholars as Wengert that Luther particularly intended these prayers for use by children and youth.<sup>5</sup> I will return to this theme later in the chapter. The survey also did not elicit much handwritten commentary or prompt further interest in interviews. Such material would have doubtlessly shined new light on the participants' practice, as we find in the journals.

Data collected from journals take us further in understanding how contemporary habits and

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<sup>5</sup> See page 41, footnote 24.

sensibilities might influence the pastoral task of teaching and commending the household prayers as part of a broader, daily devotion. Five categories of reflection repeatedly appeared on the journals' pages: adaptation and personal diversity; ritual discomfort and repetition; memorization and longevity; the presence of others; and theological interests or concerns. These five themes, summarized briefly in what follows, will contribute heavily to the recommendations in Chapter 6.

With respect to adaptation and personal diversity, the journal keepers reflected the process of accommodation reported in the survey. To some degree, they shared the survey participants' predilection for the morning and evening blessings over the table prayers, which several found "cumbersome." Those who did favor the table prayers did so for more theological and didactic reasons (such as Michael's appreciation of the prayers' "attitude of gratitude" or Oscar's delight in their correction of America's pride), while in actual practice they adapted them to personal use (as we see in the experience of Bob and Barbara as well as Denise, all of whom either combined the table prayers with other devotions or shortened them). Even among those who favored the morning and evening prayers, adaptation was evident: Katelyn used the morning and evening blessings, but skipped the collects in favor of her own extemporaneous prayer; Denise mused on the possibility of rewriting the evening collect and simply added it to some of her existing devotions; Meredith chose not to use the sign of the cross. Rather than view the household orders as unbreakable monuments, the journal keepers frequently adapted them, in a sense continuing Luther's own practice of carrying forward a tradition from the past but tailored to the present day.

Where this adaptation appears not to have taken place (notably, in the experiences of Peter and Pauline, Tyler, and to some degree Oscar, all of whom seemed to use the blessings in their

entirety), the relevant participants either had prior, theological knowledge of the prayers or, as in the case of Tyler, were still in their formative years. These exceptions to the “rule of adaptation” point to the other dimension of this theme: personal diversity. It is safe to say that Meredith didn’t “adapt” the prayers; she virtually rejected them as not fitting her style of devotion, which tended to focus on an extemporaneous use of song, poetry, and conversation. In stark contrast, Pauline’s past marital hardship and loss of faith prompted her to find childlike joy and comfort in the prayers. Moderating the two, Katelyn tended to focus on personally-devised conversation (we may recall her comment that the blessings aren’t “wrong, they just aren’t mine), but she could also find value in recitation of the Creed and Lord’s Prayer. In just these three examples, we can see how reception of the prayers hinged to a large degree on personality and experience. Attention to this diversity of personality type could prove important to remember as I and other church workers seek to lead different people on the way of devotion. Hall’s call for a true “devotion of one’s whole being” comes into play as we pause to consider how individual “beings” can differ.

As for ritual practice and repetition, even those with a more open stance towards regimented devotion (such as Bob, Barbara, and Michael, who already had robust habits of home piety) displayed abiding discomfort with formal practices. Bob and Barbara initially feared that the sign of the cross may be “just for show”; Meredith averred that it most certainly was “a show”; and Denise feared what others would think if they saw her doing it. The formal or ritual nature of that action did not find an easy home among these participants. Into this category we could also place various struggles with using the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Those who struggled to employ these elements frequently cited that they seemed more appropriate to the



public liturgy, where they experienced them more commonly.<sup>6</sup> Katelyn simply found the creed “boring.” Perhaps resistance, or even annoyance, with the table prayers also fits into this theme. We may recall Michael’s promise that he would use the table prayers in their entirety if he were to ever win the lottery and start hosting formal meals. The table prayers, marked by considerable form and recitation, carry a ritual cast that a number of the participants did not enjoy.

In contrast, Pauline, Oscar, and Tyler had fewer objections to ritual practice (though Pauline and Oscar both cited the importance of praying with mindfulness); these three also had current and ongoing involvement in Lutheran education (Pauline and Oscar as teachers, Tyler as an active student at his congregation). Bob and Barbara eventually adapted themselves to more of the prayers’ ritual form, finding value in the sign of the cross and kneeling; we may recall that this same couple, perhaps in response to this project, sought out Luther’s letter to Master Peter the Barber on prayer and read it. Michael, too, with his love of Roman Catholic liturgy, found it “easy” to include the morning and evening blessings into his already robust devotional regimen; in his past, Michael had thoughtfully explored different denominational systems, including Baptist, Quaker, and Roman Catholic as well as Lutheran. We might therefore see a correlation between theological study or denominational commitment and receptivity to these particular prayers. This correlation would seem supported by the fact that many past fathers of devotion (from the early church fathers to Luther to pietist revivalists) had strong doctrinal and/or ecclesial commitments, and many of them also relied upon or commended devotional regimens.

Discomfort with ritual practice often connected with a concern over repetition, as well. With the sole exception of Tyler, every participant reflected at least once on the possibility and

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<sup>6</sup>Interestingly, none of the journal keepers mentioned any attempts to go to work singing a hymn, as Luther suggests, and looking back on the guided questions that I provided them, I see that I did not invite such reflection.

fear that praying would become “rote,” “unthinking,” or distracted, and many reflected on the concern repeatedly—it even prompted Katelyn to invoke the authority of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*! Several of the journal keepers connected such distracted prayer to repetitious prayer. This concern may be partially inherited from the Lutheran tradition and Luther’s frequent emphasis that prayer be “from the heart”; it is also reminiscent of Matthew 6:7 and Jesus’ admonition not to babble “vain repetitions.” Yet Luther and Jesus both aim at striking down a “works righteousness” ethic in their comments, urging faith. The journaling participants seemed more concerned about lacking the necessary mental or emotional effort in their prayers, and at times, they sounded almost rationalist—is it really only words *with thoughts* that to Heaven go? How “mindful” are children, or people who cry out in terror or peril? Pauline alone asserted that her heavenly Father would hear her, even when she was “distracted,” for the sake of Jesus, although a few others, such as Oscar, did reflect that Jesus serves as the sole mediator of our prayers. Here, then, pastors may face another theological task, helping believers not only to embrace the external righteousness of Christ in the content of their devotion, but also in their understanding of it. Correctly teaching justification by faith, and the nature of faith, may serve to free devotional lives even more.

Yet if ritual and repetition caused some discomfort, memorization and long-held patterns of devotion received a more mixed review. Bob and Michael both expressed a desire to have the prayers memorized, and Pauline delighted in memorization; Meredith, Katelyn, and Denise each feared that memorization would lead to heartless or mindless repetition. Tyler, interestingly, reflected on the value of speaking the prayers out loud as a way of memorizing them (no other individual participant commented on how he or she said the prayers alone, and I now wish I had asked). Yet while Meredith and Katelyn both held memorization in suspicion for its ability to

become “mindless,” Meredith spoke approvingly of using memorized hymns and rhyming prayers; Katelyn also valued, if in a limited way, memorization of the Creed and Lord’s Prayer. Denise connected this appreciation of memorization with childhood in her salient quote, “I think daily use as a child cements ritual prayer into your soul. One prayer isn’t more right than another—it’s part of a tradition that makes it the right one for you.” Her comments find confirmation in the report of several survey participants who said that they relied on prayers learned in childhood for table prayers, even as Denise sometimes did for her bedtime prayers. Barbara also confirmed the value of a long-held devotion when she noted that, even after she thought she had “heard” the prayers, the word “graciously” struck her in a surprising and new way towards the end of the project. Pauline echoed similar sentiments: prayers long-held sound differently to us at different times. Again, this project did not research the practice of devotion among children or achieve insights into their primary experience, but the experience of these adults would seem to suggest that devotional habits are best developed, like language, when children are quite young, so that they may be held and experienced over time. Tyler’s openness to both memorization and learning these prayers, although he was already 16, supports this suggestion, and it fits nicely with Wengert’s perspective, mentioned earlier, that Luther wrote his household prayer mostly for children. Moreover, a long-held devotion, if rich in Scriptural promise, can then become a lifelong source of consolation and guidance.

Devotion does not happen in a vacuum; people pray in particular contexts, populated by others who can affect our practice. Virtually all journal keepers commented on the household blessings in relation to significant people in their lives. Oscar enjoyed how such “prepared” prayers as these allowed his grandchildren and him to dwell in a common life of prayer even though separated by miles of space; Bob and Barbara undertook the project, as with almost all of

their prayer life, together. In contrast, Michael and Meredith felt the absence of each other at mealtime; Denise worried that her prayer life “burdened” her husband, who once told her to “get started” on them early so that they could eat more quickly; and Katelyn found that she did not pray when sleeping or eating with her boyfriend, and never in such public places as restaurants. Tyler, too, mentioned that the table prayers would “take some getting use[d] to,” given his family’s existing practice. This effect of devotion on home life (and the home life on prayer) has been the focus of study for many scholars engaged in the research of domestic piety described in Chapter 3 as people like Bowes and Wooding test the dynamics between private worship and social change.

Already, in some limited way, participants like Denise experienced the power of devotion to stress or even divide households, and participants like Katelyn could feel how the presence of others could hinder prayer (as also patristic writers would lament). At the same time, Oscar experienced the joy of the *una sancta* through these prayers, and they formed part of the marital intimacy between Bob and Barbara, even helping Barbara to accompany Bob in his illness with confidence and trust in God. Personal and home devotion can be subversive or transformative to homes, a dynamic that other pastors and I would do well to remember when commending it. Not every couple or household easily walks a common path of prayer, and yet a mobile society such as ours can surely benefit from it. As I teach devotional practices to my congregation, then, I am leading them into potentially conflicted territory wherein believers must negotiate the call of Christ and the demands of their daily relationships, all for the sake of a much greater good. More than a trite and comforting practice, domestic piety is a picture of the striving Christian life.

Finally, it was good to hear some of the theological concerns and thoughts expressed by the journal keepers. Not all participants resonated with Luther’s language of the “evil foe” (such as

Meredith), even as at least one survey respondent questioned God's actual faithfulness in providing food to all creatures (as the psalms used at mealtime promise). Meredith also questioned the use of gendered language for God, and Katelyn's use of the prayers prompted her to muse on the veracity of the flood and virgin birth, both of which she seriously doubted. Others embraced and found comfort in the language of the prayers, such as Barbara's repeated joy in the language of commending "body and soul" to God. Many of them (for me, it was a surprising number) spoke of how much they appreciated the eucharistic or thanksgiving emphasis of the prayers, and a few (such as Denise) reflected on the baptismal character of the prayer. Taken together, these reflections point to both the thirst and the need for careful preaching and catechesis among the faithful, as well as how home and personal devotion can either challenge or affirm it. It certainly highlights how these particular household blessings resonate with Lutheran theological themes: the mighty fortress of God's care against evil and temptation, the fatherhood of God through Christ Jesus alone, baptism into Christ, the Scriptures as the Word of God, etc. Where that Lutheran confession is not strong and alive, it is reasonable to surmise that these prayers may find a patchier reception.

### **Summary**

The survey and journaling components of my research provide a glimpse into how the household prayers, written almost 500 years ago for one audience, have fared among a different audience today. That audience, comprised of both the Coram Deo membership and the journal keepers, engaged the prayers and this project with seriousness, for which I am thankful. They have provided me, and others engaged in the task of commending paths of devotion to the church, with examples of how contemporary believers may adapt these prayers, and sometimes adapt to them. Both theological and relational commitments seemed to influence that adaptation

(and sometimes led to the prayers' rejection), as did the diversity of personality and childhood experience. Some personalities seemed to embrace repetition and ritual practice more than others, and all seemed to rely on memorization and to cherish long-held practices to some extent. These themes will necessarily influence my final recommendations regarding the place of Luther's prayers in the home and personal devotion of my congregation today.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Dedication to any particular path of devotion arising from human tradition must always bow before the Gospel and its doctrine. With the exception of prayers and devotional injunctions coming from Holy Scripture, forms of domestic piety may rise and fall in response to the church's contemporary ministry as she proclaims the Word of God. A good example of such devotional trends may be found in hymnody, where a hymn may find broad popularity among one generation or ethnicity and not others, but nonetheless confesses the pure doctrines of the church in its content and music. Luther sets a model for this work, and for heeding the Scriptural exhortation of Hebrews 13:7: "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." By turning to paths of devotion blazed by past leaders and re-marking them for the believers of his time, he lived in the "amen" of faith and ministry, trusting the gifts he had been given and laying them, treasures old and new, before his people.

This project has sought to keep in step with his example, attending to the experience and voices of today's believers for the sake of evaluating whether or not Luther's household prayers may still serve a devotional function today, and if so, how. They surely resonate with the hallmarks of Scriptural and confessional theology. Their baptismal shape and theocentric orientation, relying on the Scriptures and creeds of the church, promises to preserve believers in the faith once delivered to the saints by connecting them with God's appointed means and the consoling righteousness of God's "dear Son," Jesus Christ. That faithfulness to the Gospel

secures their place as an enduring resource for the church. At the same time, a contemporary landscape in which modern and postmodern narratives shape believers' thought and language calls for a fresh consideration of these prayers, even as the study of devotional history demonstrates that devotional practice changes over time. Lutheranism's own reception of these prayers has varied in different times and places, and little published reflection exists on how to use and commend them in today's setting. Indeed, there seems to be little systematic attention to the task of home and personal devotion in general. Taken together, all these conditions of our present time pose the question: can the household prayers of the Small Catechism, set within a broader devotional life, nourish and sustain the life of believers in my congregation or in others?

In reviewing the data collected on this subject, it appears that we may say "yes."

Participants could engage them with devotional benefit, because the household prayers could still convey the Christian faith and sustain it. At the same, the results of my research prompt certain recommendations regarding their use and the practice of teaching or commending them to a parish. First, it would appear that these prayers may make the most "devotional sense," and receive the happiest reception, in hearts, homes, and congregations imbued with the Scriptural narrative. The household prayers speak from a certain story with which the project's participants sometimes struggled. In this narrative, life begins under the sign of Jesus' cross "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" received at Holy Baptism, and it continues on that path into every dark night; sin and the "evil foe" are real threats to life from which heavenly hosts may defend us; behind all human economy stands the gracious provision of a heavenly Father, before whose throne sinners (with real sins!) boldly ask for forgiveness; and there, with the believer, stands a church, confessing its creed, giving thanks, and hearing the voice of the living God speaking in ancient Scripture. That "story" is the truth about reality disclosed in the Gospel, and



modern and postmodern believers alike can still hear that story and live in it, but it calls for the nearly indefatigable preaching and teaching of Scripture. In such a context, the prayers that tell the story will serve to reinforce its faith and hope.

It would also seem that the household prayers would serve the devotional life best where believers have embraced the simple doctrines of the book through which they come to us, the *Small Catechism*. Not only does this book interpret and explain the Scriptural narrative by unpacking the believer's place in it, but it also helps connect that narrative to the church's worship. Virtually all the texts in the *Small Catechism* are liturgical texts—even the Ten Commandments will sometimes appear in public orders of confession—and this fact may help in the face one recurring dilemma: participants' inability to develop personal attachment to devotional elements that they considered a part of the church's public liturgy (“the Lord's Prayer cannot be an intimate prayer,” one participant insisted). This chasm not only between personal piety and public worship, but also between the believer and his baptismal faith, or the believer and her Lord's own gift of prayer, may signal a call for a form of catechesis that aims at teaching not only what the texts *say*, but also what they *do*—how this creed preaches good promises to you, or how this prayer unites your mouth and heart with Jesus' own. Luther's household prayers may reinforce such an approach and model the joy with which we receive both the Lord's teaching and the church's heritage, giving the devotee a livelier connection between home and house of worship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>On this same point, the oft-reported gap between public worship and home devotion prompts another suggestion, one not directly related to this project but that could have far reaching effects for Lutheran ministry. As I have noted, a devotional catechesis marked by use of these prayers may well help to close that abiding “gap” between Lutheran believers and their public worship. But there may be yet another avenue to pursue. A category of devotion about which Lutheran scholars appear to have published no reflection, and which they may not even recognize, is what Roman Catholic scholars have termed “popular devotions.” Popular devotions take place “on the edge” or “seam” between the public, authorized mass and personal or domestic prayer, and thus serves as a mediating force between the two. They involve broad swathes of the population, yet center on more personal and emotional attachments to the Virgin Mary, church leaders, the infant Christ, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or

Catechesis relates directly to formation of the young. Based on not only the journal reflections but also the happy tenacity with which survey respondents held to childhood table prayers, I would contend that Luther's household prayers may find their most fertile ground among children. Some data might seem to contradict this recommendation—Denise, for example, was certain that the morning and evening collects would need rewriting for children's use—but we also know that children seem to absorb such symbol systems as foreign language and computer code much faster than their adult caretakers. Moreover, we saw that the longer participants used these prayers, the more that they found themselves hearing the prayers differently and appreciating elements that they at first resisted. That benefit of a long-held devotion reinforces what Lutheran pedagogues have long known: memorization helps us to “learn by heart,” and seems to remain an important feature of not only teaching doctrine but also prayer. Certainly these prayers are worth commending to any age (and memorizing at any age), but their most benefit may come when used among families with children, thus opening them to a lifetime of usage, learning, and consolation.

Family life, as any parent will say, “can be hectic.” Personal schedules, and in some cases personal pieties, can conflict or militate against a routine prayer life. This project only heightened my awareness of it, and as I seek to use these prayers in the future, commending them to the people in my care, I will remain especially mindful of this contemporary busyness. My fellow pastors and I should probably keep an eye open for ways to adapt these prayers to

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geographical locales imbued with miraculous history. Ordained clergy might lead and teach these devotions, or they may not; they often employ forms of worship that Lutherans would recognize as “liturgical” but that involve a more passionate or ecstatic observance. The only similar category among Lutherans is “the awakening” or pietist revival, the likes of which Lutherans in North America have not seen for some time, despite all attempts. In the course of this study, and as my appreciation for home and personal devotion has grown, I've wondered if much of the conflict between “liturgical” and “contemporary” worship isn't a symptomatic problem resulting from this absence of popular devotion mediating the public and the personal, and if we don't therefore need a scholarly appraisal of it by Lutheran, confessional eyes.

different homes, times, and seasons, and we may wish even to model and teach those ways. One potential aid in doing so might be further research into the connection between devotional practice and personality type. If the journals revealed nothing else, they revealed the wide variety of reactions people may have to Luther's proposed pattern of prayer. Did those reactions hinge to some extent on the personality make-up of the individuals? For example, would use of the Myers-Brigg personality exam within a parish setting help identify what kind of devotion a person or household might receive best, and would those further results help pastors construct new ways of adapting Luther's prayers to contemporary life? It's an avenue for further study that this project seems to recommend. In some respects, an attentive and sympathetic pastor might rely on his own ability to understand the personalities and characters of his flock to develop this kind of pastoral care.

In terms of adaptation, it would seem that the table prayers received the most adaptation (and rejection) of all the household orders, raising the possibility that these prayers, in their current form, especially call for contemporary review and adaptation. Speaking personally, I may report that my own family only uses an abbreviated form of these prayers except on special occasions: birthdays, holy days and holidays, special guests, and the like—and even then, we rarely use the *Gratias*. The experience of people like Pauline, content to immerse herself in the whole prayer, gives me pause in that practice. Yet whether the prayers are used fully or in abbreviated fashion, these table prayers set a model for Christian homes: confession of God's bounty from God's Word, only then followed by our thanksgiving and consecration. So also do the morning and evening blessings set a pattern for that kind of prayer: remembrance of Baptism and use of God's Word followed by thanksgiving, petitions for help or forgiveness, and commendation into God's keeping. If pastors should feel compelled to adapt these prayers for

their congregations, those models maintain a Scriptural standard (reaching all the way back to Deuteronomy 6) and reflect the confessional principles of *sola Gratia, sola Verbum*. At the same time, simply retaining the full prayers in teaching, while articulating a “principle of adaptation” for one’s listeners, may open the door to homes making these adaptations for themselves, which seems natural and wholesome enough.

Three recommendations remain, the first relating to the issue of thanksgiving. Many participants expressed their appreciation of the household prayers’ emphasis on thanksgiving. Indeed, the participants seemed to thirst for a way to offer up thanks for all their blessings. Lutheran doctrinal emphases on God as the sole worker of righteousness in the believer’s life (and thus on His Son, words, and sacraments), may sometimes induce a sort of “devotional amnesia” in Lutheran pastors—that is, we may forget to foster a robust thanksgiving for created blessings, too. I know that I have. Precisely because God works all righteousness, including the active righteousness of the Christian life, Christians must be taught how to give thanks and given avenues for doing so. A renewed catechesis of thanksgiving may be in order (certainly for me, and perhaps for others, too), and these prayers, drenched in thanksgiving from morning to night, commend themselves for that task, both in their content and in the pattern and spirit that they model.

In contrast, participants appeared much less joyful when facing the prospect of repeated prayer and memorization. Behind this hesitance stood a suspicion, even a fear, of too much form in prayer, based perhaps on a long tradition of Christian invective against “vain repetition.” It may also stem from a rationalist interpretation of what makes a prayer “worthy.” Indeed, I often sensed, in reading the journals and even some of the survey responses, an abiding sense of guilt and accusation regarding home and personal devotion: “I don’t do it enough” or “I don’t do it

right” or “Most people don’t do it with heart.” I, as a pastor, need to see to it that this *vox legis* quiets down. It has its place, exhorting believers to more passionate prayer and thanksgiving, but when it hounds the Christian at prayer, then he or she has lost Christ’s invitation to call upon God as dear children call upon their dear fathers. Thinking on it has renewed my own commitment to teaching publicly how the righteousness of Christ alone makes prayers acceptable before God, bidding our faith as we pray either extemporaneously or repeatedly. That clear teaching would set the stage for any program of devotional education, protecting the conscience of the praying Christian, so that even more Christians may confess, as did Pauline, that their Father hears their prayers for Jesus’ blood, and not their own powers of concentration, thought, or constancy.

Finally, it would seem that the results of this study have affirmed one of the basic thoughts behind my initial formation of the *Coram Deo* fellowship: devotion is easier (in the sense of an “easy yoke) with companions walking the same path. The experience of journal keepers trying to negotiate their devotional lives around spouses and significant others who don’t share it on the one hand, and finding joy in the family bond of a common practice on the other, underscores the truth of that thesis. It also suggests that in my own devotional education of the parish, I would want to aim, as much as possible, at including a whole household around the task of prayer, and not just one parent or a child—actually, it may highlight the value of gathering a whole congregation onto a common path of home and personal piety, in so far as personality differences and local adaptations allow. Devotional societies such as *Coram Deo* may assist in this work. As fraught as they are with their own pitfalls (creating “distinctions” within the congregation, increasing dissatisfaction at home), they may provide spiritual fellowship where such fellowship is lacking.

As I turn, then, to work these recommendations into my own conduct of the ministry, I look forward to continuing the use of Luther's household prayers. My teaching and commending of them will necessarily be conditioned by a greater awareness of how different personalities may react to these prayers and even pass over them. Yet along with that awareness, I have reaffirmed in my own mind the value of such work as our local *Coram Deo* society, and I have noted ways in which I, as a pastor, may help my congregations embrace these prayers either in full or with adaptation—the prayers themselves can surely embrace the day! Teaching these prayers' connection to the Scriptural narrative, as well as employing them to reinforce the plain truths of the *Small Catechism*, will rank among the most important approaches. Accompanying those approaches is a renewed commitment to teaching these prayers to youths and equipping parents and grandparents to do the same, gathering whole households onto a common path of devotion. Through it all, it will be important to preach and teach what these prayers also confess: the happy news that our prayers are heard, not by our own efforts, whether formal or free, but for the sake of Jesus' blood alone.

Already, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, I have seen the fruit of such labor in the parish. Not too long ago, I found my feet stepping on the tile of yet another hospital's hallways, as I did almost 20 years ago at the Mayo hospitals. Once again, I found myself sitting at the sickbed with a suffering patient, near death. It would seem, to many, that God had delivered her a bitter end: after an initial recovery from cancer, it had now returned in full force, even as her husband faced his own new diagnosis of cancer. She had spent countless hours in hospital halls and hospital beds, but her face showed no hint of frustration or anger. She and I caught up on her health, her family, and things happening at church. I then asked her how things are.

“They're good, Pastor.”

“Yes? Your spirit is good?”

She nods. “I just pray throughout the day. I know who my Lord is. He’s with me.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“Mm-hm.”

“How do you pray?”

“Oh, I pray lots of ways. I pray as my parents taught me. You know, Luther’s morning prayer?”

“Mm.” I nod. “Mm-hm.”

She continues. “I pray other prayers, too, prayers you’ve put into the bulletin—here, see, I cut them out—and sometimes I just talk to Him. Or I sing. The Lord’s Prayer—oh, the Lord’s Prayer!”

“It’s a gift, isn’t it?”

“It never fails. There’s always something there.”

I pray with her, but she barely needs me. Others long before me got her ready, all in the Spirit’s good counsel, by public word and sacrament, and with the strong staff of devotion. Memorized prayers, written prayers, conversation, hymns, the Lord’s own praying—all that *Word* had found a place in her devotion, even as God had granted her a place in His grace by the blood of Jesus. In that blood, all the prayers of history were said. All that remains is for the church, in her homes and hearts as well as her houses of worship, to take up that cup of the Lord’s own devotion and say, “Amen.”

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## APPENDIX A:

### TEXT OF THE HOUSEHOLD BLESSINGS AS FOUND IN THE SMALL CATECHISM (CONCORDIA, 1986)

#### **Morning Prayer (Morning Blessing)**

*In the morning, when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say:*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

*Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may also say this prayer:*

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger.; and I pray that you would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please you. For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen

*Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.*

#### **Evening Prayer (Evening Blessing)**

*In the evening when you go to bed, make the sign of the holy cross and say:*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

*Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may also say this prayer:*

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that you would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen

*Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer.*

#### **Asking a Blessing (*Benedicite*, or Before-Meal Prayer)**

*The children and members of the household shall go to the table reverently, fold their hands, and*

*say:*

The eyes of all look to You, [O Lord,] and you give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

*Then shall be said the Lord's Prayer and the following:*

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**Returning Thanks (*Gratias*, or After-Meal Prayer)**

*Also, after eating, they shall, in like manner, reverently and with folded hands say:*

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy endures forever. He gives food to every creature. He provides food for cattle and for the young ravens when they call. His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hopes in His unfailing love.

*The shall be said the Lord's Prayer and the following:*

We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen

## APPENDIX B:

### EDITIONS OF THE SMALL CATECHISM USED IN AMERICA THAT CONTAIN THE HOUSEHOLD BLESSINGS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER BY SPONSOR (FROM ARTHUR C. REPP, SR.)

#### Prior to 1800

Zinzendorf, Nicolaus. *The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, with Explanations, Issued for the Use of the Lutheran Congregations in Pennsylvania*. Germantown: Christoph Saur, 1744.

Brunnholtz, Peter. *The Small Catechism of the Blessed Dr. Martin Luther, together with the Usual Morning-, Table-, and Evening Prayers. To which are added for the use of the older youth: the Orders of Salvation in a hymn, known under the title Hymn of Faith and In Brief and Simple Questions and Answers. For profitable use in schools and children's instruction classes. Second edition*. Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin and Johann Bohm, 1749. Reprinted 1752 (?), 1762, 1764, 1766, 1777, 1778, 1782, 1784, 1784.

Unknown. *The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, together with Questions for Those especially who, according to Christian Practice, are to be Confirmed and thereupon Partake of Their First Communion*. Germantown: Christoph Saur, 1759 and 1763.

Miller, Heinrich. Revision of the Brunnholtz catechism. Philadelphia, 1765, 1767, 1770, 1774, 1776.

Kuntze, John C. (son-in-law of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg). *The Catechism of the Blessed Dr. Martin Luther, together, etc. To which is Added a further Instruction in the Christian Doctrine for the more Advanced and the Confirmands*. Philadelphia: Steiner and Cist., June 1781.

The Pennsylvania Ministerium. *The Small Catechism of the Blessed Dr. Martin Luther, together with etc. To which are added the Orders of Salvation in a Hymn, in short Statements, in Question and Answers, in a Table: as also An Analysis of the Catechism: the Wurttemberg Brief Children's Examination, the Confirmation, and Confession: and several Hymns, Freylinghausen's Order of Salvation, the Golden A,B,C, for Children, and the Seven Penitential Psalms. For use of Young and Old*. Germantown: Leibert and Billmeyer, 1785. (This catechism continued in use until 1857; it was the catechism rejected by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.)

#### From 1800–1850

Schilling, Conrad. *The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*. Barby: Conrad Schilling, 1802. Reprinted in 1818 by Conrad Zentler of Philadelphia (Moravian).

Endress, Christians. *The Shorter Catechism by Dr. Martin Luther, with The customary Family Prayers. To which is added The Order of Salvation in Nine Short Sections and by Questions and Answers, etc.* Easton: Jacob Weygandt, 1805.

Henkel, Paul. *The Small Catechism of the Blessed Dr. Martin Luther, in which the Five Chief Parts are analyzed and set forth in short Questions so that the Contents may be learned more easily and be better Understood, Together with other Questions. As well as edifying Morning-, Table-, and Evening Prayers and Songs and whatever else is necessary.* New Market, Schenandoah County: Ambrose Henkel, 1809.

——— *The Christian Catechism, composed for the Instruction of Youth in the Knowledge of the Christian Religion, Together with Morning and Evening Hymns, Prayers, etc.* Second Edition. New Market: Ambrose Henkel, 1811. Reprinted in 1813, 1816.

——— *Der Christliche Catechismus, Verfasst zum Unterricht der Jugend in der Erkenntniss der Christlichen Religion, samt Morgen- und Abend- Lieder, un Gebete.* New Market: Ambrosius Henkel, 1811.

Henkel, David. *Dr. Martin Luther's Smaller Catechism, translated from the German: with Preliminary Observations by the Translator. Revised and published by Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod. To which are added Sundry Hymns and Prayers.* New Market: Solomon Henkel, 1828. (This edition was used through 1841.)

——— *Dr. Martin Luther's Shorter Catechism; with Preliminary Observations. Together with a Supplement of Sundry Prayers and Hymns.* New Market: Solomon Henkel, 1829.

Weyl, C. G. *Dr. Luther's Small Catechism, to which is added the Orders of Salvation, together with the Form for the Administration and Management of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America.* Baltimore: Lutherische Buchhandlung, 1845. Printed for the West Pennsylvania Synod.

## APPENDIX C:

### SURVEY QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO THE PROJECT

#### Prayer Upon Rising.

*Please circle the answer that best describes your practice.*

1. How frequently do you begin the day by crossing yourself and saying, “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?”

**not at all**   **occasionally**   **weekly**   **daily**

2. How frequently do you recite the Apostles Creed at the start of the day?

**not at all**   **occasionally**   **weekly**   **daily**

3. How frequently do you pray the Lord’s Prayer at the start of the day?

**not at all**   **occasionally**   **weekly**   **daily**

4. How frequently do you use the prayer that begins, “I thank you, my heavenly Father”?

**not at all**   **occasionally**   **weekly**   **daily**

5. How frequently do you go to your work, singing a hymn?

**not at all**   **occasionally**   **weekly**   **daily**

6. If you answered occasionally, weekly, or daily to Question 5, how often is the hymn a hymn of the Ten Commandments?

**not at all**   **occasionally**   **weekly**   **daily**

7. If you answered “occasionally” or “weekly” to any of the above questions, please state briefly what challenges you have faced in using the Prayer Upon Rising each day.

*Questions 8–11 apply if you answered “not at all” to any of the above questions.*

8. Were there any parts of Prayer Upon Rising that you tried to use, but discontinued using?



(Check all that apply.)

- Crossing Myself
- The Apostles Creed
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Rising Prayer ("I thank you . . .")
- Singing a Hymn

9. For each item that you checked in Question 8, please state briefly why you discontinued using it.

10. Were there any parts of Prayer Upon Rising that you did not try to use? (Check all that apply.)

- Crossing Myself
- The Apostles Creed
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Rising Prayer ("I thank you . . .")
- Singing a Hymn

11. For each item that you checked in Question 10, please state briefly why you did not try to use it.

**Mealtime Prayer.**

*Please circle the answer that best describes your practice.*

17. Do you use any of these prayers at mealtime?

- Yes.
- No, I use another form of mealtime prayer.
- No, I do not pray at mealtime.

18. If you use another form of mealtime prayer, briefly describe what you use.

19. If you do not pray at mealtime, briefly describe some reasons that you do not do so.

*Questions 20–25 apply if you answered "Yes" to Question 17.*

20. How frequently do you use any or all of the mealtime prayers before meals?

**not at all   occasionally   weekly   daily**

21. If you use some, but not all, of the mealtime prayers *before* meals, briefly describe which parts you use.

22. If you use some, but not all, of the mealtime prayers *before* meals, briefly describe what challenges you've faced in using all of it.
23. How frequently do you use any or all of the mealtime prayers *after* meals?  
**not at all   occasionally   weekly   daily**
24. If you use some, but not all, of the mealtime prayers *after* meals, briefly describe which parts you use.
25. If you use some, but not all, of the mealtime prayers *after* meals, briefly describe what challenges you've faced in using all of it.

**Prayer at Bedtime**

26. How frequently do you cross yourself and saying, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" at bedtime?  
**not at all   occasionally   weekly   daily**
27. How frequently do you recite the Apostles Creed at bed time?  
**not at all   occasionally   weekly   daily**
28. How frequently do you pray the Lord's Prayer at bedtime?  
**not at all   occasionally   weekly   daily**
29. How frequently do you use the prayer that begins, "I thank you, my heavenly Father"?"  
**not at all   occasionally   weekly   daily**
30. If you answered "occasionally" or "weekly" to any of the above questions, please state briefly what challenges you have faced in using all the parts of Prayer at Bedtime.

*Questions 31–34 apply if you answered "not at all" to any of the above questions regarding bedtime prayer.*

31. Were there any parts of Prayer at Bedtime that you tried to use, but discontinued using? (Check all that apply.)  
 \_\_\_ Crossing Myself

- The Apostles Creed
- The Lord's Prayer
- The Bedtime Prayer ("I thank you . . .")

32. For each item that you checked in Question 31, please state briefly why you discontinued using it.
33. Were there any parts of Bedtime Prayer you did not try to use? (Check all that apply.)
- Crossing Myself
  - The Apostles Creed
  - The Lord's Prayer
  - The Bedtime Prayer ("I thank you . . .")
34. For each item that you checked in Question 33, please state briefly why you did not try to use it.

**APPENDIX D:**  
**QUESTIONS PROVIDED TO JOURNAL KEEPERS**

**First Journal Entry**

Share a brief description of your “devotional history.” How have you prayed in the past? How does your daily devotion look today? Who taught you how to pray? What struggles have you had? What joys?

**After 7 Days**

Record your impressions of using the prayers. What about them has struck you as interesting, new or surprising? What has struck you as awkward or challenging? Has using the prayers made you reflect on anything in your faith?

**After 10 Days**

Continue to record what strikes you as new, interesting, awkward, or challenging.

How has the use of the prayers affected your sense of time? Have you looked forward to using them, or has it felt like an interruption? Have you begun skipping any portions? If so, which ones?

Have any parts of the prayers “stuck in your mind”—that is, have they started to become memorable for you?

**After 14 Days**

In your current opinion, are these prayers able to stand repeated, daily use? How do you personally experience “repetition” in your prayer life—that is, does it help you to use the same prayers each day, or does it challenge you in some ways? Why do you think you experience repetition in the way that you do?

The morning and evening collects (short prayers) begin with the words, “I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son.” Would you say that this language has helped you reflect on your relationship with God as one of child-Father? Has it helped you rest in that relationship more? Why or why not?

Did you cross yourself as a practice prior to this experiment? Do you find crossing yourself helpful? Why or why not? How do you understand the purpose for doing so?

**After 18 Days**

How familiar were you with the Apostles Creed before you started using it for daily prayer? Had you used it for daily prayer before?

Have you enjoyed using the Creed? Do you find yourself thinking about it as you see it? Why do you think Luther included its use in the morning and evening blessings?

How do you use (or not use) the table blessings?

### **After 22 Days**

Did you usually pray the Lord's Prayer daily prior to using these prayers? How has using the Lord's Prayer a few times each day felt to you?

Do you think of the Lord's Prayer as an intimate prayer? What is your favorite part of it?

Has using it more frequently increased your awareness about anything in your faith?

How are you using these prayers in general? Have you settled into a pattern that suits you? If so, why? If not, why not?

### **After 26 Days**

How well do these prayers "wear" for you as you travel or observe special occasions in your life? Do you find that they "stick" in your head and are easy to memorize, or are they difficult to retain? Are they prayers that you can say "on the go"?

Do these prayers encompass your concerns? Do they connect with your experience? For example, have you found yourself confronted with worries or concerns in the past several weeks that these prayers do not address? Do you find yourself left with other devotional need that they do not touch?

### **After 30 Days**

What has been the greatest challenge you've faced in using these prayers? The greatest blessing? Do you think that you will continue to use them? Why or why not? Do you have any suggestions for how to change or improve this experiment?

## APPENDIX E:

### SURVEY ANNOUNCEMENT AND COVER LETTER (TEXT)

#### Announcement (Summer 2015)

Coming this Fall: CORAM DEO SURVEY

Later this fall, you will receive a survey for Coram Deo members with questions aimed at exploring your experience of this devotional path:

How has the Coram Deo path intersected, or not intersected, with your daily practice of the Christian faith?

What parts of it have helped, and what have not helped? Why?

What have you appreciated about readings in *For All the Saints*? What have been struggles?

And more! The survey will come in a booklet form. It will be completely anonymous, and will be tabulated by someone other than Pr. Gjerde or Pr. Gulhaugen.

This survey is part of the final paper for Pr. Gjerde's doctor of ministry studies. The results will be made available to Coram Deo members in a subsequent issue of our monthly newsletter.

Keep your eyes open!

#### Cover Letter (with Survey, Autumn 2015)

Autumn 2015

Dear Member of *Coram Deo*,

Greetings in the name of Christ!

Enclosed with this letter is a survey about *Coram Deo*. I hope to gather information about how portions of the *Coram Deo* path have or have not supported your daily devotion.

The goal is not to evaluate your use of *Coram Deo*, but to learn how helpful or unhelpful the *Coram Deo* path may be. I have sent it to all subscribers of the *Coram Deo* newsletter, but I especially seek response from those who have attempted to follow the *Coram Deo* path of daily prayer.

The identity of all survey participants will be kept anonymous (no one will know from this survey who you are). All returned surveys will be tabulated by a professional from outside of

Zion Lutheran Church. The results will then be given to me in a summary report. This summary report will be published in a subsequent *Coram Deo* newsletter.

**To participate:**

- + fill out the enclosed survey booklet.
- + return it in the enclosed, stamped envelope addressed to Zion Lutheran Church.

**Your responses will be highly valuable.** As a member of *Coram Deo*, you know how its path of prayer has (or has not) influenced your devotional life. Sharing that information will help identify where our common prayer has assisted Christian devotion, and where it may improve. **Please take the time to complete this survey and return it using the enclosed envelope.**

**I give thanks for you!** Your faith in our Lord and your commitment to following Him is a gift from God. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I do hope that you will complete and return the survey.

The peace of Christ be with you.

*(Signed)*

## APPENDIX F:

### PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOURNALING EXPERIMENT USED IN PARTICIPATING CONGREGATIONS

#### **Prayer "Experiment"**

Nourish your daily devotion and help others by participating in a short-term prayer study! Pastor Steven Gjerde, a friend of [*pastor*] and senior pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Wausau, Wisconsin, is conducting a simple experiment as part of his Doctor of Ministry project: use the prayers provided in the Small Catechism (or a portion of them) for a few weeks and journal your reactions. Pr. Gjerde will assist your journaling by providing questions for reflection; either long or short journal entries are welcome. The final results will inform Pr. Gjerde's final paper and assist other pastors in directing the spiritual life of their congregation. To participate, contact [*pastor's name, customary contact information*].



## APPENDIX G:

### EXPLANATION OF JOURNALING, FIXED INSIDE JOURNALS

Thank you for participating in this research project. By using morning, evening, and mealtime prayers found in Martin Luther's Small Catechism, you are providing valuable insight into how today's people may experience and use these prayers. Your reflections, recorded in this journal, will be read by me and summarized in the Major Applied Project that completes my doctor of ministry coursework.

Simply pray the prayers on the following pages, using the directions that Luther provided. As you do so, you may well discover that:

- + you love these prayers
- + you don't love these prayers
- + they're just what you've been looking for
- + you don't understand them
- + you find them too simple
- + you find them too formal
- + you like some parts, but not others
- + you use some, but not all of them
- + they help you follow Christ and rest in Him
- + they don't help you follow Christ and rest in Him

Any and all feedback is valuable. I will guide you through this journal process by providing questions to guide your journaling and checking with you periodically to field any questions. When you have finished journaling, please return the journal to:

The Rev. Steven K. Gjerde  
628 Grant Street  
Wausau, Wisconsin 54403

Your personal information (your name and contact information) will be kept private and confidential, and the journals will be kept in a secure box in my office. Again, my many thanks for your partnership in this project.

[signed by researcher]

May He give you all the desire of your heart and make your plans succeed. ~ Psalm 20:4. Lord, hear my voice. ~ Psalm 130:2

**APPENDIX H:**

**RELEVANT SURVEY RESULTS COMPILED AND CORRELATED**

Relevant questions related to the Morning Blessing (1–11), the Table Blessings (17–25), and the Evening Blessing (26–34).

Each participant received a letter designation, A–FF.

Questions are listed by their corresponding number (see Appendix C).

Likert scale questions received a letter designation:

- (a) not at all
- (b) occasionally
- (c) weekly
- (d) daily

Multiple choice questions received a letter designation, starting with (a) and extending through as many letters necessary to note all choices.

**Participants A through D, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>1</b>	c	c, almost d	a	d
<b>2</b>	b	a	a	a
<b>3</b>	b	a	a	a
<b>4</b>	d	b	a	d
<b>5</b>	a	a	a	c
<b>6</b>				b
<b>7</b>	I'm not a morning person there I have to set an alarm and it's usually set to the last minute. I have to get myself dressed and into the car.	I do devotions in the eve. b/4 bed		
<b>8</b>	b,c,e			

9	Guess I just got out of the habit	Never been using		
10	e	e	a, b, c, d, e	b
11	I can't sing in the morning. Didn't want to wake anyone up.	I don't know a "Ten Commandments" hymn and immediately <u>make coffee</u> , eat & dress & start the day upon arising	Too busy, never thought about it.	I do a daily devotion each morning.

**Participants A through D, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>17</b>	b	a		a
<b>18</b>	Lord we thank you for this food. For health and friends we share. Enrich our faith	"Come Lord Jesus..." in restaurants, quickly and silently		
<b>19</b>				
<b>20</b>	d	b		c
<b>21</b>		The prayers II "Lord God, heavenly Father..."	Come Lord Jesus be our guests and let these gifts to us be blessed- and let there be a goodly share on every table everywhere, and let us help to put it there. Amen	
<b>22</b>		Do not believe in words: "The eyes of all ... you <u>give them food at proper time.</u> "		

23	a	b	a	
24		II Prayers "We thank you, Lord God..." <u>for all benefits ...</u>		
25	My Swedish grandmother taught me a prayer in Swedish. I can't write it but loosely translated it goes "Thank you God for this food".	"He gives food to every creature..." is a real problem for me.		

**Participants A through D, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
26	c	d	a	d
27	b	d	a	a
28	c	d	a	d
29	d	d	a	d
30	Tiredness			
31				
32				
33		No		b
34				I have been doing the other 3 for a long time. I also read Portals of prayer nightly.

**Participants E through H, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>
1	a	b	d	d
2	a	a	b	b

<b>3</b>	d	b	d	f
<b>4</b>	a	b	b	a
<b>5</b>	a	a	a	d
<b>6</b>	a			b
<b>7</b>		Not remembering the entire prayer. Praying for other people.		I begin my day by praying the office of Readings or Morning Prayer. I use the 4 volume set of "For All the Saints" I divide the psalter into 112 equal portions which I pray 4 times a day.
<b>8</b>		e		
<b>9</b>				
<b>10</b>	a, b, d e	e	b, d,e	d
<b>11</b>	I have other prayer habits.	I don't usually sing a hymn in the morning when I am at home.	We use the Apostles Creed along with devotions from "For All The Saints" daily.	The prayer is lovely and has deep theological value. I read it occasionally as a prayer, but it is not part of my regular daily prayer

**Participants E through H, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>
<b>17</b>	b	b	b	b

<b>18</b>	Typical table prayer.	Come Lord Jesus God is good	Prayer of thanks for the food and including other events or individuals that we know are in need of prayer.	"Bless us, O Lord, these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty through Jesus Christ Our Lord. A variation of the Amen prayer in II
<b>19</b>				
<b>20</b>	a			d
<b>21</b>				see 18
<b>22</b>				
<b>23</b>	a		a	a
<b>24</b>				
<b>25</b>				

**Participants E through H, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>
<b>26</b>	a	d	d	d
<b>27</b>	a	a	a	b
<b>28</b>	a	b	b	a
<b>29</b>	a	b	b	a
<b>30</b>		Falling asleep shortly after going to bed	No challenges.	My daily prayer is divided into 4 parts Morning, Noon, Evening and Night. I say the Lord's Prayer at morning & evening, but not night.
<b>31</b>				
<b>32</b>				
<b>33</b>		b		b, c, d Except for the last item, I use them at other times of the day.
<b>34</b>	I use another bedtime prayer	No		see answer in 33

**Participants I through L, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>L</b>
<b>1</b>	c	d	b	a
<b>2</b>	c	d	b	a
<b>3</b>	d	d	b	a
<b>4</b>	d	b	b	b
<b>5</b>	c	d	a	c
<b>6</b>	b	a		b
<b>7</b>	I usually begin with the psalm then readings in F. A.S.	I don't have it memorized— it means keeping a copy of the prayer handy	Simply feel rushed & pressured to start the business day	Haven't made it a habit.
<b>8</b>		d A hymn of the 10 Commandments — what would that be	e	a, b, c, d, e
<b>9</b>		I have a copy— somewhere — Matins Bulletin	Knowing few hymns by heart	Haven't made it a habit.
<b>10</b>				a, b, c, d, e
<b>11</b>				I didn't make it a habit.

**Participants I through L, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>L</b>
<b>17</b>	b	a	b	a
<b>18</b>	Come, Lord Jesus	Also, Come Lord Jesus...	Come Lord Jesus...	
<b>19</b>		I'm getting better at remembering— after years of not doing it even though as a child we prayed at mealtime		
<b>20</b>		d		d
<b>21</b>				

22		Not having it memorized or no handy copy.		
23		a Shameful!	a	a
24				
25		Frankly, I never thought of it		It is not a habit.

**Participants I through L, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>I</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>L</b>
26	c	b	a	d
27	c	a	a	a
28	d	b	b	d
29	c	a	b	c
30	I usually read compline in F.A.S.	Too tired	Generally prefer more free-form, stream of consciousness prayer at bedtime	I haven't made it a habit.
31		b, d		a, b, d
32		Too tired – a better idea would be to do it before I retire for the night		They didn't become a habit
33		b, d	a, b, c, d	
34		Too tired to stay awake	Not accustomed to crossing myself in general and see # 30	

**Participants M through P, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>M</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>P</b>
1	d	a	d	d
2	c	c	a	a
3	c	c	a	a
4	d	b	d	d
5	a	a	a	a
6	a			



<b>7</b>	Not part of my normal routine daily schedule.	Forgetfulness. Rushed for time		none
<b>8</b>	b, e		b, c, e	b, c, e
<b>9</b>	No reason for not using the Apostles Creed. Singing a hymn takes time.		It seems too repetitious — and somewhat unfeeling	never started
<b>10</b>	e	e	b, c, e	b, c, e
<b>11</b>	See # 9.	Focused on getting ready for work. Don't know any by heart.		time

**Participants M through P, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>M</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>17</b>	b	b	b	b
<b>18</b>	Common table prayer "Come Lord Jesus..." followed by "O Give Thanks..."	"Come Lord Jesus, be our guest..." or "O give thanks unto the Lord..." or "Bless us oh Lord for these thy gifts..."	We use a spontaneous prayer thanking God for the day and the food.	extemporaneous
<b>19</b>				breakfast and supper not together and not at the table
<b>20</b>	d	d		
<b>21</b>		The prayers I use are shorter versions of the prayers/verses.		
<b>22</b>		I don't have them memorized		
<b>23</b>	a	a	a	
<b>24</b>				

<b>25</b>	Never developed the practice.			
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**Participants M through P, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>M</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>26</b>	d	a	d	a in the past d in the future
<b>27</b>	b	a	a	a
<b>28</b>	b	a	a	a
<b>29</b>	d	c	d	d
<b>30</b>		Exhaustion / sleepiness. Don't have a consistent nighttime routine.		
<b>31</b>			b, c	
<b>32</b>				never started
<b>33</b>		a, b, c,d	b, c, e	
<b>34</b>		Exhaustion / sleepiness. No consistent bedtime routine		bad habit

**Participants Q through T, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>Q</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>1</b>	c		d	c
<b>2</b>	a		d	a
<b>3</b>	a		d	b
<b>4</b>	b		d	a
<b>5</b>	a		a	b
<b>6</b>				a

<b>7</b>	Because we use the Prayer book (For All the Saints) every day at breakfast most focus on devotions and remembrance happens then.		It has become a part of my morning experience, so there are no challenges anymore.	
<b>8</b>		b, c, d	e	
<b>9</b>	"Not all" means that because of the regular use of the prayer book supersedes all other practice.		More to the point, never started. Don't know enough hymns from memory to sing one.	
<b>10</b>	b, c, e	e		b, d
<b>11</b>	Again all of our practices focus on the entire prayer book – and much discussion often growing out of reading IV	didn't feel well		I pray a personal prayer each morning

**Participants Q through T, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>Q</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>17</b>		a	a	b
<b>18</b>			"Come Lord Jesus"	1. "Come Lord Jesus—etc 2. The first sentence of the Psalm verse.
<b>19</b>				
<b>20</b>			d	d
<b>21</b>	Always "Come Lord Jesus" or unfrequently a voluntary prayer for guests always make sure on a Trinitarian ending,			The first line of the Psalm verse

22	don't know anything about "mealtime" prayers in your lexicon			
23	a		a Have never developed the discipline to use one	d
24				The first line of the Psalm prayer.
25				

**Participants Q through T, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	Q	R	S	T
26	c		d	b
27	a		d	a
28	b		d	a
29	b		d	b
30	Because of other prayer concerns and needs			
31				
32		I pray constantly not exactly as you say, but I try my best. I attend my church weekly as I am able. I am handicapped and no longer drive. I love my lord Jesus my savior		
33	b			b
34	Sunday corporate recitation seems to meet my needs			I pray a personal prayer

**Participants U through X, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	U	V	W	X
<b>1</b>	a	d	b	d
<b>2</b>	a	c	b	b
<b>3</b>	a	d	d	d
<b>4</b>	c	c	d	b
<b>5</b>	d	d	b	d
<b>6</b>	d ?	b	a	a
<b>7</b>		I use, primarily, Matins (LBW)/For All the Saints rather than Martin Luther's Morning Prayers. I use appointed or office hymns; few of these are based on 10 Commandments	I wish I had a very small booklet including the Daily Prayers and the Creeds that could be next to my bed, in my Bible or packet.	
<b>8</b>	a, b, c			
<b>9</b>				
<b>10</b>				
<b>11</b>				

**Participants U through X, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	U	V	W	X
<b>17</b>	b	a	b	a
<b>18</b>		Sometimes "Come Lord Jesus" and/or "Thank you for the World So Sweet" from family of origin	Free thanksgiving	Komm herr Jesu
<b>19</b>				
<b>20</b>		c		d
<b>21</b>		All as is, often with Lord's Prayer		
<b>22</b>				
<b>23</b>		b		a
<b>24</b>				

<b>25</b>		Again, not as likely to also include Lord's Prayer at meal	I think it would be nice to have these prayers on table tents to that all gather around the table could read and use them.	
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**Participants U through X, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>U</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>26</b>	a	c	b	d
<b>27</b>	a	c	b	b
<b>28</b>	a	d	d	d
<b>29</b>	d	c	b	a
<b>30</b>		I am most likely to use Compline	Again it would be nice to have these prayers in a small pamphlet or boat form.	Falling asleep!
<b>31</b>				
<b>32</b>				
<b>33</b>	a, b, c			
<b>34</b>				

**Participants Y through BB, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>Y</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>BB</b>
<b>1</b>	d	d	b	d
<b>2</b>	b	c	a	a
<b>3</b>	d	d	a	d
<b>4</b>	d	d	d	d
<b>5</b>	d	b	b	b
<b>6</b>	b	a	a	a
<b>7</b>		Can't hold a tune Don't know and songs using the Ten Commandments	This is a devotion that I was not taught as a child. I do greet the Trinity and the angels when I walk in the AM	
<b>8</b>		e		b ?e

<b>9</b>		can't hold a Tune	As noted in 7. I was not taught this devotion. I have not instituted in my day.	just never started saying the confession. Will try to include it.
<b>10</b>		e		b
<b>11</b>		Can't hold a tune		

**Participants Y through BB, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>Y</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>BB</b>
<b>17</b>	b	a	a	b
<b>18</b>	The one I used as a child... "Come Lord Jesus."			1) Come Lord Jesus 2) Let us Give thanks unto the Lord
<b>19</b>				
<b>20</b>	b	d	d	d
<b>21</b>	If at a large gathering sometimes one of those is used.		II	
<b>22</b>	Reverting to prayers used as a child seems to be the automatic default		We have never done these. It is not part of the home tradition.	
<b>23</b>	a	b	a	d
<b>24</b>		Prayer no II Thank you		
<b>25</b>				

**Participants Y through BB, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>Y</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>AA</b>	<b>BB</b>
<b>26</b>	b	d	d	d
<b>27</b>	a	b	b	a
<b>28</b>	b	d	b	a
<b>29</b>	d	d	d	d

<b>30</b>	It depends on where I fall asleep— if in bed it's more likely to happen but it in my chair, sometimes not as common.			
<b>31</b>				
<b>32</b>				
<b>33</b>	b			b, c
<b>34</b>	Never tho't to do it.			

**Participants CC through FF, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>CC</b>	<b>DD</b>	<b>EE</b>	<b>FF</b>
<b>1</b>	d	d	a	a
<b>2</b>	d	a	a	a
<b>3</b>	d	a	a	b
<b>4</b>	d	d	b	b
<b>5</b>	b	a	a	b retired — sing at home
<b>6</b>	a	a		
<b>7</b>		Being able to concentrate fully upon what I'm reading		My husband and I follow the "For All the Saints" devotions in the morning
<b>8</b>		b, c, e		
<b>9</b>		I never started using any of these, I have certain prayers I say daily that encompass all my thoughts and feelings		
<b>10</b>		b, c, e	b, e	



<b>11</b>		It's easier for me to just talk to God and say the Rising Prayers		This survey prompts me to consider using parts of the Prayer Upon Rising
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**Participants CC through FF, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>CC</b>	<b>DD</b>	<b>EE</b>	<b>FF</b>
<b>17</b>	b	c	b	b
<b>18</b>	Come Lord Jesus...		Come , Lord Jesus, Be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed	We use various meal time prayers
<b>19</b>		I usually forget but try not to		
<b>20</b>		b	d	d
<b>21</b>		I just thank God and ask his blessing		
<b>22</b>				
<b>23</b>	a	b	a	d primarily after dinner
<b>24</b>		I just thank God		We use the Psalm verse
<b>25</b>		Just trying to remember to say them		

**Participants CC through FF, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	<b>CC</b>	<b>DD</b>	<b>EE</b>	<b>FF</b>
<b>26</b>	b	d	a	a
<b>27</b>	b	a	a	a
<b>28</b>	b	a	b	d
<b>29</b>	b	d	b	a

<b>30</b>		No challenges		I use the Lord's Prayer and personal prayers
<b>31</b>		b, c,		
<b>32</b>		I never started with them		
<b>33</b>		b, c		
<b>34</b>		I just have many other prayers I do say and I just like to talk to God		I will consider crossing myself prior to evening prayers

**Participant G, Questions 1–11 (Morning Blessing)**

	<b>GG</b>
<b>1</b>	b
<b>2</b>	a
<b>3</b>	a
<b>4</b>	a
<b>5</b>	a
<b>6</b>	
<b>7</b>	Time Job
<b>8</b>	
<b>9</b>	
<b>10</b>	b, c, d, e
<b>11</b>	Time Job

**Participant G, Questions 17–25 (Table Blessings)**

	<b>GG</b>
<b>17</b>	b

<b>18</b>	Traditional Lutheran — Come, Lord Jesus be our guest plus sign of the cross
<b>19</b>	
<b>20</b>	
<b>21</b>	
<b>22</b>	
<b>23</b>	
<b>24</b>	
<b>25</b>	

**Participant G, Questions 26–34 (Evening Blessing)**

	GG
<b>26</b>	a
<b>27</b>	a
<b>28</b>	a
<b>29</b>	a
<b>30</b>	
<b>31</b>	No
<b>32</b>	
<b>33</b>	a, b, c, d
<b>34</b>	Tired and Lazy I guess