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IMPACT OF ELDER TRAINING IN
LAW AND GOSPEL DISCERNMENT,
CHRISTIAN VOCATION, AND
TWO KINGDOM THEOLOGY
AT
GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH
WOODBIDGE, VIRGINIA

A Major Applied Project
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By
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August 2020

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For Larry Prah, David Boedecker, Carroll Kohl, and Frederick Klein
who taught me much, and continue to be model pastors to a pastor.
To Ken, Jan, Robert, and Julie for showing me Jesus,
and to Alissa.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EIIT	Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology at Concordia Seminary
ELCA	The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ESV	English Standard Version
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
WELS	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

ABSTRACT

Martin, Lannon, R. “Impact of Elder Training in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian Vocation, and Two Kingdom Theology at Grace Lutheran Church, Woodbridge, Virginia.” Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2020. 139 pp.

This Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) Major Applied Project (MAP), studies the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church in Woodbridge, Virginia, and seeks to determine how their influence from federal government and military culture has shaped how they view and carry out their service. They are then taught foundational theology including Law and Gospel, Christian vocation and two kingdoms. The qualitative research study seeks to find if a shift comes in their service, as a result of their new training. Recommendations are made in how to go forward and continue the work of training faithful Lutheran elders in any Lutheran context.

The Research Question

“How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?”

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

Grace Lutheran Church of Woodbridge, Virginia, is a member congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The congregation is nearly sixty years old and is somewhat unique existing within a Northern Virginia suburb of Washington, DC. Accordingly, most of the local workforce is either federal government staff or military personnel. Within the congregation there is a large population of current and former military and government employees. The federal government is the major factor of influence for culture and climate. The municipality to the adjacent south includes Quantico, a major Marine base and FBI training center. The municipality to the adjacent north includes Fort Belvoir, a medium sized Army base with substantial medical facilities. To illustrate the influence of the federal government on pastoral care, I have twice been delayed in visiting parishioners in the hospital at Walter Reed Medical Center because the first lady and another unknown VIP were sharing a floor with a member. Also, I have only once officiated a funeral without a burial at either Arlington or Quantico National cemeteries.

Grace Lutheran Church is situated between Interstate 95 and State Route 1, about 15 miles outside Washington, DC on a busy connecting parkway. The I-95 western side of the property is a high income upper middle-class area. The Route 1 eastern side is a lower income area with major influences from first- and second-generation immigrants from Western Africa and El Salvador.

The congregational membership reflects a wide range of socioeconomic demographics with vibrant racial diversity. Each generational group is represented by a roughly equal percentage of

membership, which allows the congregation to be active in caring for and relating to all age groups. New members in just the last couple of years include countries of origin being Ethiopia, Pakistan, Guatemala, El Salvador, and South Korea. The missional potential of the area is unique and exciting from all the international influence within steps.

There are about 250 baptized members currently averaging 150 in worship. I was called to be sole pastor. Over the past year we transitioned by adding a part time assistant pastor and an Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology (EIIT) vicar from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO. The assistant pastor is a South Korean immigrant who came to the United States with his family to pursue graduate studies at our seminaries. He holds a PhD. in missiology from Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He also teaches classes in missions and church history at a local Christian college. The EIIT vicar came with his family as a child to escape conflict in El Salvador and does work with second generation immigrant outreach. We also hold a weekly worship service on site in Oromo for Ethiopian immigrants who were with the Mekane Yesus, in partnership with another LCMS congregation in Kensington, Maryland. Another significant demographic is the close to three dozen highly active members who have left The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) within the past ten years over theological concerns. Former ELCA members continue to be a growing population, whose experience is a major factor in planning and ministry within the congregation.

Grace Lutheran Church is focused heavily on social ministry. They have run a seasonal soup kitchen, volunteer at a local homeless shelter, have a tutoring partnership with a local public middle school, partner to offer adult English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, and give generously to causes of need through the budget and special offerings. The facilities are well maintained by a Board of Property Management with about a dozen dedicated members

who take care of everything from landscaping and electrical, to painting and long-term facility planning. The campus includes a modern sanctuary, office area with a conference room, a glass atrium gathering area outside the sanctuary, two small Sunday school wings with about 7 classrooms combined, and a large fellowship hall and commercial kitchen. There is also ample parking in a multiple tier wooded parking lot. The congregation has recently begun efforts to remodel the educational and office facilities to meet growing needs for more offices and educational spaces. The finances of the congregation are healthy and stable, having operated in surplus for about three years. The polity of the congregation is a typical board structure with boards of Elders, Evangelism, Financial Management, Property Management, Technology Management, Social Ministry, Fellowship, and Education, all having chairmen that make up a Church Council. Despite the considerable number of people required to fill the board positions, the need for leadership is consistently met by the members of the congregation.

The congregation's first great strength is being active and welcoming. Often, when new families or individuals join the congregation, or return for a second visit, they remark how warmly they were received. I attribute this to a large population of people who have moved many times for military reassignment. With this experience there is knowledge of exactly how it feels to walk into a church for the first time. The culture of hospitality is a major strength of the congregation.

A second major strength of the congregation is their strong resiliency. Grace Lutheran Church has had seven different called or contracted pastors over the previous ten years before my arrival in 2017. During this ten-year period, nearly all church functions were maintained throughout each of the vacancies that preceded me. A strong consistent leadership with a heart for the people of the congregation seems to have kept morale up, hope constant, and ministry

ongoing. The leadership during this time is an example of God raising up the right leaders at the right time for his kingdom. In this situation, it was ideal to have military and government trained leadership who knew well how to troubleshoot a problem, and they did exactly what they were trained to do. The leadership wrote up policies and created structure for seemingly every possible situation. In this way they carried on for their beloved congregation.

A main weakness of the congregation stems from most members coming from a similar professional background with the military or federal government. This culture craves bureaucracy, advancement, and has deep respect for authority. Federal influence in the congregation means that the elders, church council, congregation chairman, and pastor have above average influence to enact change within the congregation. The lay leadership has been especially influential not only because of this context, but also due to the pastoral turnover issues of the previous decade. The constitution and bylaws, an operation manual, and personnel manual, all have been recently updated, and detail the full operations of the congregation. A former professional policy manual writer for the Pentagon, who was a longtime elder, used his professional skills to write congregational documents and policies with exceptional detail.

The board of elders in a Lutheran context, specifically within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “oversees the spiritual life of the congregation and its individual members.”¹ The current board of elders includes two former congregational chairmen, and four other former congregational chairmen have served on the board of elders within the past five years. It had been very typical for members of church council, and the council chairman, to simply flip back and forth between being an elder responsible for ministry, and the council responsible for congregational business.

¹ LCMS Job Descriptions: Congregation Officer (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, n.d).

The sum of the board of elders by definition being the chief stewards of congregational spiritual life, and also being government or military personnel, had led to a major cultural confusion of God's two kingdoms. Luther wrote of the life of a Christian as existing in two kingdoms, both ruled by God. The left-hand kingdom includes worldly order, government, and all temporal authorities.² The right-hand kingdom is God's spiritual kingdom of grace, by which he serves his people on earth.³ We all exist in both kingdoms, but the key is to keep a balance of the two kingdoms. "Since God is also at work in the temporal government, there is ultimately no conflict, since the divine will is authoritative in both kingdoms or governments."⁴ At Grace Lutheran Church a lifetime of government training, left most members of the board of elders unaware of the distinct value of right-hand kingdom discernment.

Most notably, as the balance between the right-hand and left-hand kingdoms increasingly favored the left-hand kingdom, the board of elders had become less focused on ministry as the paramount focus of their congregational vocation. The main focus of the board of elders had become fulfilling and carrying out the policies and duties of the board, and then enforcing their policies in all areas of congregational life. The elders had long functioned as what could be described as an organizational business leadership group, in conjunction at best, and competition at worst, with the church council.

The foundational responsibility of a congregation to care for God's right-hand kingdom, was confused with the left-hand kingdom. The federal culture's influence minimizing God's right-hand kingdom is the genesis of the problem at Grace Lutheran Church. Upon my arrival,

² Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 320.

³ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 320.

⁴ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 320.

the president of the congregation, a distinctly business authority in the church, attended all meetings of the board of elders to present the agenda and discussions of the church council, as an ex-officio member. The elders debated these issues for agreement to be taken back to the church council. Staff contracts and the overall congregational budget were debated. Confirmation, worship, difficult member issues, and assimilation were forgotten. The left-hand kingdom was firmly in charge, the board of elders was unaware of what had been lost, and the reputation of the board suffered.

A left-hand kingdom focused board of elders is the one that I met on arrival in Virginia. Lay elders have a duty to uphold the spiritual right-hand kingdom in the congregation and bring two kingdom balance to congregational leadership. When a board of elders strays from their primary right-hand kingdom focus, the lay people in general cease to understand the role and purpose of an elder in general. C.F.W. Walther, the first president of the LCMS, and a parish pastor, saw this very thing was happening in his own congregation, “people wondered what these lay elders were, where they came from, and what they were to do.”⁵ When the board of elders drifts from their purpose, the reputation of that board suffers, the challenge of carrying out their duties becomes greater, and the congregation can forget why they even exist. An erosion of right-hand kingdom ministry was occurring, and a balance of the two kingdoms seems to have been lost.

The elders should be commended on their tireless focus on keeping the church functional through difficult periods in Grace Lutheran Church’s recent history. However, the side effect of their efforts was an erosion of ministry to and for church members. Visitations, confirmation

⁵ Albert Collver, “Lay Elders—A Brief Overview of Their Origin in the Missouri Synod: Implications for Elders Today,” *Concordia Journal* 30, no. 1 (2006): 41.

supervision, assimilation, and other ministerial responsibilities had often been forgotten as a central focus to the purpose of the elders. This did lead to a drop in the reputation of the board of elders within the greater congregation. Even if the board of elders sensed the situation, they only had left-hand kingdom skills to address right-hand kingdom issues. If a situation were to arise where a difficult matter of spiritual care came up before them, they simply have not been trained with the skills and confidence in how to respond or support the pastoral staff and congregation.

Research Purpose

After installation, I was surprised at how rigidly the congregation was organized just like a government agency would be organized. There was a written policy for everything and many layers of bureaucracy. The board of elders had several subcommittees each with written charters and duties complete with plenty of assumed authority. The leadership built what they were trained to build and had kept the congregation running without a consistently strong pastoral presence. This led to a blurring of the two kingdoms. For example, some of my first meetings with the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church discussed similar agenda items as the church council. Also, each subcommittee of the elders held regular meetings. Most days had at least one meeting scheduled with a group within the bureaucratic maze of church leadership. The board culture maintained focus on left-hand kingdom business and structure. There was not only a lack of two kingdom awareness, but there was no concept of adiaphora. Adiaphora are “ceremonies and ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word but have been introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order and decorum”⁶ Without a concept of adiaphora, congregational practice was very rigid. For some in the

⁶ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 635.

congregation the rigidity and bureaucracy existing within the congregation had led to a distrust of congregational leadership. For those serving as elders, the line between their professional vocation and congregational vocation as an elder was blurred since both had come to function in a similar fashion.

Out of ten current members of the board, all of them have been involved in military or government service excepting two, the wife of a naval officer turned defense contractor, and a Supreme Court Bar attorney. Obviously even those outside of direct government service are steeped in the influence of federal culture.

Grace Lutheran Church, along with most area LCMS congregations, has adopted the practice of both males and females serving as elders⁷, and the local LCMS district endorses this practice. Some of the most respected and remembered former elders of the congregation were women. Currently two out of ten members of the board of elders are women.

An elder in service at Grace Lutheran Church is assigned a list of no more than twenty family units. The elder gets to know the family, visits the family, prays with the family, visits them in the hospital when sick, encourages them toward faithful activity in the congregation, and to the pastors, as needed. Spiritual care for the families assigned to their care is the chief duty of the elders individually. Families are assigned to each elder intentionally to provide the best possible care. An adult convert is matched up with adult converts. An elder who is a former

⁷ The historical role in a Lutheran setting for women in congregational ministry is that of a deaconess. In historical Lutheranism, deaconesses have long served as women in ministerial mercy work. In the historic Lutheran tradition, deaconesses have long served in ministerial mercy work and human care. The current female elders at Grace Lutheran Church operate similar to the historic model of a deaconess. For more information on gender concerns for Lutheran elders or deaconess service, see the following:

Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *CTCR Review of 2005 Task Force Guidelines for the Service of Women in Congregational Offices*, (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2014).

Deaconesses in the LCMS (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2017).

ELCA member is assigned many of the incoming ELCA families. A recently retired woman is assigned homebound women. Elders with children still at home are assigned young families.

After conversations with members and former members, I found that frequent pastoral turnover had left the congregation without vision or direction, and the leadership was losing focus of the right-hand kingdom. The confirmation class had various instructors and no uniform curriculum or requirements. The adult Bible class was scarcely attended and had spent three years studying the same six chapters of the Gospel of John. One frequent concern was that members of all ages were unable to understand recent sermons. There was no recognizable evangelism effort, and the corresponding committee had all resigned, with some leaving the church altogether.

The pastoral turnover and corresponding issues began after the retirement of a pastor who served faithfully for twenty-five years in the congregation. Next, a beloved vacancy pastor served throughout the call process for four years. After this four-year vacancy, a called pastor was installed. He was a second career pastor whose first career was federal government service with the Department of Transportation. According to documentation from board minutes and policies, this pastor was strongly in favor of developing policy and structure that would take duties from his role and place them into the elder's role. As this was implemented, the pastor's own government training, along with the board members similar training, took right-hand kingdom ministry, and turned it into left-hand kingdom tasks. As the board of elder's duties increased, policy was written to rigidly mandate how each elder was to carry out their role in every situation. For example, during this tenure, elders assumed all homebound visitation and funeral planning according to strict step by step written protocol and scripts to follow. This period included many such examples of two kingdom confusion. This pastor served for exactly

three years to the date, leaving to return to government service. He gave the congregation a two-week notice, during which he took vacation time, which was one final example of left-hand kingdom training guiding Grace Lutheran Church during this era. After a short vacancy, an intentional interim served for about three years, after which I was called as pastor.

The elders, with the increase in stated duties, along with the need to keep ministry continuing during challenging times, turned to what they knew best: bureaucratic organization and accountability. The resulting problem at its core finds the congregational leadership focused on practicality and organization as opposed to faithfully caring for one another. Over a difficult period of history and with a vacuum of ministerial leadership, this was the culture created and passed on. In short, the right-hand kingdom was blurred or lost, and accordingly the reputation of the board of elders suffered within the general congregation.

The congregation needs spiritual leadership with tools for faithful discernment beginning with Law and Gospel. Martin Luther describes Law and Gospel discernment as:

The law commands and requires us to do certain things ... For God speaks through the law, saying, 'Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you.' The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says, "This is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake."⁸

As right-hand kingdom focused leaders who provide spiritual care for members of the congregation, it is extremely important to understand Law and Gospel discernment. When these concepts are confused, God's people are not served appropriately. At Grace Lutheran Church, the board of elders has neglected specific care for families in the congregation delegated to their

⁸ Martin Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. 35, *Luther's Works* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1960), 161.

care. This is due, in part, to a lack of confidence in knowing how to faithfully offer care in line with their vocation as an elder. Law and Gospel discernment is a spiritual tool that will continue add to their vocational confidence into the future.

The board of elders was functioning more like the church council. This was not only because of a confusion of the two kingdoms, but a confusion of Christian vocation, as well. Christian vocation would teach them that their vocation was a distinct role God had given them to carry out his kingdom work. Their roles as parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, soldiers, and government personnel were also vocations where they carry out God's kingdom work as well.⁹ Christian vocation understanding could help the board of elders to better balance the two kingdoms and understand their unique place in both kingdoms.

Basic theological training was needed to assist new board members in their transition from member to elder. Through training in Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology there has begun to be a cultural shift within the board of elders as they experience confidence and direction in their role. For this project, Grace Lutheran Church's strong leadership will be trained to assess issues in a more faithful way utilizing Scripture and relevant foundational Lutheran theology. With new training in place, the board has been able to refocus their vocation as an elder. They are accordingly better equipped to support the pastors and care for the congregation. Over time with a culture shift in place, the reputation of the board should continue to heal within the congregation.

Grace Lutheran Church is a blessed congregation in many ways. It enjoys being a stable congregation in terms of polity, budget, and programming rhythms. It has enjoyed rapid growth

⁹ Dale Meyer, and Joel Biermann, "Two Kinds of Righteousness—An Interview with Dr. Joel Biermann" *Interviews* 33, 2008, <https://scholar.csl.edu/interviews/33>, accessed July 10, 2018.

in recent years. However, this era has often lacked faithful, organized teaching of God's Word and effective Christian care giving. The era of inadequate spiritually based training and support left scars in the congregation that needed to be addressed. The board of elders has had little in terms of intentional training during tougher times. The recent congregational growth, and shifts toward pastoral stability, made the project term an opportune time to influence positive change.

The purpose of the research and project was to create custom training for the board of elders in the unique context of this congregational culture. The board members will continue to be better prepared to provide care to members and make faithful decisions. It was interesting to see intentional theological training and strategies for care and discernment reform the way in which the board of elders lead individually and collectively. Interviews at the beginning and the conclusion of the project were designed to notice changes in outlook and confidence within individual members of the board of elders.

The goal for the board of elders is for each member to hold an appreciation for the office they hold. Individual spirituality, faithful discernment, confidence in their vocation, deepening relationships within the congregation, are all goals sought through the structure of the project. A more faithful board of elders who are respected well in the congregation is the long-range goal of the project.

Research Question

In my own experience, a board of elders finds exceptional health when the elders are being trained intentionally by the pastors and build close relationships with one another. All of us have been trained for various vocations to bring out the best in ourselves. It is imperative that pastors, board chairmen, and long tenured elders see training as a critical in sustaining health of the board of elders. This spirit of internal training and accountability is a natural aspect of a board of

elders. The goal is to begin a new culture within the current board through custom training that will influence the onboarding of future members as they make the transition from member to elder.

The process required starting with and focusing in on the individual elders. Initial qualitative research interviews guided the greatest needs for training and direction, and for the project itself. Eight interviews were conducted individually. The goal of the interviews was seeking to understand how each of them came to be an elder, what their greatest joys and challenges have been while a part of the board of elders, what they use as guiding principles for making decisions, and how they provide care for the members assigned to them. Interviews were also used to assess where theological and care deficiencies have their sources.

The next step was a half day retreat. For the retreat agenda, I led devotions, and after a discussion on prayer, the elders prayed at some length for the families of the congregation, for each other, and the community that we serve. I taught them the basics of Law and Gospel from the abbreviated “God’s Yes and God’s No,” an introduction to Christian vocation, and the basics of two kingdom discernment. These theological concepts are typically at a higher level. I believe the current board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church can handle deeper theology. The board members are all passionate long time Lutherans who have excelled in academics and in their secular vocations. Follow up interviews then discerned, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?”

Presuppositions

The people in leadership at Grace Lutheran Church are thoughtful, dedicated, and intelligent. The elders make their service to the church a priority and are reverent about the

gravity of their vocation within the congregation. All of them have achieved in higher education and most have earned graduate degrees. They have been trained to lead and to follow in their secular vocations. They have been trained to build a system and achieve order in all situations. They are willing and eager to learn and grow as Christians and leaders in the church.

As predicted, the board of elders has begun to flourish, as a result of the project. Two kingdom theology, and Christian vocation have helped them to distinguish themselves from congregational business leadership, and find value in their unique roles. The Law and Gospel discernment better equips them to make decisions as a board, and respond to the needs of the congregation members more faithfully. The retreat time has taught them needed theology and give them a safe opportunity to be appropriately vulnerable in prayer for one another. This all leads to increased confidence. A more confident, better equipped board whose membership is already intelligent, passionate, and capable will continue to affect positive change throughout the congregation, and improve the reputation of their board.

Without a faithful rhythm of training, the elders cannot faithfully fulfill their vocation. Over time, as the congregation is served by leadership who understand Law and Gospel, Christian vocation and two kingdom theology, the congregation will be better served spiritually. The results of this training should continue to bear fruit well beyond the project as confidence builds, spiritual care quality increases, and the reputation of the board of elders recovers.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” finds the elders in the difficult situation of seeking to fulfill right-hand kingdom needs and issues with left-hand kingdom training and solutions. The solution was to take an approach of teaching a new foundation. If the issue first deals with a theological understanding of the vocation of a congregational elder, then a theological foundation is needed to supplement the absence or confusion of theology. Each of the theological concepts taught will serve to build that new foundation of theological understanding for the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church. As the board turns over, the new foundation will continue to be taught. This way a new culture will form over time for healthy spiritual leadership.

The problem rests with the confusion of vocation as an elder. Historical and biblical context of the vocation of elder was a vital place to start. At its foundation, a board of lay elders is a right-hand kingdom function for the congregation as they work with and support the pastor for the work of ministry. Restoring vocational understanding to the board of elders is only the beginning. The board of elders need tools for discernment. To carry out faithful discernment within their caregiving, the elders will be instructed in Law and Gospel distinction. This helps empower them to understand when God’s Word of Law is needed, to show us our sin, and when God’s Word of Gospel is needed, to show us our forgiveness in Christ. Christian vocation was the next foundational theology taught to the board of elders. Through this understanding, the members of the board can each see their place as an elder as one of the unique ways that God is working through them. Finally, the board of elders would need training in Luther’s two

kingdoms. two kingdom theology will equip the board of elders to understand their place within the greater congregational leadership structure. There is a careful balance needed within a congregation regarding when God's spiritual right-hand kingdom is at work, and when God's temporal left-hand kingdom is at work. With a solid theological foundation in place, additional tools and concepts were able to appropriately be put into place on this solid foundation.

The board of elders are to be an accountability for the congregation when it comes to the Means of Grace¹ and all that God has commanded in Scripture. The elders need to understand the places where God has spoken to stand firm and guard the right-hand kingdom as well as the places of adiaphora which require faithful discernment of left-hand kingdom functions. The elders need clarity within their role. Even when they perform functions such as budgeting or policy, they are doing so by using left-hand kingdom work to support the right-hand kingdom. In summary, to meet the needs of the congregation, Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, will be the building blocks of meeting and fulfilling the needs of the board of elders expressed in the research question.

Historical Context

If the major applied project seeks to reinforce a proper vocational role philosophy, it is essential to seek the Biblical and historical example for right-hand kingdom lay leadership in the church. Jesus begins his ministry in the Gospel of Mark, "proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'" (Mark 1:14b-15).² This was the focus for Jesus' ministry and then, by extension, his

¹ The Means of Grace are described in The Lutheran Confession as instituted by God, "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith" AC V in Kolb and Wengert, 40.

² Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced from the *English Standard Version* (ESV).

committed focus to training the disciples. Jesus recruited ordinary men trained in other professions with little background knowledge. Starting with ordinary men with little background knowledge is how lay elders are also recruited and trained. Jesus spent time with these men, and he taught them first by example, and then through teaching. Much of what lay elders do is modeled by a pastor or another lay elder, and then taught through localized congregational training. Jesus continued to train the disciples even when they failed to understand. He continued even when they directly did the opposite. Jesus maintains limitless patience for those he was training. There ought to be an extended period of training and retraining for lay elders, as well.

“He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything” (Mark 4:34). In this way Jesus met the disciples at their level of understanding. He spent specific time with them and gave them ways to help understand the concepts he was teaching. When teaching lay elders right-hand kingdom concepts, while they are firmly embedded in the left-hand kingdom, they need to be taught in ways they understand and by example.

Jesus continued to call and send ordinary people, never losing sight of his original focus throughout his ministry. Development of lay leaders in a congregation should look like the example set for us by the Lord as he trains disciples. Faithful elders, although a distinctly different vocation than apostles, could be trained in a similar method with custom teaching based within an existing relationship, and delivering concepts in understandable ways unique to the current board or specific individual.

Lay elders begin as ordinary people of faith, without specific theological training. Based in an existing relationship with other elders and the pastors, they are then trained intentionally over time in a way they can best understand. They are taught through the lens of their own

experiences and knowledge, with a focus on forming faithful servants for God’s people. Faithful spiritual leaders train faithful spiritual leaders. Over time this intentionality will result in a shift to right-hand kingdom thinking, and a cultural shift within the full board of elders.

Much scholarship on lay elders is unhelpful because of the broad use of the term and role within the larger Christian spectrum. Most helpful is a historical understanding of vocational origins within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, of which Grace Lutheran Church is a member congregation. In the earliest days, C.F.W. Walther, the first president of the LCMS, held a position that, “lay elders were appropriate and even needed in the Lutheran church in America.”³ He held this position despite the fact that the practice of utilizing lay elders was not consistent through Lutheran church history. In fact, “the concept was foreign to most German Lutherans.”⁴ Luther himself did not write on the vocation of lay elders specifically. “The fact that Luther knew nothing of the lay elder is explained by the belief that the office of lay elder disappeared during the dark days of the papacy.”⁵ This illustrates the historical inconsistency of lay elder service within Lutheranism.

Theodore Graebner supported Walther’s position on lay elders. Graebner asserts that the office of a lay elder has its foundations in Scripture and “took shape gradually according to needs and circumstances.”⁶ He writes, “The Lutheran contention is that the office of eldership, ... was not divinely appointed ... as is the office of the ministry; it is an auxiliary office. ... Elders are not assistant pastors. They are assistants to the pastor.”⁷ Walther earlier asserted, “The preaching

³ Collver, “Lay Elders,” 40.

⁴ Collver, “Lay Elders,” 41.

⁵ Collver, “Lay Elders,” 43.

⁶ Theodore Graebner, *Handbook for Congregational Officers*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1939), 11.

⁷ Graebner, *Handbook*, 9.

office is the highest office in the church, from which all other church offices flow.”⁸ The Biblical use of lay leadership positions was historically to assist the clergy, freeing them up for their main tasks. Graebner writes of elder duties in his time, “They lit the candles, read lessons from Holy Writ, and announced prayers, and hymns. Above all, they cared for the poor, the widows, and orphans.”⁹ Much of Walther and Graebner’s common position of preserving a lay leadership office of elder for spiritual congregational leadership, has been preserved in modern practice across the LCMS.

Walther’s plan for lay elders in congregations was a functional one established to assist pastors by doing appropriate ministerial work in the congregation. Lay elders began in the LCMS because Walther, “needed a way to organize the church here in America without the assistance of the government. Lay elders formed part of his solution ... as part of the church’s freedom in Christ.”¹⁰ Walther used right-hand kingdom focused lay elders as a way to avoid confusion between the two kingdoms that God uses to govern the world, the right-hand kingdom of grace and the left-hand kingdom of civil government. In this way, Walther was safeguarding a traditional Lutheran understanding of holding a distinction between the two kingdoms. Federal culture and resulting left-hand kingdom focus is the influencing issue at Grace Lutheran Church. As in Walther’s day, the board of elders can be the solution.

The office of elder within a Lutheran congregation is a great responsibility. As such, the Major Applied Project seeks to insert increased training into the local elder model. The project

⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry: Witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 289.

⁹ Graebner, *Handbook*, 10.

¹⁰ Collver, “Lay Elders,” 53.

especially includes foundational theological principles that would act as tools to carry out their task more faithfully. If we first look to the description of the board in the congregational bylaws:

By mutual encouragement, the Elders encourage others. By mutual admonition in love, the Elders develop their skills in admonition of the erring in the Congregation. By mutual searching of the Scriptures, the Elders develop good habits which can be passed on. Mutual watch keeping, done in all frankness of love, the Elders will use the Scriptures...for mutual teaching, reproof, correction, and training. The Elders bear a broad scope of responsibility including, but not limited to worship; Sacraments; discipline; membership; care and comfort; spiritual growth; and congregational vitality.¹¹

The definitions, job descriptions, and expectations for lay service and leadership positions such as elder can all find their foundation in Scriptural and historical example. Within the congregational constitution and bylaws, Scripture is the guide for outlining the duties assigned to the board of elders. As far as this internal documentation is concerned, the board of elders is tasked with right-hand kingdom spiritual matters of good order within the congregation, in line with Scriptural example. Despite the definition and duties as written the training of the board members was lacking theological foundation.

Elder training must cover many foundational components both theological and practical, with the theological guiding the practical. Elders not only need to be taught about discernment, but first the constitutionally stated responsibility that is on their shoulders is caring for God's gathered people. The apostles give us the example of establishing lay spiritual leaders to assist the work of ministry. They realize early on that the spiritual care for the people is in jeopardy because they are overwhelmed.

The apostles want assistance so that they can devote themselves fully to their own duties of preaching and administration of the sacraments:

¹¹ Constitution of Grace Lutheran Church (LCMS), 2019, Grace Lutheran Church Woodbridge, VA, 28.

The twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right-hand that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering. (Acts 6:2–5)

The research question finds elders functioning outside of this biblical model for lay workers in right-hand kingdom assistance of those who preach and administer the sacraments. The apostles establish the tradition of lay people carrying out matters of the right-hand kingdom in partnership with the clergy. Also, as the whole gathering of the church was in approval of these seven to serve, we see a similarity where lay congregational elders are elected by the congregation.

The apostolic example establishes and separates two spiritual vocations, one clergy and one laity, both with a right-hand kingdom focus. Lay elders in Lutheran context based in this example were not meant to take on the clergy role, but to occupy a distinctively different role as laity. This separation of two separate spiritual roles has long been the Lutheran interpretation of, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1Tim. 5:17). American Lutherans from Walther and Graebner on have taught this.¹² Qualifications and duties are set. Vocations are separated and defined. God directs his spiritual leaders, both clergy and lay, and the people are spiritually well served.

Clarity exists in the scriptural and historical example. However at Grace Lutheran Church the problem is with the elders theological understanding of their role defined as being the ones entrusted to care for the “spiritual life of the congregation.”¹³ Accordingly, the research question

¹² Collver, “Lay Elders,” 50.

¹³ LCMS Job Descriptions: Congregation Officer. (St. Louis, MO: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, n.d.).

seeks an opportunity for growth within the board and the congregation renewed through foundational theological training.

Biblical and Theological Foundation

Law and Gospel

Martin Luther used another dichotomy to explain how God governs his created world and serves his people called Law and Gospel. “God speaks a word of law and gospel, that is, a word of law that reveals our sin, terrifies and kills the old creature, and thereupon a word of gospel that forgives our sin, comforts and makes us alive in and by faith alone.”¹⁴ The distinction between Law and Gospel is a theological tool that Christians and spiritual leaders utilize to navigate both the left-hand and the right-hand kingdoms.

The research question seeks a theologically equipped board of elders and Law and Gospel discernment is a distinctly Lutheran theological discernment tool for them to understand. The foundational Lutheran understanding of God working through Law and Gospel first requires understanding “God’s Word does not just sit there (for us to observe and figure out) but does something to us. ... Thus, God said through the prophet, “Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29). In the New Testament, too ... Jesus often ends his parables with the words “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”¹⁵ In order for Law and Gospel distinctions to matter, there must first be an understanding that Scripture is a living working thing, and no ordinary literature. God can and does do mighty works through his Word for the good of his people.

¹⁴ Timothy J. Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations*, ed. Paul Rorem, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 77.

¹⁵ Wengert, *Formula for Parish Practice*, 78.

“Law-Gospel distinction was foundational to Luther’s approach to reading Scripture. When reading the Bible, one must be able to identify when either the Law or the Gospel is speaking in order to correctly understand the text.”¹⁶ Since the board of elders deals specifically with individual struggles, and at times church discipline, the dichotomy of Law and Gospel would be another helpful theological concept for them to be well versed in. The struggle for faithfulness with Law and Gospel discernment is difficult even for pastors who have theological training. Accordingly, thoughtful, and frequent conversation and training will be essential to allow a board of lay elders, to faithfully and confidently make Law and Gospel discernment a helpful tool for their service.

Without careful discernment of Law and Gospel, difficult issues can quickly surface. Ignoring the Law is a major struggle to avoid in ministry. Those in a ministerial vocation find there is always a strong draw towards wanting to be liked. Avoiding a confrontation of the Law is a fantastic way to be liked, but not a fantastic way to be faithful. On the contrary, it is far easier as a human being to speak Law in terms of fairness or striving towards a goal, than it is to find peace in the work of Christ. Faithful discernment of Law and Gospel is essential in administering faithful spiritual care.

“Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon were the first to make the distinction between Law and Gospel a centerpiece of their theology. Already in his famous tract of 1520, *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther distinguished Law and Gospel. He then linked them inextricably to his argument that we are justified by faith alone.”¹⁷ It cannot be overstated how foundational the distinction between Law and Gospel is for Christians. Regardless, lay people routinely

¹⁶ Jessica Parks, ed., *Martin Luther: A Guide to His Life and Writings*, Faithlife Author Guides (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2017).

¹⁷ Wengert, *Formula for Parish Practice*, 78.

misunderstand how Law and Gospel work within the context of Scripture and Christian life. Any time a Christian is heard saying something to the effect of, “can you believe a Christian acted that way?” or “After what he did!?” there is often a misunderstanding of Law and Gospel. Even Scripture is misunderstood as containing one testament of Law and another testament of Gospel. “Though the Old Testament as a whole chiefly contains Law, it also contains the Gospel, just as the New Testament chiefly contains the Gospel but also contains the Law.”¹⁸ Misunderstanding the distinction between Law and Gospel is common. The importance of proper distinction is great. Spiritual leaders, including lay elders, must be working toward an understanding of proper Law and Gospel distinction for the sake of those they serve.

Law and Gospel discernment is important because it allows the Scripture to properly work in our lives. It shows us the need for a Savior, and it fills us with the joy of what he has done for us. Or as Luther put it, “God speaks through the Law, saying, ‘Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you.’ The Gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. [The Gospel] ... does the very opposite, and says, “This is what God has done for you; ... his Son be made flesh for you ... put to death.”¹⁹ The practical results of misusing this theological tool are eternal. Because of the vital importance of properly discerning between Law and Gospel, this discernment remains a core teaching for those in Lutheran ministry, including congregational lay elders.

The application of teaching Law and Gospel discernment will be lived out in the service of the board of elders, as issues more personal to members and guests will continue to arise. Hospital calls and home visits will be made by elders. Personal issues such as lodge membership,

¹⁸ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 191.

¹⁹ *LW*, Vol. 35, 162.

cohabitation, close communion, marriage, funeral policies, and others will present themselves. Personal issues must be discussed with a clear basis in sin, grace, repentance, and forgiveness. If issues are not handled with prayer and faithful discernment, God's people would in these cases not be served appropriately, and the faith of individuals within the congregation could suffer.

Luther writes, "It is therefore a matter of utmost necessity that these two kinds of God's Word be well and properly distinguished. Where this is not done, neither the Law nor the Gospel can be understood"²⁰ The distinction between Law and Gospel has long been held as an essential framework for Lutheran preachers to hold their sermons and Bibles Studies against, was something Luther felt that each Christian could and should guide their life of faith and understanding of the Scriptures. In the LCMS, Walther agrees, "the primary requisite for a salutary knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is the correct understanding of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel."²¹

There is a depth of difficulty in putting Law and Gospel into practice. Walther reflects, "Every child can comprehend this doctrine... The practical application of this doctrine presents difficulties which no man can surmount by reasonable reflections. The Holy Spirit must teach men this in the school of experience."²² For training Law and Gospel discernment, further study will need to take place. I feel strongly that a framework of spiritual discernment with the depth of distinguishing Law and Gospel, will allow the board of elders to thrive in their vocation.

²⁰ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel: 39 Evening Lectures*, electronic edition, ed. and trans. William Herman Theodore Dau, and Ernest Eckhardt. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 35.

²¹ Walther, *Law and Gospel*, xii–xiii.

²² Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 43.

Christian Vocation

For the research question to be fully answered, there first needs to be a foundation where the elders can understand and find joy in their vocation on the board. This foundation can be found in the doctrine of Christian vocation. Christian vocation provides a distinctly Christian worldview for God's people to see how they can carry out his will in every one of their unique roles in life.

Broadly, we have a relationship with God in a vertical sense, but also a relationship with one another in a horizontal sense. Christian authors and preachers are outstanding at articulating the gifts of the vertical relationship which finds ultimate fulfillment on the last day. All too often the question of "What now?" is missed in Christian messages. God's people also need to hear of his will for them within their horizontal relationships, as they interact with, and serve their neighbor.

As Christians we often dwell in the Gospel warmth. Jesus' ultimate victory over sin, death, and the devil consumes our prayers, sermons, Scripture study, and fellowship conversations. Our primary Christian focus is with the vertical line representing the relationship between ourselves and God. Luther called this, "passive righteousness,"²³ and it described the work which was completed for each of us with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The vertical relationship is where justification declares us innocent of sin before God, our sins are promised to be forgiven, and life eternal is promised to us. These gifts are all freely given by God all purely because of Christ's own work. Passive righteousness is the Gospel comfort we feel within the right-hand kingdom, where Christ's gifts are found, and our relationship with God is restored and maintained.

²³ Meyer and Biermann, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 2008.

The pastor is charged through his own vocation with administering God's gifts. "The pastor is someone who tends the often unruly and oblivious sheep that make up the congregation, feeding them with the Word and Sacraments, protecting them from the wolves of false teachers, seeking the lost, and leading his flock to the green pastures of everlasting life."²⁴ The board of elders are those who support the pastor's right-hand kingdom work through their own vocation.

Before we receive our crown of glory, we have the demands of our daily lives right-hand here. Our day to day relationships are themselves beautiful gifts that God gives. Daily life relationships also have Laws from God as to how we are to conduct ourselves within them. God first calls us to seek him and his guidance for how we live within our earthly relationships and vocations. This is Martin Luther's idea of "active righteousness." Active righteousness is represented by a horizontal line. Our earthly relationships are guided by God's plans and purposes for each individual relationship and situation we find ourselves in. The understanding of our roles within these horizontal relationships comprise the theological understanding that is Christian vocation.²⁵

When a Christian understands and embraces the concept of Christian vocation, they first find fulfillment and purpose in the vertical relationship they enjoy with God, but also, they find fulfillment and purpose in the horizontal line represented vocations in service of one another. Clarity of relationships leads to amazing results. Christian lives are changed dramatically, families find renewed joy and strength, whole congregations find health and direction, all within God's design for his kingdom found in Christian vocation.

²⁴ Gene E. Veith, "Called by the Gospel," *The Lutheran Witness*, December 2001, 3.

²⁵ Meyer and Biermann, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 2008.

As one sees the purposes for their own lives in God's plan for vocation the darkness of wandering through life finds light and direction. Martin Luther's work on vocation was truly a gift to the church, where every day Christians find God's holy calling for them in every corner of life. As the board of elders ensure, understand, and fulfill their vocation, the congregation is served well with God's right-hand kingdom gifts. Through knowledge and training, the board of elders can find joy in their vocation as elders. They can also begin to find increased joy in seeing God's hand at work within each of the various vocations within their lives.

Luther wrote that our Heavenly Father, "daily and abundantly provides ... all the necessities and nourishment that I need to support this body and life ... out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy."²⁶ Luther also wrote, "God gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all evil people."²⁷ God makes promises to his children that as our Heavenly Father, he empowers and directs us to serve one another and care for one another in the many and various vocations of our own lives.

The events of our days are blessed abundantly as we consider how God is at work in our lives through vocation. "When I go into a restaurant, the waitress who brings me my meal, the cook in the back who prepared it, the delivery men, ... the butchers, the farmers, the ranchers, and everyone else in the economic food chain are all being used by God to 'give me this day my daily bread.'"²⁸ All of these simple examples are ways in which God's promise and will is done, and the needs of his children are met.

Our lives and relationships are filled with vocations to which God has called us as his children to care for one another. "Life is never inactive. Every moment man is doing something...

²⁶ SC II, 1 in Kolb and Wengert, 354.

²⁷ SC III, 12 in Kolb and Wengert, 357.

²⁸ Gene E. Veith, "Masks of God," *The Lutheran Witness*, August 2001, 12.

If a man ... trust[s] in God and the certainty of God's Grace Lutheran Church, 'he will find how much there is for him to do and that everything is rooted in faith.'"²⁹ From creation, God had already set up vocational roles for Adam and Eve. "God's timeless truth ... [Applied] to changing situations"³⁰, as the world changes one example of this timeless truth is that God works through vocations to accomplish his plans and purposes. The ways in which we carry out our vocations can change for myriad reasons but the opportunity to do God's holy work through our everyday vocational interactions is unchanging.

On the sixth day of creation God also made vocation. "And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). God creates the vertical line relationship between himself and his people right-hand here. Immediately following the establishment of our relationship with him, God sets up the horizontal line relationship concept and vocations develop. First, God calls Adam and Eve to care for one another and creation, and those first vocations are realized. So, it has been that man has always had both horizontal and vertical relationships and the duties that come with them. The most important vocation we have is as a redeemed child of God. This is immediately followed by the horizontal vocations in service of each other. God has called us to be parents, spouses, siblings, and caretakers for the fullness of his creation. The fall into sin changes the relationship man has with God, but the vocations to serve one another remain exactly intact.

Pastors, teachers, missionaries, and other professional church workers who enjoy right-hand kingdom focus in their professional vocations, can easily see the heavenly purpose in their

²⁹ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1957), 117.

³⁰ Meyer and Biermann, "Two Kinds of Righteousness."

work. Other people can struggle in finding the holy purpose for their daily lives. The confusion can change when a person comes to understand that God blesses and empowers each of our vocations. With the clarity of Christian vocation intact, we find that God is pleased every day, and every time we use our gifts from him in service of our vocations. “[S]o, the mother who stays at home taking care of little kids and changing diapers is doing what God gave her to do, this is holy work.”³¹ God calls every one of us especially and uniquely to serve in his kingdom.

“Vocation belongs to our situation between baptism and the final resurrection—a situation in which there are two kingdoms ... two contending powers (God and the devil) ...the old self and the new self ... Christians are involved in constant struggle.”³² We often struggle and sin in the daunting task of attempting to perfectly carry out all of the aspects of each of our vocations. A Christian vocation lived well is a God pleasing beautiful thing, but a vocation filled with abuse, or neglect is a tragedy.

The fall into sin corrupted the entire world and vocation is not immune from the brokenness of sin. The brokenness of a vocation confused brings us back to the problem and research question, where the fullness of the vocation of the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church is not fully understood and is not functioning according to its purpose. Every single situation in which a vocation is not lived out as God intended, people can suffer. Children are abused, neglected, or misled when a parent falters in their vocation. A husband or wife who neglects or abuses their vocation, can cause pain to many. The sin of the world is on full display as God’s gifts in Christian vocation are under constant attack.

³¹ Meyer, and Biermann, “Two Kinds of Righteousness.”

³² Marc Kolden, “Luther on Vocation,” *Word and World* 3, no. 4 (1983): 382–90.

Congregational practice often finds this kind of vocational confusion. Evangelism committees forget their purpose and become marketing departments. Organists and musicians forget their role in delivering God's Word and see only performance. Custodians become jaded at a lack of appreciation, and quality of work can falter. When any of these happen, the effects are felt, and the body of Christ is hurt in its local context. As God serves his people through local congregations, the stakes could not be greater, because the vertical relationship with God can suffer if vocations are broken. This is where we find the heart of the research question. The board of elders have drifted from the foundation of their vocation as elders, and congregation needs are not met. It is vital that people strive to serve one another within congregational vocations faithfully and with joy. The board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church can find increased fulfillment in their service through an understanding of Christian vocation in its beautiful fullness, as an original gift of God to his people in the garden.

The doctrine of vocation was a gift that God restored to his church when Luther wrote it. This is one of the great gifts to the greater church Lutheranism holds. In our vertical relationship with God we find the glow and warmth of the Gospel. It is in that Gospel we find assurance and security forever in our relationship with God. God calls each of his children into his symphony of flourishing vocations working together in harmony. These horizontal interworking relationships are where we live out our vocations in service of each other. Within the service of these relationships, God's will is done.

Each of God's baptized children has the responsibility to respond to the grace within their relationship with God in service of one another. God's kingdom flourishes and grows when his beloved children find joy in service of one another in the vocations in which he calls them. The

goal is for that the board of elders always see a vocational opportunity that God has set before them to safeguard right-hand kingdom ministry within the congregation, in service of his people.

Two Kingdom Distinction

Martin Luther wrote of two kingdoms, or two governments which he sometimes called it, by which God governs over the needs of the entire world. The left-hand kingdom includes worldly order, government, and all temporal authorities.³³ The right-hand kingdom is God's spiritual kingdom by which he serves his people on earth.³⁴ Luther writes, "We must carefully distinguish between these two governments. Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other."³⁵ Two essential kingdoms are established, and both are under the power of God. The two kingdoms are not in conflict or competition and clarity is the key to balance. Lutherans have traditionally held to this important distinction to understand how God governs the world.

The structure of leadership within the congregation has several boards and committees which operate primarily with left-hand kingdom focus, but in line with the congregation's right-hand kingdom mission. For example, the finance committee deals with budgets, and fiscal policy which are left-hand kingdom focused duties, but they do so ultimately in order that God's people are served spiritually. The board of elders serves with a primary right-hand kingdom focus. The research question finds its problem in a confusion with this distinction as the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church were fulfilling right-hand focused tasks with left-hand- hand focused

³³ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 320.

³⁴ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 320.

³⁵ Lohse, *Luther's Theology*, 156.

action. Over time the left-hand kingdom actions crept into a primary focus, and the balance of the two kingdoms was lost. For the sake of the research question, and health of the board going forward, education on two kingdom theology will be essential.

When Luther wrote, the clergy and specifically bishops and the pope were functioning more in the left-hand kingdom than the right-hand kingdom, as they engaged heavily in politics. Luther addresses this confusion of the two kingdoms first by affirming the right-hand kingdom role that Christians all share in. “It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate, while...artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate ... all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of the office.”³⁶ Luther was adamant that lay people play a role in right-hand kingdom work. “They are all of the spiritual estate ... but they do not have the same work to do.”³⁷ As with the problem at Grace Lutheran Church, the struggle was overwhelming left-hand kingdom influence. One way Luther sought to address this problem was to build up the laity by affirming their place in both kingdoms.

Luther wrote on two kingdom issues to address problems in the world around him within and outside the church. He also addressed times when there were issues with left-hand kingdom citizenship. Luther continued to maintain that Christians must exist in both kingdoms under God in this world. For example, in response to peasant revolts in Germany, he wrote, “there were two ways for God’s rule to be expressed: in the secular sphere, where the civic authorities ruled, and

³⁶ Martin Luther, *The Christian in Society I*, vol. 44 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav C. Pelikan, et al., (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), 127.

³⁷ Luther, *Christian in Society*, 129.

in the spiritual sphere, where the church ruled.”³⁸ Here Luther was appealing to a Christian duty to be good citizens in the left-hand kingdom.

Luther lived and wrote in a climate of extreme confusion of the two kingdoms both in the church, and in society and government. Luther encouraged Christians to faithfully live under God’s rule both spiritually and temporally, as Paul writes in Romans:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right-hand, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right-hand and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Rom. 13:1–7)

Paul reveals God’s intent that all men be good citizens in the world. Luther sees his era through this lens and exhorts all people to extend good order and Christian example into God’s left-hand kingdom in the world, even while God continues to serve his people through right-hand kingdom gifts.

Theologian Karl Barth rejected Luther’s explanation of two kingdom discernment. Barth, “rejected the equating of any political organization or ideology with the kingdom of God. For Barth, the state was evil, and all governments are under the judgment of God.”³⁹ The viewpoint of Barth must be avoided for two main reasons. Lutherans would reject this view that all

³⁸ Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, “Romans,” in *Situating the Apostle Paul in His Day and Engaging His Legacy in Our Own*, ed. M. Aymer, C. B. Kittredge, and D. A. Sánchez (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 418.

³⁹ Kittredge, et al., “Romans,” in *Situating Paul*, 418-9.

government is inherently evil. Within a culture that is heavily influenced by government and military service, like that of Grace Lutheran Church, has a high regard for the left-hand kingdom. Any teaching on the two kingdoms must be balanced and respectful of the left-hand kingdom. Clarity of the two kingdoms, and vocational awareness is a major aim of the research question.

Chief among the duties of a congregation is the distribution and administration of The Means of Grace. To ensure faithful administration of the Means of Grace, the two kingdoms must be distinguished, both for good order and for the proper care of God's people. At Grace Lutheran Church, most of the congregation members are current or former government employees, who are largely unaware of the distinctive nature of the right-hand kingdom. Accordingly, it is essential that two kingdom theology be clear and in focus especially because of a professionally learned tendency to focus on the left-hand kingdom.

The problem at Grace Lutheran Church is most vivid when the board of elders naturally utilize trained left-hand kingdom means to carry out right-hand kingdom primary needs. The board of elders need careful two kingdom discernment in areas of adiaphora, which are "ecclesiastical practices that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word but have been introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order."⁴⁰ Many difficult issues of adiaphora come before the board of elders as they attempt to meet right-hand kingdom logistical needs. Examples of adiaphora under the authority of the board of elders would include the means by which the sacraments are administered, and the logistics involved in carrying out Divine Services.

⁴⁰ SD X, 1 in Kolb and Wengert, 635.

Martin Luther fought issues of adiaphora as he was protecting the people from overbearing church leadership.⁴¹ In the spirit of keeping leadership from being overbearing, it is essential for pastors and elders serving in congregations to understand not only the two kingdoms, but to be able to understand adiaphora, for proper discernment. Often it is with matters of adiaphora that harmful legalism can confuse the kingdoms of the right-hand and left-hand. At Grace Lutheran Church, this meant that whenever an issue of adiaphora was decided for good order, it was written as a policy and lost flexibility. For example, there was once a written policy for where flowers were allowed to be placed in the chancel area, complete with measurements and illustrations. As the research question seeks a more faithful right-hand kingdom approach of the board, understanding the scope of their work as primarily upholding the matters of the right-hand kingdom was needed. This would include flexibility on matters of adiaphora, where congregational needs could change, and practices would require fluidity to continue to meet current needs. Adiaphora are especially important as they relate to the delivery of the Means of Grace, and rigidity of practice around these areas can become a deterrent. Access to the Means of Grace is vital and this comes when adiaphora is understood and not a deterrent.

The start for training and discussion of adiaphora begins with definition, and explanation as to why something neither commanded nor forbidden by God, can still be especially important. When it comes to many matters of lay elder discussion and action, “we do not simply ask what is permissible, but what should we do, that is, how should we act based on who we are.”⁴² Typically, most of the agenda items before a board of elders could be considered adiaphora. For example, Confirmation Sunday might have traditions of having a reception, and giving hymnals

⁴¹ Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, 165.

⁴² Charles P. Arand. 2004. “Not All Adiaphora Are Created Equal,” *Concordia Journal* 30 (3): 156. <http://search.ebscohost.com.csl.idm.oclc.org>, accessed May 5, 2020.

to the newly confirmed. These would be considered adiaphora and the board of elders could be tasked with deciding to change or maintain such a tradition. Or the baptismal font in the sanctuary could be a cherished fixture in the front and a group of new members have requested that it be moved to the back, this is another example where God's Word is silent, but the elders would have to decide what is best within the current congregational context. Matters of adiaphora often determine the faithful delivery of God's right-hand kingdom gifts within the congregation. The key for lay elders is to not lose focus of what is at stake with their decisions. "All forms and practices should support the teaching of the Gospel. While we agree on this, we cannot take it for granted."⁴³ Faithful discernment becomes vital, and more difficult than simply looking to Scripture for clear direction.

Adiaphora can be a difficult concept for faithful discernment. This is especially true when seeking faithful balance between the two kingdoms. In certain areas, God has spoken. For example, "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) is a clear mandate to partake in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a right-hand kingdom function overseen by the board of elders. Many right-hand kingdom issues, including the Lord's Supper, involve matters that God has commanded be done or not done. God's Word says, "Whoever, therefore, eats of the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." (1 Cor. 11:27-28). God speaks here through Paul to the Corinthians and we have a command from God to examine ourselves or confess our sin as a component of the Lord's Supper. This is also a right-hand kingdom responsibility overseen by the board of elders. For these Scriptural reasons, the elders would easily understand their role is to walk in support of the pastor to ensure the

⁴³ Arand, "Adiaphora," 157.

Lord's Supper is offered, and confession and absolution is included as efficacious preparation. The elders and pastors would be fulfilling right-hand kingdom functions of the church, in ensuring the availability of the Lord's Supper and confession and absolution. Right-hand kingdom functions are not the most typically in dispute or in need of attention or change from the board or its members.

The board of elders act within the left-hand kingdom with issues of adiaphora to ensure the good order of the delivery of God's right-hand kingdom gifts. In keeping with the Lord's Supper example, "Lutheran congregations ... often fight ... over other, less earthshaking matters. Many such questions of adiaphora have to do with worship. At what age should persons receive the Lord's Supper? How often should the Supper be celebrated? Do we use white wine or red wine ... these questions and others like them are very significant to the parties involved..."⁴⁴ When God has not been clear by commanding or forbidding, as with matters of adiaphora, discernment is far more difficult. The board of elders first must ensure that God's commands are carried out. In this example, that starts by ensuring the Lord's Supper is available. Secondly, the board of elders must practice faithful discernment with the good order left-hand kingdom adiaphora issues which ensure that the congregation is served in the ways in which God commands:

the Lutheran Confessions distinguish between the authority of the word of God and matters which are not essential for salvation but are necessary for the communication of the word of God. Such matters are language, liturgy, aspects of tradition and the like. They are "matters of indifference" (from the Greek *adiaphora*, meaning "things in the middle"). Adiaphora are "church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God, but which have introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order"⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, 165.

⁴⁵ Eric W. Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 135.

In the before mentioned examples the board of elders would need to discern how to best keep good order in having the Lord's Supper available. These often-logistical issues of adiaphora are vitally important since they could prevent God's service of his people if carried out inappropriately.

How can elders ever be confident in their vocation with so much adiaphora before them? They can do this not because they felt a decision sounded like it was easy, a good idea, or a logistical compromise, but because they have a sense of confidence in their discernment stemming from their training. Confidence in their vocational decisions also comes as each elder has been led to their positions through prayer and careful study of the Scriptures, through the lens of Lutheran theology. The final factor of faithful discernment comes as the board of elders understand the unique needs and culture of the congregation in which they serve.

The board of elders can finally go forward trusting that through weighing these factors, they have been led to a decision of "good order." The research question is then answered as a shift takes place in the discernment process of the elders after tools from training and study are put in place. The research question would seek elders who are steadfast in the right-hand kingdom and faithful in their discernment of left-hand kingdom issues as they lead to the "good order" of the right-hand kingdom.

Why is faithful elder leadership essential on practices of adiaphora? As the Epitome says, "offense must be avoided, and special consideration must be given particularly to those who are weak in faith."⁴⁶ Faithful leadership and practice in matters of adiaphora matter because God's people matter, and adiaphora are often the methods by which God's gifts are delivered to his people. When things are unclear or abrupt, people become confused and often upset. Faithful

⁴⁶ Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, 171.

leadership from pastors and elders instills congregational peace from good order. When a board of elders is taught two kingdom theology and adiaphora, the elders can be faithful to the right-hand kingdom responsibilities they are given. When the spiritual leadership of a congregation loses two kingdom balance, as the research question suggests, issues of adiaphora are pulled from the left-hand kingdom to the right-hand kingdom and are explained as if local practice and tradition are details commanded by God himself.

The board of elders are responsible for membership, support, and accountability for the pastors, new member assimilation, and church discipline, all of which are primarily adiaphora left-hand kingdom functions meant to ensure good order for matters of the right-hand kingdom.⁴⁷ Within a congregation with the polity of Grace Lutheran Church, it needs to be clear that the issues of the left-hand kingdom being the business and grounds of the church are taken care of primarily by church council and other established leadership boards. This frees up the pastors and the board of elders to focus on the congregational needs of the right-hand kingdom, and the matters of adiaphora that support them. In a healthy board of elders, the meetings and service are uniquely and squarely focused on the spiritual care of the people. A right-hand kingdom focused board of elders is the ideal answer to the research question and the goal of the project.

Theology in Summary

The problem and research question find the board of elders in need of a theological foundation and an understanding of their place in congregational leadership. Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology builds up identity for leadership, and provides

⁴⁷ Grace Lutheran Church, Constitution, 26–27.

discernment tools for service. These three major theological concepts fill the need in response to the need of the research question.

At the genesis of American Lutheran lay elders, elders were tasked with becoming those who would safeguard the right-hand kingdom. Walther believed that those in the office of public ministry along with those in the role of the lay elder care for, “what needs to be safeguarded, the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, and between what is a doctrine and what is not.”⁴⁸ When Walther championed the office of lay elders, we see that he no doubt that the office of lay elder would safeguard matters of adiaphora to best meet the spiritual needs of the people, and also Law and Gospel discernment to serve them faithfully. With foundational theological tools in place, the board of elders will continue to gain confidence in their vocation and service as congregational spiritual leaders. These tools will bolster their capacity for faithful discernment, and care practices for the specific members they serve.

In the next chapter, Lutheran elder training resources have a great deal of implied theology. The board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church have never been involved in a time of study in foundational theology, specifically as it pertains to their role as elders. Foundational theology cannot be taken for granted. Getting into a rhythm for study and training is a principal component to faithful service as elders and can only deepen the quality of leadership and care for the congregation. As the project moves toward answering the research question, the theological concepts of Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and the two kingdoms are taught and begin to set the board of elders a more faithful path as spiritual leaders. “Christian elders are moved by the love of Christ to a life of unselfish service in order that through the power of God's Spirit

⁴⁸ Collver, “Lay Elders,” 53.

people may be liberated from the power of sin and set free for their own joyful Christian discipleship.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Constein, Victor A., *The Caring Elder: A Training Manual for Serving* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 26.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

“In strong healthy congregations, there is an excellent match between the competent leaders, their key objectives, and their authority. These qualities contribute to this excellent match. The leader has: compassion for persons, this congregation, and its mission in the world”¹

The rationale for continuing to seek better and more applicable resources to train elders is because of the key part that they play in congregational leadership. The health of a board of elders can determine whether people are served or reached, and if a congregation is able to flourish. A pastor or pastors cannot know of, and respond to, every issue raised, nor can they faithfully consider every issue related to spiritual life of the congregation factoring in the concerns of the full congregation. In the spirit of congregational health, the effectiveness of the board of elders is an essential concern for every congregation. An understanding of current available resources for lay elder training is vital to pursue a favorable answer to the research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?”

Originality

“We build a strong leadership team for the total persons we serve. With a mutual spirit, we serve members, constituents, persons served in mission, friends of our congregation who live elsewhere, and community persons. We serve them as a whole family God gives us to serve.”²

¹ Callahan, Kennon L., *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 130.

² Callahan, *Twelve Keys*, 41.

These words hit the heart of the matter. The elders of a congregation exist in service to see that the kingdom of God is thriving in the congregation, and community. This requires intentional custom training.

The kind of training that makes a uniquely Christian leader is a trendy topic in popular culture today and has led to a genre of Christian leadership training resources. Bestselling books, workshops, and courses of study are capitalizing on this trend constantly. As with many other trends in society, the church is affected and often even enriched. Most every major American church body, congregation, and many well-known pastors have their own ideas to add into this up and coming trend. Due to this modern trend, there is an abundance of contemporary scholarship and resources.

The challenge of a literary review on contemporary elder training is the heavy influence that theology and polity have over the scope and aim of each resource. When it comes to lay elders in a congregation, the scope of the role is driven heavily by theology. For a resource to be most useful to the project the source would share polity and theology with the LCMS. The first task was to review major current publications of the LCMS on elder training. With LCMS resources being limited, focus for this study looked then primarily within other Lutheran traditions, which would be most likely to share some theological groundwork for lay service in the church.

Across Christendom, current research on elder training typically involves elders serving in a greater capacity in the absence of a pastor, or in partnership with a pastor without distinction. Elders filling a full Word and Sacrament vocation is far beyond the subject matter. This type of scholarship where elders function as pastors is mixed in with a surge of evangelical sources in the area of leadership training in general. The scope of general leadership training for this

research is far too broad, and individually focused. Scholarship only dealing with leadership development would not aid in answering the research question. Most importantly, given the heart of the project, the theology of an evangelical source naturally follows evangelical theology. Considering the confusion of Law and Gospel that is common from mainline evangelical sources, these resources would work against a goal of the project. Theology severely limits the range of helpful scholarship.

The research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” seeks a custom approach that is applicable for the elders serving at Grace Lutheran Church. The topic begins with a theological foundation and moves into the practical realm. The original contribution of this project is the marriage of the theological and the practical. This approach will be guided by interviews with the individual elders, which in turn will shape the training and the retreat. The value of any source to this project is in focusing both on foundational theology and corresponding to practical training.

A review of contemporary literature ideally seeks a training guide for congregational lay elders for a distinctly Lutheran congregational context. Scriptural and confessional agreement is essential to begin the criteria of source evaluation. Along with scriptural and confessional integrity, there must be corresponding theologically based training components, and not exclusively practical training components.

The search for resources was threefold. First, what current resources are available within the LCMS for elder training as a practical starting point? Second, are there resources available from other Lutheran denominations within the area of elder/ lay leadership training? Third, have

there been other DMin projects done in this area? There were found to be resources available in all three of these areas with varying degrees of usefulness to the project.

Most importantly, for any resource to prove useful to the project it must agree with the LCMS on what it means to be an elder. The definition of an elder must be carefully nuanced to avoid overlapping core responsibilities with the church council or the pastor. A congregation is best served when her leaders are operating faithfully as they have been called, elected, or appointed to serve and thus definition of roles is a crucial factor to consider.

Seeking resources to use in an LCMS congregation, it is logical to look to neighboring denominations ideologically. Lutheran sources are evaluated based on definition of the elder role, respect for distinction of the Pastoral Office, foundational theology, scope of duties, cultural flexibility, individual flexibility, and Gospel focus. All these characteristics are important to the project.

Literature Review

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The largest Lutheran church body in America, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has a polity different from that of the LCMS and is typically seen as theologically more progressive. Elder training resources need to be filtered for value through that lens of theological distinctions. An elder or deacon is defined within the ELCA as follows:

all elected members of the congregation's leadership council. In other congregations, deacons are specific congregation council members who are tasked primarily with some aspect of the administration of the congregation or worship leadership. Some congregations use the term deacon for those lay people (whether elected or not) who assist in leading worship at or around the Table in some way (e.g. assisting ministers, communion servers, etc.). While some of these folks might receive training in

partnership with other congregations, most are elected or appointed, trained, and installed by and for the local congregation.³

The ELCA sets a definition for a deacon or elder as being any leadership role within the congregation. If a component of the problem is the blurring of the “two kingdoms,” then any scholarship or resource from the ELCA could have potential to blur those lines even further, as the ELCA’s own definition of a congregational elder lacks the clarity of two kingdom distinction.

The ELCA has a series of short books on leadership training published by Augsburg Fortress called “Congregational Leader Series.” The series has several volumes with multiple printings going back over twenty years. This series from Augsburg is a time-tested Lutheran leadership training series. Within this series two titles stand out as being applicable to the topic of lay elder training and service. *Called to Lead: A Handbook for Lay Leaders*, and *Growing Together: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees*, were both evaluated for this project.

Called to Lead was written by Mark D. Johns, a longtime parish pastor and professor. An initial detail that stood out within this book was the spiritual gifts inventory that is placed early in the text,⁴ and corresponding use of the inventory results to help aid the reader in finding their best place of possible service within their own congregation. Although a spiritual gifts inventory was not a component originally sought by the research question, it could be an added benefit in answering the research question. The rationale of including the gifts inventory, “To succeed as a leader in such a complex organization requires knowledge, actions, and character.”⁵

³ Bill Gafkjen, “Here a Deacon, There a Deacon, Everywhere a Deacon, Deacon: A Brief Sampling of Current Uses of the Role/Title “Deacon” in the ELCA and Beyond” (Chicago: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2014), http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Deacon_Descriptions.pdf.

⁴ Mark D. Johns, *Called to Lead: A Handbook for Lay Leaders* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 9–14.

⁵ Johns, *Called to Lead*, 15.

Understanding one's own giftedness from God could impact the research question as individual elders see their place on the board more clearly as they learn what unique gifts they add to the board of elders. In turn the board can foster improved teamwork as individuals serve intentionally with their unique gifts from God.

Predictably, with the ELCA dictating between vocations of lay leadership, the great weakness of this resource is the in confusion between the right-hand kingdom and the left-hand kingdom. Johns's attempts to draw out the need for the health of both spiritual and business arenas for a congregation to flourish, but lack of an understanding of Christian vocation, gives the same lay leaders the same common responsibilities without distinction. Christian vocation clarity would allow the holder of each office to see a responsibility distinct from the other vocations within the church and within their lives. The previously mentioned section on spiritual gifts and congregational roles attempts to meet a similar need as the research question. The rationale, "Equally essential is a mutual appreciation of why all these gifts are necessary and how complicated a congregation truly is. Otherwise ... leaders will not have the insights needed to see all sides of the argument ..."⁶ The author's intention for this rationale, which seeks to incorporate complementary gifts, is that all business and ministry needs of the congregation are well met. The research question seeks moving an established board from left-hand kingdom thinking to right-hand kingdom thinking as a clear spiritually focused definition would dictate. This inventory would help to draw out kingdom distinctions from the start if used independently from the rest of the book.

The problem lies when lay people, and federal and military staff in particular, are far better trained and familiar with the basics of left-hand kingdom practice such as budgets, meetings, and

⁶ Johns, *Called to Lead*, 20–21.

structure, and far less trained when it comes to worship, education, or evangelism. This difficulty is the main issue in need of attention when a person transitions from member to elder. As the research question presents, two kingdom clarity serves a vital role in God's church as it is lived out in local congregations. Without two kingdom balance, the risk is that the congregation will not know how to lead and to serve God's people in the capacity that his baptized and redeemed ought to be served. The weakness of a resource losing a distinction between the right-hand kingdom and left-hand kingdoms, is a common thread through the leadership development resources from the ELCA. Within ELCA resources there may be a component that could be helpful for the project, but the greater theology could outweigh the benefit.

Called to Lead seeks to teach people exactly how they have been gifted by God. Then Christians are encouraged to use their unique gifts and personalities within their congregations. Congregational lay leaders are at their core lay people who have been trained for other vocations outside of the congregation. It can be difficult for new congregational leaders to understand the fullness of how the organization of a church operates. They will also need to learn how different their previous secular vocational training really is from training to serve within the church. *Called to Lead* meets a new congregational lay leader at an entry level and its aim is to lead them to easily gain a cursory knowledge of the congregation they now help lead.⁷ The simplicity with which this book is constructed could help aid a lay elder training process if some of the vocational duties were distinguished between vocations, and the two kingdoms were distinguished more clearly. There is also no mention of Law and Gospel as a foundational discernment tool within this resource. The research question will move towards its answer as a collection of foundational training resources are found and assembled for the board of elders at

⁷ Johns, *Called to Lead*, 29–34.

Grace Lutheran Church Woodbridge. *Called to Lead* brings some creative ideas into consideration of the project.

The next reviewed book also within the ELCA's "Congregational Leadership Series" is *Our Gifts: Identifying and Developing Leaders* by David P. Mayer, a congregational lay leader from Pennsylvania. *Our Gifts* says it is meant for "pastor and professional staff, the congregation council, new member classes, mutual ministry committee, nominations committee, or long-range planning committee."⁸ Once again, all offices of congregational leadership are grouped together without distinction. This general grouping of offices is a cautionary detail for any resource when seeking faithful distinction between the left-hand kingdom and the right-hand kingdom. *Our Gifts* encourages discipleship and growing in personal faith as congregational leadership and is a right-hand kingdom focused guide. The training of this book groups all congregational training together with no distinction made between the two kingdoms, and no explanation of Christian vocation to set offices apart. There is also no Law and Gospel training for discernment within *Our Gifts*. These omissions increase the risk for confusion, similar to the problem at Grace Lutheran Church. This book would be well served to have a foundational theology chapter that set the tone for the rest of the book.

"The Leadership Dilemma" is a potentially useful section within *Our Gifts*. This section focuses on effective and faithful leadership in any context. It seeks to dispel three leadership myths, "1. Leaders are primary problem solvers. 2. Leaders are primarily charismatic individuals who are often described as heroes and pioneers. 3. Leaders can solve any organizational problem using the natural Laws of cause and effect."⁹ This section takes on these three listed challenges

⁸ Mayer, David P. *Our Gifts: Identifying and Developing Leaders*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 17.

⁹ Mayer, *Our Gifts*, 20.

and seeks to leave a new leader feeling more confident for the task before them and more faithfully focused on their duties.

“A Christian leader is someone who is called by God and the church to grow in his or her faith and to courageously and joyfully share that faith with others through word and action.”¹⁰ Serving with one’s time and talents at their congregation is an example of first fruits giving. This kind of leadership is also an act of sanctification as the service is a response to one’s faith as God works through you. A person’s faith continues to grow and bless others. Framing Christian leadership properly as an act of sanctified life is a strength of this book.

Considering the potential for meeting the needs of the research question, *Our Gifts* is by far the strongest and most useful tool for the project within the ELCA’s “Congregational Leader Series.” *Our Gifts* was aimed toward the individual nature of each person to find their gifts and use them to God’s glory. *Our Gifts* also considers the cultural distinctive attributes of an individual congregation. *Our Gifts* shows immense potential to aid the project through its examples, interactive inventories, and discussion questions. There is even a unique section on recruitment of new leaders.¹¹ However, with missing the theological foundation of training Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and the two kingdoms, using components of this resource could further the problem at Grace Lutheran Church.

The final reviewed resource from the ELCA’s “Congregational Leadership Series” is a book called *Growing Together: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees*. *Growing Together* is meant for “any groups that meet regularly to do the work of the congregation ...”¹² It is written

¹⁰ Mayer, *Our Gifts*, 26.

¹¹ Mayer, *Our Gifts*, 63–71.

¹² Melander, Rochelle, and Harold Eppley, *Growing Together: Spiritual Exercises for Church Committees*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1998), 6.

by Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley, both parish pastors in the ELCA. *Growing Together* is a series of fifty devotions for meetings of church groups. The devotions are arranged thematically based on the circumstances of the meeting. Examples of devotional themes include “facing challenges,” “working through conflict,” and “first meetings.” Each devotion includes readings, prayers, and versicles and multiple rounds of discussion prompts. For example, a devotion based on “Setting Goals” asks “tell about a goal you set and achieved.” then offers Prov. 16:9, “the human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.” In reflection on the verse a discussion prompt is offered “Recall a past task our group set out to achieve. . . . In what ways did we experience God’s guidance as we worked to achieve that goal?” Thus, setting the meeting focuses back on God.¹³

Growing Together also has a helpful question and answer section for those tasked with running meetings to be more confident in meeting their task.¹⁴ This book is unique among those reviewed, and could be a positive tool for the project, or any new lay leader. Specifically, a chairman of a board of elders seeking to find a devotion that keeps a spiritual focus applicable to the situation, would find this book valuable. Keeping focus on the spirituality of the right-hand kingdom is a vital component for answering the research question. A targeted devotion resource tailor made for unique ministry situations could be an excellent component of the project. *Growing Together* also avoids areas of denominational theological disagreement, making it a universally valuable tool.

Overall, the reviewed ELCA resources offered some outstanding ideas for consideration in meeting the needs of the research question. However, the ELCA exists in a theological and

¹³ Melander and Eppley, *Growing Together*, 30–31.

¹⁴ Melander and Eppley, *Growing Together*, 5–9.

practical position that is continuing to move further from the LCMS. The ELCA also defines lay leadership roles in a less distinctive way than within the LCMS. For these reasons, ELCA sources can only be helpful to a point when seeking to train faithful elders for spiritual care in an LCMS congregation.

The research question seeks Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and two kingdom discernment, as foundational tools for elders understanding their own vocation and practicing faithful discernment. The major difficulty within all ELCA reviewed sources is with confusing the two kingdoms by not defining unique characteristics of congregational vocations. Likewise, the confusion of roles negates the clarity found in Christian vocation. These are the same issues of the research problem, which seeks a distinct training for elders based in foundational theology. Furthermore, there is no mention of Law and Gospel discernment, which is a major tool for spiritual leadership in a congregation. These ELCA based texts would be helpful reading for an LCMS pastor or elder board chairman seeking to plan a course of training, with some careful discernment and great assistance from other sources. For the purposes of the project these sources could be intriguing aids in a limited capacity.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) is the next logical source of material to review as the WELS is typically seen as closer to the LCMS theologically than the ELCA. However, theological disagreements exist between the LCMS and WELS on the issue of the Office of the Holy Ministry. Because of this disagreement, this material needs to be reviewed with caution for slight nuance of disagreement in terms of roles, duties, and philosophy of the office of pastor. The vocational relationship between pastors and elders could make this a potential issue.

WELS' own Northwestern Publishing House offers a single classic text on the topic of lay elder training, *The Shepherd's Assistants: A Handbook for Church Elders or Deacons* by Arthur J. Clement. *The Shepherd's Assistants* seems to be widely used within the WELS being in its eighth printing in thirty years. This book is the most focused and detailed source of any kind available on the topic of elder training within the WELS tradition.

It is refreshing to find that within *The Shepherd's Assistants*, Clement upholds Law and Gospel as a foundational theological principle for elder training. This was the only reviewed resource to overtly utilize Law and Gospel for discernment. "The Law and the Gospel, together with their proper use are so fundamental to admonishing the offender."¹⁵ The suggestion is made in this section, that each pastor and elder ought to carefully review Law and Gospel distinctions before each counseling session.¹⁶ The chapter on Law and Gospel discernment includes a variety of Scripture references to attempt to consider them as either Law or Gospel.¹⁷ The Law explanation is nuanced between the three uses of the Law as curb, mirror and guide. As refreshing as it was to see foundational theology built into elder training, this could have been strengthened with some more hypothetical practical situations to consider for discussion during training.

The dominant value of Law and Gospel as a foundation is for Scripture to work in our lives, as God intends. A weakness of this resource is one that is indicative of most lay leadership training resources, it is simply rigid and Law heavy. For example, this explanation that is applied to an inactive member, "spiritual weakness took them away ..."¹⁸ Unfortunately, no possibility is

¹⁵ Arthur J. Clement, *The Shepherd's Assistants: A Handbook for Church Elders or Deacons* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 2007), 128.

¹⁶ Clement, *Shepherd's Assistants*, 128.

¹⁷ Clement, *Shepherd's Assistants*, 128–32.

¹⁸ Clement, *Shepherd's Assistants*, 106.

offered that a Christian solid in their faith would ever begin to worship at another congregation, or have difficulties known or unknown that have made regular attendance an impossibility. It should make Christians uncomfortable to know that the elders of their congregation are trained to care for them and their families in narrow Law heavy way.

It would seem, based on *The Shepherd's Assistants*, that elder or deacon service within the WELS is very rigid. This source leaves out two kingdom Theology and Christian vocation by definition and in practice. The board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church struggle to problem solve outside of specific structure. Without the flexibility for context or personality, the risk would be to push the board of elders further toward left-hand kingdom thinking. Even sections that encourage relationship building as a good and honorable way to be effective elders, go as far as to give scripts as to how to be a good friend or neighbor and build trust through relationships. "Your work can be jeopardized if you approach people, in such a way that you do not relate to them or their problem. ... Your work is jeopardized by your failing to establish rapport."¹⁹ The feeling of this section borders on manipulative, for this reviewer. The rationale given for building trust is solely to be more effective as an elder or deacon to accomplish your own vocational goals. Relationship building is then not solely out of love for people, and a will to care for them better. Rigidity of this nature is exactly the concern of the problem. If a right-hand kingdom team is seeking a firm path toward specific goals and the people cared for take a backseat to the goals of the role, the effects are confused and not faithfully planted.

As the role of an elder in *The Shepherd's Assistants* expands into areas of counseling and appeals to the priesthood of all believers broadly, this text follows WELS theology toward a lower view of the office of pastor. "Some apprehensive souls may question the right-hand of the

¹⁹ Clement, *Shepherd's Assistants*, 30.

laity to carry on a spiritual ministry in the congregation. “Pay and Pray” are all too often the only tasks- besides mowing the ... lawn, cleaning ..., and organizing potlucks- that laity are challenged or even permitted to do.”²⁰ and Clement goes on to say, “all believers are ministers of Christ and should be trained by the clergy for spiritual tasks.”²¹ While there is some truth in these words, the Office of the Holy Ministry is something specific and set apart in Scripture, which is confused within *The Shepherd’s Assistants*.

Within the LCMS, congregational autonomy is at the core of identity as a church body. *The Shepherd’s Assistants* is incredibly detailed on specific topics of structure and practice. These same areas of structure and practice are decided locally from congregation to congregation in the LCMS. For example, how and by what means and authority a person is removed from congregational membership, is within the LCMS an issue settled in the bylaws of a congregation and may vary slightly from congregation to congregation. Within *The Shepherd’s Assistants* the exact steps are outlined very specifically word for word without mention that a local congregation could have their own means of accomplishing this task.²² *The Shepherd’s Assistants* does not seem to consider differences that could be acceptable within a local congregation or cultural context for any issue. Also not considered are the individual gifts of a lay leader. There is no opportunity for localized tradition, culture, or history that could cause a reason to deviate from the given instructions.²³ As the project is seeking to make localized changes to answer the research question, the usefulness of *The Shepherd’s Assistants* is limited.

²⁰ Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistants*, 2.

²¹ Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistants*, 3.

²² Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistants*, 114.

²³ Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistants*, 117–22.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

As the research question requires the project to take a localized approach, the most applicable place to review available resources is within the LCMS. LCMS resources were searched seeking those especially where theology agrees, and practice corresponds. Three resources from LCMS sources stood out for the purpose of lay elder training.

The Caring Elder is a long-published manual for elder training within the LCMS. The very first chapter begins with a parable of sorts where a couple is considering the written explanations for service vocations within their congregation. “One set of questions focused on the elders as spiritual leaders. ‘I thought our pastor was our spiritual leader,’ Emelda said.”²⁴ *The Caring Elder* begins by considering this very real possibility that lay people might be surprised to learn that they too can hold leadership roles of a spiritual nature for the congregation. A natural beginning for *The Caring Elder* is to explore job descriptions and qualifications that make clear role definitions and distinctions for both pastors and elders. Within a robust study in Scriptural basis and contemporary distinctive Lutheran practice, the statements, “God requires congregations to have pastors.”²⁵, and:

a congregation which by divine mandate calls a pastor for the public ministry, and by the instruction of its constitution and bylaws appoints a board of elders to assist the pastor ... members of a congregation’s board of elders are not assistant pastors. They assist the pastor. They are not officially called to perform the Office of the Keys.”²⁶

A solid statement of definition here brings clarity that *The Shepherd’s Assistants*, and reviewed ELCA resources sorely lack. At the core of solid elder training, the pastor must be supported and accountable, not replaced or challenged. Distinction between pastors and elders is a key litmus

²⁴ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 5.

²⁵ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 9.

²⁶ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 10.

test for any resource used within a congregation that believes in the Office of Holy Ministry being set apart by God, and distinct from other roles of service.

The Caring Elder focuses on the importance of relationships as not only a vehicle for effective elder care, but a practice faithfully following the example of Jesus. “Mateo confronted the same dilemma we all face. How can we respond to people when we hardly know them? How can we respond to their need and then be partners with them in meeting it?”²⁷ Constein uses careful illustration to bring out the Christian heart for one's neighbor as the rationale for relationship leading to effective service. This appeal to the heart is a refreshing shift from the Clement text which explains relationship only as a means of meeting the expectations of the vocation of an elder. “Jesus now empowers us by his love to put to work the new mind he has given us by faith in his sacrifice for us.”²⁸ There is a beauty in solid theological footing in sanctification and the Gospel as the driving force of *The Caring Elder*.

The Caring Elder is a strong source and could serve as a great resource for new elders in a generic sense. A great strength is found in the additional resources built into the book which could be immensely helpful. Bible study planning help, prayer templates, and personal devotion plans, helpful visitation guidelines and expectations are all strong additions to *The Caring Elder*. For a historic LCMS resource, this book does a commendable job theologically and appeals to Scriptural faithfulness. For example, the book has a robust history of lay leadership in the Old and New Testament²⁹ and offers qualifications for pastors and elders drawn from the Epistles.³⁰ Scriptural rooting allows the reader in an LCMS context to find confidence in the source.

²⁷ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 54.

²⁸ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 54.

²⁹ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 5-9.

³⁰ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 21–24.

The research question seeks an elder training foundation that would be unique to the culture of Grace Lutheran Church. This book is another source which does not allow for this local flexibility of needs. This book could use a revision if it was to continue as a central text within the LCMS. Terminology and examples are used that have fallen out of mainstream use and understanding. One example of an outdated term that needs updating would be “mental retardation,”³¹ as the medical community has long replaced this term. The book takes for granted a basic knowledge of Lutheran theology, especially Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and two kingdoms. The understanding of these foundational concepts is often lacking, especially for a new member to a board of elders. This training guide could be more effective if it taught relevant Lutheran theology determined to aid elders in their vocational responsibility. Theological foundation is a central need of the research question still not fully found within *The Caring Elder*.

Pastors and Elders: Caring for the Church and One Another by Timothy J. Mech, an LCMS pastor currently serving in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, is the most recent work published for LCMS elder training following *The Caring Elder*. Mech even quotes Constein within his text as an overt show of succession from one LCMS elder training text to the next. *Pastors and Elders* is meant to be a working guide or curriculum for pastors and elders to work through together, and even has available videos to guide the process with multimedia examples. *Pastors and Elders*, offers sample letters, agendas, and talking points, which adds great practicality. In an era where convincing a lay person to read a book is increasingly difficult, Mech’s book is a short easy read that uses discussion questions to draw out main themes in conversation.

³¹ Constein, *Caring Elder*, 54.

The strengths of *Pastors and Elders* are many. More than any other resource found, Mech's book is meant to facilitate active in person training through teaching, discussion, exercises, and videos. Mech also begins and continues throughout with a solid Scriptural foundation. For a variety of reasons clarity is a major strength of *Pastors and Elders*. The pastoral heart of the author is evident and is a great strength of this text. The reader easily imagines real situations where Mech was involved in tense discussions with his own congregational elders. While not giving personal examples, each chapter contains vivid hypothetical situations for the reader to consider. The author can be vivid in example, because he has likely seen the successes of well-trained faithful elders. He has also likely seen the failures caused by misinformation, envy, or confusion within a board of elders. Mech's current service as a congregational pastor is a major strength of this book. The evidence stemming from the author's ministry carries the fullness of the book.

This resource includes a helpful personality assessment added to *Pastors and Elders*. "Sometimes difficulties in relationships between elders and pastors occur not due to a specific sin, but because of a clash of differing personality styles. Understanding the influence of our different personality styles can be helpful in developing trust between pastors and elders."³² Yet another strength of *Pastors and Elders* is the attention to detail given to the strengths, weaknesses, and tensions that can and do occur within boards of elders because of personality type. Mech gives four general personality types: "doer, charmer, connector, and perfectionist."³³ From these four, the author leads the reader to discover themselves, and their fellow elders. For

³² Timothy J. Mech, *Pastors and Elders: Caring for the Church and One Another* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 44–45.

³³ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 45.

example, “a weakness of this type is following through.”³⁴ and “A connector wants everyone to work well together.”³⁵ Mech uses these four types to show where agreement and tensions can arise, because, “It is easy to see how a clash of personality styles can breed mistrust.”³⁶ This chapter on personality influence is an absolute treasure among elder training resources and scholarship. The problem finds the elders overly focused on the left-hand kingdom and not finding a distinction and focus that fits their role. An assessment exercise such as this is a fitting example of a left-hand kingdom action supporting right-hand kingdom efforts. The key would be to make this distinction clear during the assessment. Overall, understanding themselves and each other can only help to bring confidence and trust to the whole board of elders.

Alongside a thoughtful guided discussion on personality, Mech focuses on the individual Christian faith of the elder. Many pastors, for example, struggle with a personal devotional life because of the difficulty transitioning from prayer and Scripture being work to prayer and Scripture being personal. Pastors have fellow pastors to help anticipate and discuss such situations and encourage one another. A pastor is best fit for service when he is personally healthy spiritually. Elders can encounter a similar struggle for the first time, without the same collegial network of support. An elder must “care for their own spiritual life first of all (and that of their families), being fully devoted to The Means of Grace. Be regular in church and Communion attendance and faithful in Bible class attendance.”³⁷ Considering the personal Spiritual health as the first duty of an elder, is a brilliant addition to this book, and one that would be a welcome addition to the project.

³⁴ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 47.

³⁵ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 47.

³⁶ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 48.

³⁷ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 29.

“Any attempt to establish one's freedom from accountability is an attempt to usurp the authority of the Word of God.”³⁸ A major theme of *Pastors and Elders* deals directly with how Pastors and Elders hold each other accountable. As with any and all situations or vocations as a part of the Christian life, the Old Adam can creep in and cause much harm. A respectful accountability between pastors and elders is key. “Pastors and elders need to hold one another and fellow members of the body of Christ accountable to the whole counsel of God.”³⁹ Mutual accountability is one area where the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church is currently strong. The working relationship between the pastors and elders is faithful, respectful, and accountable to one another.

Law and Gospel distinction is what makes Lutheran preaching, teaching, and caregiving unique. This theological concept is one that the research question seeks to evaluate as the elders take up their right-hand kingdom mantle and discern areas of faithful Christian caregiving. However, the nuances of learning this concept well are difficult. Lutherans know it when they hear it, but often seem to have a challenging time articulating it for themselves. Accordingly, this theological concept should be a part of elder training to give them this vital tool to aid in more faithful decision making and caregiving. The elder manual by Clement from the WELS added in this component but seemed to miss the mark. The LCMS resources leave this as an implied and understood concept. “The full counsel of God, the Law and the Gospel.” is an example of how Law and Gospel is taken for granted in this text by Mech. Optimism drives this omission, but a disappointing omission remains.

³⁸ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 78.

³⁹ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 80–81.

“The pastor refused to give in to the demands of the culture, and instead lived according to the Word of God.”⁴⁰ This quote is from an account offered in a section on pastors and elders countering sinful situations of parishioners. This statement is technically not wrong or misleading in any way. However, this quote is something of a cliché said to be offered by hypothetical pastors who serve their congregations with a heavy hand. This heavy-handed approach speaks to the general feeling towards this book of my own current board of elders when we went through the book, as an introduction to the project. While there is absolutely a heart to this book in terms of authentic examples from a pastoral heart, *Pastors and Elders* occasionally leaves the reader with a heavy feeling of Law without Gospel encouragement. After working through the text in my own setting, a couple of long serving elders felt deeply inadequate for their role. The goal of training in any context is to create confidence within those who learn, and that has not been my experience with this book. It is not a resource I would look to use again in its fullness, without first fulfilling the foundational theological framework sought by the research question.

As for the theological foundation sought by the research question, *Pastors and Elders* maintains a clear implied focus on Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and God’s two kingdoms. None of them are taught specifically, but the two kingdoms are held in focus, the vocations of pastor and elder are made clear, and Law and Gospel are in focus. Ideally each of these foundational theological concepts would be taught before teaching skills.

The Central Illinois District of the LCMS has its own elder handbook. It is titled *Pastor-Elder Handbook* and it is written by Pastor Geo. Beiderwieden and Pastor Gary D. Fortkamp. This online book is meant to be a training program implemented over a three-year period. A

⁴⁰ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 57.

three-year period is a daunting amount of time, however creating a continual culture of learning and growth is a commendable goal. The introductory section does an outstanding job scripturally advocating for the office of elder and outlining the duties of the board.⁴¹ The duties as outlined are extensive and exhaustive entirely focused on the right-hand kingdom. When it comes to two kingdom discernment there is a refreshing balance. For example, there is instruction on the stewardship tie in with a healthy faith life⁴², and advocating for the salary and benefits of the pastor(s),⁴³ Here even a left-hand kingdom issue of salary remains planted in the spirituality of right-hand kingdom stewardship. *Pastor-Elder Handbook* is a strong resource from the standpoint of two kingdom theology. However, two kingdom theology is implied, and not taught as a standalone theology to allow for deeper understanding and discernment skills. Over time, especially in a setting so influenced by the federal government as Grace Lutheran Church, the left-hand kingdom could creep back into dominance and out of balance. Without intentional training, this could happen without anyone to understand why this would be inappropriate. Increased left-hand kingdom focus is the genesis of the problem at Grace Lutheran Church.

Pastor-Elder Handbook at ninety-four pages is short, yet exhaustive. It is detailed, but not overly structured and rigid, as was seen with the Clement text from the WELS. Each potential area of accountability held by an LCMS board of elders is given situational hypotheticals. *Pastor-Elder Handbook* does a commendable, but not perfect job of meeting the people served in the “gray area” where ministry happens. For example, a common need for individualized ministry comes in a section on weddings. The situation considered is the marriage of

⁴¹ Geo. Beiderwieden and Gary D. Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. LCMS Central Illinois District, <http://www.cidlems.org/PastorElderHandbook2012.pdf>, accessed October 24, 2018, 1.

⁴² Beiderwieden and Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. 17.

⁴³ Beiderwieden and Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. 69–70.

nonmembers. The advice given, “Members marrying a non-Christian—counsel before wedding by asking them to sit in on a Bible inventory. If they agree, marry them.”⁴⁴ Here the advice deals with a situation not typical for a congregational resource to consider, and yet the ministry potential of this situation is realized. *Pastor-Elder Handbook* is honest about troublesome situations and at times does a commendable job with advising them, but at other times it can be legalistic in the handling of other situations. Divorce and remarriage are addressed in terms of Scriptural permissible situations, “Only divorce for infidelity (Matt. 19:9; Matt. 5:32) (Innocent, sinned-against may remarry; guilty may not as long as reconciliation is possible.) Only divorce for desertion (1 Cor. 7:15).”⁴⁵ With no previous training of Law and Gospel discernment, situations like this have a risk of being mishandled by elders with good intentions, who are simply following a provided script. Another requirement of this resource is for church members who miss worship services to be contacted weekly by an elder or pastor.⁴⁶ Law and Gospel are implied in this guide. However, the rigidity of the manual means that the Law becomes the predominate tool for ministry. If elders are to assist the pastor in carrying out faithful Christian ministry, there needs to be both the Law and the Gospel included in training.

Pastor-Elder Handbook makes assumptions which are simply not accurate in all situations. Planning a “Reception in the all-purpose room (The party will save the cost of renting a public place; ladies of the congregation will be able and willing to plan and execute. The fringe benefits will be a Christ-like reception without a drunken brawl.)”⁴⁷ It seems strange to assert that all wedding receptions outside of the church campus are unchristian and “drunken brawls.” Further,

⁴⁴ Beiderwieden and Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. 14.

⁴⁵ Beiderwieden and Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. 14.

⁴⁶ Beiderwieden and Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. 50.

⁴⁷ Beiderwieden and Fortkamp, *Pastor-Elder Handbook*. 14.

many congregations do not have a group of ladies who are willing and ready to cater a wedding reception. The perspective of a more rural district stands out especially to me as I serve in a very urban area of a coastal district.

Pastor-Elder Handbook as a resource contains several positives aspects to offer an LCMS congregation looking to train new elders. Many topics are covered to make elders more confident for service and discernment. The book does keep proper distinction between the vocations of pastor and elder, but never teaches Christian vocation as a concept. The material is broken down to spread out over three years making it a thorough study guide with strong Scriptural and doctrinal faithfulness beginning to end. If this resource added in some of the personality assessment from Mech and began with basics explicitly in the areas of Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and the two kingdoms, *Pastor-Elder Handbook* could transcend its shortcomings and be a blessing to any congregation.

As a project component, I sought to put a resource in the hands of the members of the board of elders that they could take with them as they provide spiritual care for members of the church. Pastors have access to various resources to do exactly this, and elders should also have access to such a resource. Members of the board of elders who have been trained to seek a manual or policy for every situation professionally as government or military personnel, could benefit especially from this kind of resource. Giving each elder a tool to carry out the work they have before them can only increase vocational comfort and confidence. *Visitation* edited by Arthur A. Just Jr. and Scot A. Kinnaman was chosen to fill this need. As Dale Meyer writes in the forward, “Members of the body of Christ need to go to one another and share the Word that opens our narrow hearts to all the blessings that come from the faith, hope, and love in Christ

Jesus. *Visitation* fills that need and is an essential tool for comforting others in their difficult times.”⁴⁸

Visitation is compiled specifically so that any person, clergy or lay, can use its resources in the visitation of fellow Christians experiencing difficulties. *Visitation* is organized into sections based on a wide variety of situations, and includes devotions, prayers, Psalms, and hymn stanza selections. *Visitation* also offers resources for emergency baptism, a commendation of the dying for use when a pastor is not present, and more, all for use by lay people. *Visitation* is not specifically for elder training, but is an outstanding resource available from the LCMS, and one that can aid the ministry of a faithful Lutheran elder. As the project culminated in the creation of an elder training program, *Visitation* has become a valued aspect of that final program.

Contemporary Doctor of Ministry Research

Other academic research done on elder training has been done. There are resources close to the topic from other denominational sources, but with strong theological disagreement with the LCMS views held by Grace Lutheran Church. Theological disagreement on this topic could only serve to deepen the problem, and accordingly the use of these resources is limited. The typical theological disagreement comes as the definition of “elder” is not in agreement. Without even the most basic of agreement as definition of the main term, a deep dive into these sources would only serve nominal value. Three Doctor of Ministry Projects were chosen for review to illustrate strengths and weaknesses of sources outside of major Lutheran denominations.

The most valuable source within recent academic research found is a DMin project by Bruce A. Jones, a nondenominational pastor called, “Reclaiming the Biblical Role of Elders:

⁴⁸ Arthur A. Just Jr., and Scot A. Kinnaman, *Visitation: Resources for the Care of Souls*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), vii.

Equipping the Saints to Lead the Local Congregation.” Jones built an original elder training program that was carried out at a retreat and reinforced with a sermon series. The sermon series seems misplaced, and overly broad from a Lutheran standpoint. The retreat strategy is well planned. Jones does an excellent job of reinforcing his work with Biblical foundation. He even uses koine Greek for his research. This project does well to keep the elders focused on the spiritual right-hand kingdom. The problem with this specific project is an expected one with defining the roles of pastors and elders. The elders are responsible for far more than a Lutheran elder would be. The elder serves Christ, caring for the spiritual well-being of God's flock with the pastor of the congregation. “All Christians are called to service, but in the Reformed tradition, some are elected to special ministry functions. In the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), these functions are the ordained offices of Deacons, Elders, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament.”⁴⁹ With the foundational theological disagreement of the source, it fails to meet the needs of this project and provide useful content for the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church.

“A Leadership Training Manual for the 21st Century Church Leader” by Gregory Baxter is a DMin thesis from Liberty University in 2011. Although from a Baptist/ Non- Denominational perspective, this project seeks to take a purely biblical approach to training church leadership. Baxter asserts that currently used training models use framework from business, government, and other secular inspiration. This paper seeks to take the idea of training for the church “back to basics.” The limitation of this source is that it focused also on pastoral training as an aspect of continued blurred role definitions, and vocations. The theology of the paper from a practical

⁴⁹ *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U S A)* Part II, (Louisville, KY Office of the General Assembly, 2009) G-6 0103, quoted in Bruce A. Jones, “Reclaiming the Biblical Role of Elders: Equipping the Saints to Lead the Local Congregation,” pg. 4. DMin. Diss., University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, 2011.

standpoint comes with a conflicting view on defined leadership roles. This is a major limiting factor of the usefulness of this source, but one that is expected considering the source tradition.

“The Training and Implementation of A Ministerial Board of Elders at Yosemite Lakes Community Church.” by Cody Gunderson, a non- denominational pastor, is a DMin project completed through Fuller Theological Seminary. The project redesigned the elder training at the congregation served by the author. The limitations of this paper are many. This project depends heavily on church growth themes and continues evangelical role confusion.

Summary

The work within the realm of leadership training is vast, especially with the rise of life coaching in popular culture. Lay leadership training for congregations has followed suit with evangelical sources training elders to serve in a pastoral capacity. The research question sought foundational theology to help correct the board of elder’s culture at Grace Lutheran Church and find it moving more fully into proper vocational balance with a right-hand kingdom focus. The literature review found great wealth among various Lutheran sources that will be valuable to supplement right-hand kingdom focused elder training, but the theological foundation the research question requires is still absent and required. The literature review also underscored the vital importance of theological agreement for the usefulness of scholarship in this area. Theological agreement necessity eliminated most sources outside of broad Lutheran scholarship as the confusion of terminology threatens to pull the board of elders further into left-hand kingdom focus.

Most notably, each of the three main Lutheran church bodies publishes a lay leadership training book or books. However, each of the Lutheran sources reviewed lack identity from a foundation of intentionally taught Lutheran theology. Absent were Law and Gospel, Christian

vocation and two kingdom theological appreciation. Furthermore, historical perspective, theological disagreement, and differences in governance structures all have a major impact on these texts. This severely limited their value for this project. The needs of the research question remain. “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church have always been supportive of this project since its inception. Despite the problem, and implied issues referenced in the research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” the board of elders have always been in favor of additional training.

The board of elders have a reverence for their role. They seem to understand the gravity of holding a right-hand kingdom focused role, despite not being fully aware of what that means. Throughout the project, I offered generic updates on the progress of this project back to the full board. In an effort to not influence potential responses of the qualitative research phase, the project updates remained general. The board of elders were aware that I was working on localized elder training, but that is where their initial knowledge of this project remained until its completion.

To design training for the board of elders, and find the initial details needed to answer the research question, it was important to first better understand how the elders understood their vocation individually. Having a better understanding about how the elders see themselves and their role within congregation leadership served to magnify gaps in their training. The research question would next require an educational phase to reinforce the foundational theology, and practical components found to be needed in the interview phase. Finally, a follow up round of interviews sought to measure growth and development as individuals serving on the board of elders. Beyond the scope of the project, ideally the research question could be answered in noticing that the culture of the board had refocused toward a clear balance of the two kingdoms.

The results could also be observed over time naturally as the reputation of the board of elders improved within the congregation. Through training, care and discernment capacity would naturally increase, and better serve the congregation.

To be thorough before beginning initial interviews, a review of the previous five years of minutes from board of elder's meetings was completed seeking patterns of discernment, and focus. The board of elders have been through at least one of the evaluated LCMS training resources, *Pastor and Elders*, roughly six months before the project phase. Recent training with a major denominational course helped to discover early on the shortcomings of at least one source reviewed in the literature phase of the project. This aided the creation of the interview and the training retreat phases, as well.

The problem asserts that the federal government and military training of the individual elders will have led to confusion of the two kingdoms. Confusion of the two kingdoms would likely mean there was also an issue with the definition of the vocation of an elder. Other assumed shortcomings explored in the interview phase included the historical understanding of the vocation of a lay elder, and the lack of faithful tools for discernment. Tools for discernment, and foundational theology were always assumed to be lacking, as the research question implies.

This project at its core is an Action Research project. Action Research is a relatively new concept for dissertation research structure, "as more working professionals have begun receiving doctoral degrees, there has been a tendency for Action Researchers to be insiders to their professional settings, making them at once both researcher and practitioner."¹

¹ Kathryn Herr, and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation a Guide for Students and Faculty* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015), 2.

I cannot, as the researcher, separate myself from the fact that I will simultaneously be their pastor throughout and after the project. The limitations in terms of bias from being and remaining the pastor would be varied. I hold a personal bias toward growth of the leadership and laity. Congregational leadership development in the location where I serve would make my role as pastor easier and more fulfilling. However, if I am committed to giving back to the church something of value, and also truly being able to grow in my ability to raise up leaders from within the congregation, faithfulness to the task is a worthwhile endeavor that I am committed to.

Research Design and Methodology

Initial Interview Phase

The first step toward better understanding the depth of the problem and answering the research question, was a phase of qualitative research. Both qualitative and quantitative research were considered, but the individual nuances of each elder's situation requires more depth and varied personal responses. Qualitative research also gave a more robust opportunity for each elder to reflect and express their thoughts more fully. I wanted each elder to carefully consider answering based in their own unique experiences, thoughts, and history. For these reasons, qualitative research was chosen.

I have conducted Internal Review Board guided research in the past as an undergraduate at Concordia University, Mequon, Wisconsin, and on the called staff of Concordia Theological Seminary for grant reporting. For this project, I successfully completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CISM) formal training online before requesting permission to begin the qualitative research phase. I felt qualified and sufficiently prepared to have conducted this research.

I interviewed eight adults for this study each initially for a 60–90-minute period. As I had been reporting some broad information on the project to the board of elders at their regular monthly meetings, they were expecting this phase of research to commence. No advertising was needed beyond this. I asked the six longest currently serving members of the board of elders to participate and they all accepted my invitation to be interviewed.

I also wanted a deeper historical perspective for this phase of research, so I asked two former members of the board to participate. For these former members, I made sure to ask them to participate at a more private opportune time. This way I could explain the process better and answer any questions they had without any added pressure to participate. This was essential since they were not present in the recent meetings of the board, and accordingly were unaware of the project. One accepted my invitation, the other was in the process of relocating and declined. I then asked another former member of the board to participate, and they accepted. I was able to interview six currently serving board members including four men and two women. I also interviewed two former members of the board of elders, including one male and one female. The blend of current and former members and of men and women proved to be a fruitful mix of participants for this study.

I have some existing knowledge and accordingly this is an Action Research project. I attempted to develop questions that do not take any of my prior knowledge for granted. This allowed me to record a more holistic sense of the situation. I explored individual religious history, experiences within the congregation, and time serving on the board of elders. I specifically wanted to gauge their methods of care and discernment as elders, their personal views as to what an elder should be, and some positive and negative experiences drawn from board experiences. The questions were designed to draw out the core of the research question. A

complete copy of the survey without annotation can be found in Appendix A. The interview questions with annotations for motivation of questions, are as follows:

1. How did you come to be on the board of elders here at Grace Lutheran Church?

This question seems like a benign way to begin. However, this question sought to find out if elders were recruited by pastors and other elders as right-hand kingdom focused personnel, or alternatively if they had recently left the church council or serving as president of the congregation. In these cases, they would have been left-hand kingdom focused personnel.

2. What is the greatest joy of your position as an elder?

3. What is the most difficult part of being in leadership at Grace Lutheran Church?

These two questions began to form the project and move toward answering the research question. This was done by developing an idea of how the elders view their role. As they answered ministry related aspects, or business-related aspects, it began to clarify what they believe an elder is foundationally.

4. If you have served with multiple senior pastors, did you notice your role change? If yes, How so?

After the service of a pastor who was second career and a previous federal government employee, it was interesting to see if any of the elders still serving from this time (six years ago) had noticed a shift in their service or with board culture.

5. If you have served under multiple board chairmen, did you notice your role change? If yes, how so?

As the current board chairman has never been in another role within the congregation, and the previous chairman was a long-time congregational president, this question was included to see if board leadership background specifically has had any influence on board direction, climate, or training.

6. How do you personally approach difficult issues that come before your board?

This question simply sought reflection of each member. I wanted them to consider if they have a discernment process for their decisions as an elder. This is where left-hand kingdom and right-hand kingdom issues would surface. If an elder answered prayer, or scripture study a right-hand kingdom focus would be apparent. If they answered structure, or policy, this would reveal more of a left-hand kingdom focus.

7. You have several families assigned to your care. How do you generally approach your role in spiritual care?

8. What are the greatest difficulties for you personally in caring for the families assigned to you?

Arguably, the largest portion of the stated responsibility of an individual elder is to have a relationship with and care for families assigned to them. How they answer this question will explain their own vocational view of an elder.

9. How do you live out your faith outside of the church building?

This question sought to find if any right-hand kingdom focus from elder service has bled out to other facets of life seeking to further pinpoint the problem.

10. What is one way that your role could be made more effective?

The idea in closing the interview with this question, is to open for reflection the possibility that an individual elder is aware of a research question type problem within the board.

The initial interviews took place in the Grace Lutheran Church conference room, which was strategically chosen to be a more neutral space than my office, yet more logistically convenient than an off-campus site. The interviews were audio recorded and began with an explanation of the project and process. I explained the consent and confidentiality to each participant and they each signed a paper consent form, as approved by the Institutional Review Board. I memorized the interview questions to keep a more natural flow to the conversation style

of the interview. I supplied the questions to each person interviewed on paper, to keep openness and confidence with the process. The audio recordings were transferred to and saved on a password protected computer. The recorder was stored in a fireproof safe, which only I have a key to open. The audio files were transcribed by Amazon Web Services transcription software. I then edited the transcriptions for accuracy in a word processor. The final transcripts were again saved on the same password protected computer kept in my office, which is also locked behind a door only I, and my assistant have the key to open.

I followed up with each of the interviewees to make sure they were comfortable with the process, and to thank them. I wrote each of the interview participants a thank you email or card and spoke with them directly in reflection. One of the aspects of this being an Action Research project is that as I remain their pastor, I care about each of them as individuals. I also value a strong relationship going forward with each member of the board.

Education and Training Retreat

Following the qualitative research phase, the elders gathered for a Saturday morning retreat. We first discussed the historical context of the service of the board of elders, and where we are striving to improve as a unit. The goal of this discussion was to bring everyone to see their function as serving the Lord and all the members of the congregation as they are entrusted to their care.

Next, we began an instructional overview of Luther's understanding of the two kingdoms. A discussion followed to put two kingdom discernment into practice. This begun by asking the board members how they view the role of the board of elders within the life and leadership of the congregation. Stemming from their interviews, discussion was led to compare their service as elders with their own service in other congregational positions as applicable. I also asked for

them to consider and share any difficulties they personally may have noticed in making a transition from a left-hand to a right-hand kingdom focus as they may have changed roles in the past. This discussion was an effort to begin to shape a new philosophical view on the board of elders itself.

The board of elders, by congregational definition, support and hold the pastors accountable. They are additionally a distinct committee which exists to preserve the right-hand kingdom congregational spiritual life. The problem itself rests in the confusion between the two kingdoms amplified by the board's vast government training and service of most members. Having a robust discussion about the uniqueness of the board of elders was critical for the success of the project, and the ability to answer the research question.

The philosophical framing of the elders as the right-hand kingdom accountability, developed into discussion which served as an introduction to adiaphora. The board of elders ensure that the things that God commands are done, and they also ensure the things that God forbids are not done. The board of elders can accomplish this as they faithfully discern left-hand kingdom issues of adiaphora, for the good order of God's right-hand kingdom gifts. This is the ideal distinction of balance between the two kingdoms. For this discussion, a brief quiz was administered and can be found in Appendix 2. The addition of real examples of adiaphora drawn from the quiz were designed to foster an environment where an abstract theological concept can "come to life" as reflection and group discussion guided this new concept.

After being confident that the definition and discernment of adiaphora was well understood, I asked the board of elders to consider issues from their past meetings and if they were adiaphora or not. Examples of this included choosing liturgical settings for seasons of the church year, setting service times, evaluating the organist, a confirmation sponsor program, etc. I

filled out a list by using the minutes from the previous two meetings as a guide. It was clear that much of what the board of elders discuss is considered adiaphora.

It was essential to make the point that adiaphora are not meaningless issues. Adiaphora are often key issues that can either aid or be a detriment to the faith of the members of the congregation. This is an issue that the research question requires be taught well. The goal of including adiaphora as a part of the two-kingdom teaching was to develop the idea that right-hand kingdom issues often have little flexibility, but the left-hand kingdom includes all the ways in which we carry out right-hand kingdom work. This is where faithful discernment takes over. The literature review chapter showed that Lutheran elder training programs often neglect or take for granted an understanding of adiaphora and the two kingdoms completely. Discussions on these theological principles help the elders to understand the scope of their role and the vital nature of having tools for discernment.

We then transitioned into a Law and Gospel discernment discussion starting with a Bible study on the prodigal son from Luke 15:11–32. This text is an outstanding narrative illustration on how God treats his people in terms of needing the Law or the Gospel. The younger (prodigal) son, is instantly the despised character of the narrative. Then as he reaches his low point envious of the pigs' feed, he realizes his situation and he returns home. He is seeking for his father to make him a servant, and instead the father runs to meet him at his own disgrace and embraces him in forgiveness and restoration before the son can utter an apology. This son in his repentance needs grace and receives grace. The older son appeals to his own works when he also disgraces the father by not coming into the party that his father is hosting. The father shows him how blessed he is and how good he has it. The father is exercising the Law here. The father does not

forgive the older son or excuse his behavior, yet he still meets him with the message he needed to hear.

Having previously covered the two kingdoms, the case was already well received for the need for strong discernment techniques. Law and Gospel could now be taught with urgency and sharper understanding. We began with a basic explanation and definitions of both Law and Gospel. The Law being God's mandates and response for our behavior, and Gospel being Jesus' work to overcome our shortcomings of the Law and drawing us to himself. "The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other: Law and Gospel"² It was important to explain that Law and Gospel are not synonyms for the Old and New Testament. It was also relevant to teach that both Law and Gospel are paths to heaven. Both Law and Gospel are themselves good, as they both come from God. Law and Gospel both technically offer eternal life. They are both truths, essential, and must be a part of every Christian walk in faith. The differences are that the Law's main functions are to convict sinners, show our brokenness, and show the need for a Savior. The main effect of the Gospel is forgiveness of sins, relationship with God, and life eternal. The Gospel's main function is to bring hope and peace into the heart of a repentant sinner.

Following the brief discussion on Law and Gospel definitions and basics, a brief quiz was distributed to allow for personal Law and Gospel discernment using individual Bible verses and Christian phrases. The quiz was printed off and distributed at this point in the retreat. This quiz can be found in Appendix 3. This quiz proved useful to administer up front in this discussion, for ongoing reflection.

² Walther, *Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, 1, electronic ed.

Following the quizzes and definition training, a discussion on a few quotes and theses from C.F.W. Walther's *The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel* followed as quoted below:

Rightly distinguishing Law and Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of a Christian.³

The most important doctrine is the proper distinction between Law and Gospel ... without this knowledge Scripture remains a sealed book.⁴

The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is not preached in its full sternness and the Gospel not in its full sweetness, when, on the contrary, Gospel elements are mingled with the Law and Law elements with the Gospel.⁵

The Word of God is not rightly divided when one makes an appeal to believe in a manner as if a person could make himself believe or at least help toward that end, instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by laying the Gospel promises before him.⁶

These quotes illustrated the vital nature of Law and Gospel discernment in the life of a Christian.

Walther's words also illustrated relevance for congregational leadership. Each member of the board of elders can visualize the relevance of Law and Gospel discernment. As each elder considers matters of board discussion, and also individual care, this discernment would quickly be seen as a relevant tool for faithful service.

Any Christian should be able to ask two questions in various situations. Who would need to hear Law? Who would need to hear Gospel? A discussion based on the following prompts began to answer these universal questions.

³ Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 42.

⁴ Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 1.

⁵ Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 1.

⁶ Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 3.

First Situation

An unmarried woman from your care list contacts you and says that she needs to talk to you soon. When you do meet, she tells you that she is pregnant, has no plans of marriage as the father is now out of the picture, and she feels awful. How do the Law and the Gospel apply here? Which will you use in this situation?

Second Situation

One of the pastors has misused a matter of adiaphora, telling a parishioner that God commands their child be confirmed instead of explaining confirmation as a means by which to teach the faith when a child is ready to learn it. Does the pastor need to hear Law or Gospel from the board of elders who have learned of this situation?

The point of the discussions based in these two hypothetical situations was to prompt discussion on what could happen if Law and Gospel are misused, but also what could happen when they are used faithfully. The board of elders are on the front lines of spiritual care for congregation members. It is important for each elder to know when Gospel is needed, and when is the Law needed. This discussion ushers in the need for thesis from Walther's *The Proper*

Distinction Between Law and Gospel:

The Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestling with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace.⁷

The conversations then took a serious tone as the importance set in as to just how important Law and Gospel discernment really can be. Misuse of Law and Gospel is unfortunately something

⁷ Walther, *Law and Gospel*, 2.

alarmingly common to see in the Christian life. The distinction between Law and Gospel is one that is difficult. The current board of elders is eager for training, and academically accomplished, I always believed the capacity existed for depth of training in this way.

The practical nature of the retreat's discussions would follow the Law and Gospel discussion. I worked to frame the educational discussions of the retreat with a goal of further developing skills for care taking. It is at this point, the board of elders has been taught Scriptural context, vocational history, two kingdoms, adiaphora, and Law and Gospel. They were then I asked the board to discuss relationship building, and spiritual care giving. Specifically, the board discussed ways in which some of them have achieved success in getting to know and serve congregation members.

I asked the board of elder's members to share with one another some advice for when to visit someone who is sick or struggling, how often to visit them, and even what to say or not say. Some of the elders, despite the cultural issue of left-hand kingdom focus, have excellent dedication and heart when it comes to fulfilling their vocation as an elder. While the training itself was beginning to answer the research question, I was seeking to draw out best practices from the group and foster a climate where best practices for care are freely discussed.

A critical issue discussed at the retreat was, when to ask for help from a pastor or another elder. Surely there will be situations of dire health or spiritual struggle where an elder simply does not feel comfortable or confident in meeting the needs of the individual. The elders need to know that they always can partner with one another or a pastor in these troublesome situations. They never have to meet a tough situation alone. Seeking to implement a balanced two kingdom focus for federal government and military employed elders is a concept that is contrary to their secular vocational training. For this reason, the team approach of collaboration and support will

always be an opportunity for elders to be accountable, equipped, and confident. When the elders are well trained over time, the research question is answered, and the congregation is well served.

One month before the educational retreat, I implemented a practice where an elder would pray with the service leaders each Sunday before Divine Service. I used this activity to discover if, as the problem asserts, most of the elders are simply not confident in a right-hand kingdom function such as praying aloud with a small group. Their occasional discomfort proved to be indeed the case, as these prayers felt nervous and confused. This is a foundational right-hand kingdom care practice that can be remedied over time with opportunities and training. The project retreat accordingly concluded with a prayer workshop.

The closing prayer workshop began as each elder was asked to consider what it means to pray continually. Anxiety for a prayer leader can transfer to others for whom care is given. For this reason, I encouraged them to be at peace while at prayer and even embrace moments of silence to collect thoughts. These types of activities and discussions can only improve the skills of the board of elders to be confident spiritual care givers. I asked each of the elders to share prayer requests from their own lives, and prayer requests from the families on their care lists, as a best practice example for their own daily prayers.

As the problem of a firm left-hand kingdom focus would assert, these elders are most comfortable with any concept that utilizes strict structure. They feel most comfortable being guided by policy and structure. To use this to the advantage of their training, I gave them a framework to instill confidence by teaching them a five part collect. The following quote and example were shared:

Collects usually consist of five parts: (a) an address to God; (b) a relative clause indicating the activity or attribute of God on the basis of which we approach him; (c)

the petition; (d) the purpose of the petition; and (e) the conclusion declaring the sole mediatorship of Christ. For example:

- (a) Almighty and everlasting God,
- (b) by whose Spirit, the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified;
- (c) hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people;
- (d) that each in his vocation and ministry may serve you in holiness and truth
- (e) through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.⁸

The structure of the five part collect served to fill the need for structure where many of the elders can find comfort and confidence. I then paired off the members of the board into five groups of two, with the pastors attempting to provide guidance, as needed. The groups were instructed that the needs from their lives and care lists just discussed would provide petitions to lift to the Lord at this time. There was ten minutes given for prayer with each person asked to pray aloud for five minutes.

Guidance of Regular Meetings

The third step of the project following the educational retreat was an intentional guiding of regular meetings of the Board of elders. For three months I intentionally integrated the concepts and skills taught on the retreat day. These insertions included research question elements such as Law and Gospel considerations, Christian vocation focus, and two kingdom issues. There was ample material from the retreat to refer to while seeking to reshape the culture and processes of the board in this way.

After being very intentional about leading meetings, the research question was now able to be answered with confidence. The research question would be answered in finding if the elders

⁸ Duncan B. Forrester, J. Ian H. McDonald, and Gian Tellini, *Encounter with God: An Introduction to Christian Worship and Practice*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 108.

themselves would begin a new methodology of leadership and discernment as a unit. Thus, the fourth step was to observe if the elders approach their service and regular meetings differently from before the project began. Much of the results of the project will be beyond the scope of this project. Careful notes needed to be taken to observe growth within the agenda items at the initial meetings following the retreat. Being an Action Research project, this will have some limitations since I am still the pastor of the congregation and care about the board decisions made by the board of elders. However, as I pull back planned intentional guiding, much has been and will continue to be learned from the actions of the board.

Final Round of Interviews

Finally, a second round of qualitative research was conducted with each elder. Here is where the research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” is most fully understood and answered. Qualitative research continued to be utilized for this project phase as the project goal is seeking to find a shift in thought process. The most natural way to find growth in thought is through qualitative research. I used some of the same questions that were used in the initial phase of research, and allowed the conversations to develop naturally. Conversations were then evaluated for growth areas within responses. Each elder interviewed was asked to consider the board retreat, follow up meetings, care for people over the project term, and any related personal reflection in answering some questions from the initial round of qualitative research once more. The reduced survey for the second round of interviews can be found in Appendix 4. At these interviews, I listened for increased theological depth, prayerful consideration, and deeper bonds forming with the

members in their care. I was seeking any shift to personal approach for discernment and spiritual care.

Limitations

The limitations of the project would be first and foremost, time. Ideally the interviews could be administered again annually, or more, with continuing members of the board, and newly trained members of the board. It would also be beneficial to interview some members of the congregation after a couple of years. Interviews with congregation members would answer is reputation of the board of elders has improved following training and a cultural shift within the board. It will also not be possible to ever truly know what kind of discernment process is part of a person's own internal process. The concept of Action Research is also an unavoidable limitation with inherent bias. I have a personal relationship with each person I interviewed, and they all know that they are supporting me personally through an academic pursuit and wish me well to complete my project. I care about each of the people interviewed. The positive personal relationship I have with each of the members of the board of elders could compromise the answers given. Some of the answers could have bias toward what is believed to be beneficial for me personally, over what may be accurate.

Implementation Timeline

The whole research process took about six months. These six months included one planning month, one month for initial interviews and training, three months for elder meeting observation, and another final month for final interviews. This timeline for research held the project within the one-year normative timeline for the Major Applied Project.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA

The research question “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” is answered in evaluating growth within the discernment and conduct of the board of elders. The actions of the board of elders will be evaluated through board meeting observations and a second phase of qualitative research. Observation and interview were and will continue to be the main methods by which the research question is answered, and the measure by which the project’s success or failure will be evaluated. Findings of this project will also shape guidance and training of the board into the future.

In my research, I found that the elder training phase was well received and appreciated. I have been asked often to provide additional training for the elders. This shows me that that they are eager to grow as congregational leaders. However, the board of elders have been asked to shift from a system of bureaucracy and left-hand kingdom focus, toward a clearer balance of the two kingdoms with specific focus on the spiritual right-hand kingdom. A two-kingdom balance is something these elders have not experienced professionally, personally, or in any other capacity of congregational leadership. This is a substantial philosophical shift, which could prove to at any point be an uncomfortable one, for some members of the board. A need for training existed, was craved, and was fulfilled.

I observed noticeable progress in the educational phase of intentional meeting observation and guiding. I appreciated that the members of the board of elders took great care to think critically in line with newly taught theology. However, I am concerned that the more tenured elders could resist a change in the focus of their service, especially if it is not a written policy. I

wonder if the newly taught theology will have an effect where the vocation of an elder becomes less desirable as service and humility are sought, and perceived power or influence is lost. I have seen, as the project concludes, that growth in many of the board members, and the full board of elders has progressed toward more confident and faithful leadership. Hopefully, this shift will continue to flourish beyond the project. This shift will be evidenced most fully as the congregation grows to trust the board of elders through faithful service.

George Barna describes the habit of developing the spiritual core in congregational leaders as a key indicator for congregational health. Barna states:

Bible knowledge and application must completely influence a person's mind and heart for spiritual maturity to be achieved. Appropriate faith development activities should influence the total person including all opinions, attitudes, values, character attributes, behaviors, and beliefs. Developing spiritual leaders demands a development process that is comprehensive, tying together a person's intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual¹

The research question is seeking a more confident, well trained board of elders. Training will always require a holistic approach where the elders themselves are well fed as Christian people who are thriving in faith.

One Example of the Board of Elders in Discernment

A recent example of the problem came within an elder discussion involving the Lord's Supper. This meeting and discussion took place before the interviews or subsequent additional training phases of the project. This example is useful to establish a baseline before the research question is fully answered. The Lord's Supper itself is firmly established as given and commanded by Christ and is firmly within the right-hand kingdom. However, logistically the

¹ George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches Being Strategic in Your God-Given Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999), 87.

good order administration of the Lord's Supper is a matter of left-hand kingdom adiaphora which is given for the board of elders to discern and carry out.

The agenda topic discussed the possible use of grape juice as a permissible option for communion distribution, instead of wine. The request was made by two separate congregational members, one who struggles with alcoholism, and a homebound member with a medication complication with alcohol. Personally, I was in favor of the notion. However, I had been wanting to see the elders in action on a discernment issue of adiaphora. I largely abstained from the discussion. A decision was very quickly reached to offer grape juice as an option. The rationale for the decision was that a grape juice option was requested and logistically possible. The primary focus of discussion was who would acquire the grape juice, where it would be stored, how it would be distinguished from the wine, etc. The elders then sought a member to write up a policy to be voted on, mandating the details. In this discussion there was an absence of right-hand kingdom implication, awareness, or discussion. There was no theological discernment, prayer, study, or even an opinion requested from one of the pastors in the room. Regardless of if the decision was the correct one, or if I agree with the decision, there was no method of faithful discernment involved. This issue dealt with an issue of important adiaphora, and instead of being discussed with theological implication, it was discussed and decided as a health and convenience issue. The board saw a problem, and they solved it as quickly as possible using left-hand kingdom skills and structure. This showed a void where the people of the congregation could be served better by the board of elders establishing the problem the project sought to solve.

In an ideal faithful situation, with further training and discussions, this issue would have instead been discussed recalling the biblical basis and example for communion practice. The board could consult the Lutheran Confessions, as a component of discernment. The discussion

could be briefly paused for prayer. There could even be a delay to a future meeting to allow more time to faithfully discern the issue. This discussion needed to be discerned with the reverence that an issue directly related to the Lord's Supper would require. Instead, the board of elders acted in a predictable way in line with their professional training. The board of elders did exactly what they were trained to do in their secular vocations. Left-hand kingdom focus and structure took over the process of discernment.

This example highlights the original problem and the research question. On an issue such as this, the congregation is expecting the elders and pastors to make decisions not only based on practicality, but also based on what is theologically appropriate as Lutherans. The congregation has not consistently received that kind of faithful service from the board of elders with decisions that affect them in worship and practice. This example, from just before the interview phase, clearly depicts the state of the elders as the project began. Having heard the elders reflect individually provided insight into their own approach and understanding of their vocation as elders and shed light on the needs for training that existed within the full board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church.

Data Analyses

The research question looks at the board of elders as a complete unit considering how individual members and their professional experiences have influenced the overall board culture. The interviews did exactly this. Each interview was unique, but collectively offered great insight into those who uphold the right-hand kingdom, as my partners in ministry at Grace Lutheran Church. These interviews highlighted the board's strengths that needed to be emphasized, areas where individual elders can learn from one another, and areas that need to be addressed with education and training.

Participant One

Participant One has been an elder for some time. He has also served as the congregational president several times. He has been in various capacities of congregational leadership through some of the most troublesome situations in the congregation's history from long vacancies, to pastors publicly at odds, lawsuits, affairs, and building projects. Participant One has seen a wide variety of congregational situations. He has been trained through his varied experiences in congregational leadership. If anyone had been affected by the implications of the problem, it would be Participant One. He spent his entire professional career in military, and government service. He has also been either an elder, or congregational president, nearly the entire time he has been a Lutheran. He has been a Lutheran for about thirty years, and always an LCMS Lutheran within the same congregation. His views on the church at large are driven primarily by local congregational culture. I was very curious how he had adjusted to the shift between elder service and church council service so many times.

One of the keys to be an effective elder and understanding what it means to be the accountability for the right-hand kingdom is a spiritual maturity and deep knowledge of what it means to be a Christian, and a Lutheran, more specifically. This is typically something that is built up over an extended period. Yet in this case he recalled, "(I was) confirmed as a Lutheran in June of '91. The president of the congregation at the time called me at home. It was a Sunday evening two months before the election of officers, which we held at that time in December. Okay. He asked me out of the clear blue to serve on the board of elders." The logical question to be asked here is, "What was it that this congregational president saw in Participant One to ask him to take on this important right-hand kingdom focused function in service of the congregation, so soon after his adult confirmation?"

To answer his understanding of the very rapid time frame between confirmation and being an elder, Participant One recalls, “In my last assignment in the Pentagon, I ended up I was in a supervisory chain over 66 people so that was a lot of supervision. He knew that (after) we had talked about my military life, since he was government (when he asked me to be an elder).” Right from the first time he became an elder nearly thirty years ago, it was because of governmental authority that the congregational president, not an elder, asked Participant One to join the board of elders.

As Participant One reflected on his elder service he summarized his joys and struggles in this way, “I tend to be a judger. And, uh, I'm also labeled as a fixer, and a diplomat. In later life with the federal government, that really made sense as a diplomat.” Participant One sees government service as ideal preparation for the board of elders. Surely some of these skills have been well used for kingdom service at Grace Lutheran Church. However, these skills as they have been taught, more than likely lack the heart that a right-hand kingdom focused role would require.

Participant One went on to say that he deeply enjoys participation in worship services and worship planning and being a resource for people in their joys and sorrows. There are definite bright spots for the service of this long time elder. However, in conversation with Participant One, it was clear that he stepped into a culture already looking for elders who could make structure and take charge, rather than care and encourage. Explaining the similarity or difference between his roles as congregational president and as an elder he explained, “Yeah, it's very similar. It's the same with my total 11 separate terms as president at very different times. Yeah, it's very similar.” For Participant One, the board of elders was a left-hand kingdom focused role. That is the arena where he excelled, and what he was first added to the board of elders to do.

In the follow-up interview, Participant One said of feedback from the congregation about the elders lately, “I think they're seeing a meshing if you will. I've had a couple of congregation members mention that. It's really good right now.” Of all the elders interviewed, Participant One held the view of being an elder that was closest to the assumptions of the project problem. However, through some training and time, he is sensing positive change personally as an elder, and feels affirmed as he hears recent positive congregational feedback on elder service.

Participant Two

Participant Two was a career military officer. In retirement, he began a second career as a quality control regional corporate supervisor for Thrivent Financial, from which he has also since retired. He was a lifelong member of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) up until the adoption of the ELCA's human sexuality decisions. It was at this point that he joined Grace Lutheran Church. In his previous ELCA congregation, Participant Two was congregational president, and served in various other leadership roles. In his eleven years at Grace Lutheran Church, he has been an elder for four years and congregational president for six years.

In these interviews, I was seeking, as the research question does, to find elders with an understanding of right-hand kingdom discernment. There is an interesting dynamic when it came to individuals who had served both as an elder and as congregational president. Either they were more focused on the business and structure demanded by the left-hand kingdom as congregational president, or they were more drawn to the ministerial heart of the right-hand kingdom required as a member of the board of elders.

In the case of Participant Two, because of his heart and faith any congregation would be blessed to have him be one of their elders. Participant Two was clear that his focus was on the

people entrusted to his care. He is first concerned with care of members as a stated requirement of his vocation as an elder. However, Participant Two showed a depth where it became obvious that he cares more about the individuals, than he does about the requirement.

I love the interface with people. I have always loved that. That is the most important thing for me. Even in jobs that I had in the past; I love the interface with people. It is the most important thing for me. I enjoy being able to serve people. As an elder, I'm thinking through the entire array of things, and the responsibilities, and I would say it's that interface with people, and being able to touch base with people that bring me the most joy, and when they have needs trying to help, to make sure those needs are taken care of.

This was a beautiful aspect of Participant Two's interview. For someone who has been trained in the military, and went into a corporate quality control position, it would be assumed that Participant Two would have been a classic case of left-hand kingdom focus regardless of his position in congregational leadership. However, as he showed so much care and compassion for the church and its people, he is clearly the opposite of the project problem's anticipation. Participant two is a bright spot of potential influence toward a future culture shift within the board of elders.

Participant Two served as congregational president through a period of repeated vacancies and short-term pastorates. He volunteered to take on that role when no one else would. He did this because he loved his church, and the people it cares for. He spent his congregational presidency bringing a stability and confidence to members of the congregation that God was in control. In his interview, he seems to have even reflected on the real possibility that God put him exactly where he needed to be, so that the congregation could move forward towards a new chapter as peacefully and hopefully as possible. In this way, while a right-hand kingdom focus is perhaps not typical for a congregational president, Participant Two became a de facto elder for the whole church, at a time when the board of elders was more solidly left-hand kingdom focused, and the people needed elder care the most.

In follow up, Participant Two went into some detail about two kingdom discernment. He recalled reading that a congregational committee dealing with recruitment of board members had five named members, and he knew that the bylaws of Grace Lutheran Church specifically required six members be on that committee. He had planned, and made a note, to bring this up at the next meeting of the board of elders to try and correct the problem. Instead, he indicated that it occurred to him that this was a left-hand kingdom function. He decided that since this was not directly related to the right-hand kingdom focus of the board of elders, he would not bring up the issue. He decided that this issue could only cause the meeting to derail from proper focus. This is exactly the kind of bureaucratic focus that would distract the board of elders from discussing supporting the ministry of the church, in the past. This was great proof of early project success starting to take root and the research question was beginning to be answered.

Participant Three

Participant Three is a career counselor for a federal government office. She has previously served in the military, as did her husband. She has two sons in high school. Participant Three was raised as a Roman Catholic and had a difficult and traumatic experience with her family and parish. She struggled with works righteousness, wandered from the church, and later became a Lutheran. Participant Three also leads the youth ministry efforts of the congregation, is deeply passionate about the annual Vacation Bible School, and is a Stephen Leader who actively trains Stephen Ministers at Grace Lutheran Church and organizes the congregational Stephen Ministry efforts.

Participant Three has been a part of Grace Lutheran Church for about fifteen years. She became a member of the board of elders when she was approached by the current chairman of

the board of elders. This was after he saw her heart and enthusiasm as director of Vacation Bible School. She accepted and has served until the present.

Participant Three was very candid about her experiences on the board of elders. She was at one point tasked to be the elder who was the music liaison. She quit this additional responsibility after an experience where she attempted to adapt a preexisting music policy in support of the current pastor. She feels that she was not treated fairly by the other elder appointed in this capacity, because of her being a woman, and because of her wanting to change a policy. She often felt treated as a lower member of the board because of her gender, at times even directly.

Some of her interview in this capacity shared the feelings of Participant Four, a former female member of the board of elders who left the board, after alleged disrespect. The difference is that Participant Three remained on the board of elders, despite how she felt she was treated. The reason for this, she expressed, was the families in her care. She said, “when I think about maybe it's time to change, it's not an option to change ... and I think it's because I absolutely love watching families grow in Christ. Now I have been hurt by the church, and so when I think about people coming here and what being here has done for me, if this position helps, then it's worth staying in.”

Participant Three is typically assigned younger families and has been exceptionally helpful in cases of miscarriage, stillbirth, or postpartum depression. She deeply cares for people. She is willing to endure negativity from fellow elders to continue to care for the people she cares for. This focus is exactly in line with the research question goal of seeking find or develop elders focused on the ministry of the right-hand kingdom. Participant Three's heart for service is in the proper place for a member of the board of elders, as she well exhibits right-hand kingdom focus.

In follow up, Participant Three expressed increased trust in her fellow elders believing that meetings were more peaceful and focused.

Participant Four

Participant Four served for three years on the board of elders, and as the secretary of the board. Her service is still fondly remembered by those she served with, and those who were a part of the families on her care list. She currently is on the church council as the chairman of the board of social ministry. Under her leadership, this care ministry arm of the congregation has flourished more than anyone could ever have anticipated. She organizes collections of coats in the winter, and food year-round. Her board makes quilts for pregnant community mothers, Christmas story books for needy seniors, collects medicine bottles for third world countries, has outreach for veterans, raises money for the social ministry efforts of other neighboring LCMS congregations, ran a successful soup kitchen for migrant workers for many years, and more. Participant Four has even won an award from the LCMS Southeastern District for the impact of her social ministry efforts. It is obvious that Participant Four has an amazing heart. She inspires many to follow her example. For this reason, I was interested to find out how she came to be an elder with such a balanced view of the two kingdoms, and yet she no longer was serving on the board of elders.

Her heart for people was evident as she reflected on her time in elder service. I asked how she would take on the task of providing care for the members assigned to her. She recalled her methods, "I called everybody on my list to wish them a Merry Christmas. Their birthdays, I called on their birthdays, and that progressed. People kept you on the phone longer eventually, you know, and talk to you about things. But my thing was, here's an introduction. Here's who I am. I'm a mom of three. I'm the wife of a police officer, at the time he was retired. But what's my

background? How can I relate? And let that progress.” She was beautifully describing relationship building as the heart for her time as an elder.

One of the most interesting parts of Participant Four’s interview was how often she referenced her faith, as opposed to her training or skills. This would be the ideal type of response sought by the research question. Every elder ought to adopt this type of mindset through training and experience, with the help of the Holy Spirit. When speaking of how her time on the board of elders affected her as a person she said, “I had to go back on my faith constantly to get the answers to get the direction I needed to go, whether it was a high, high or low, low. Um, so I would say, probably it deepened my faith, because I needed to rely on the Lord, not on who I was, because I wasn't. I wasn't ready for all this, but he showed me the way.”

“I came off (of the board of elders) in 2015 because we were just not happy with some of the direction some of the other elders ... see with the military they will be behind whoever's in charge there, no questions asked. It's a very military way of thinking. So, the president of Congregation, he was in all of our meetings and he voiced an awful lot of opinions.” She, like Participant Three, felt that either her lack of military or government experience, or her gender left her disrespected by some of the fellow members of the board. It meant that she finally left the board of elders. As a past participant of the board of elders, Participant Four is not able to comment in a follow up interview.

Participant Five

Participant Five is a retired military officer. He is passionately patriotic, and very openly looks forward to burial at Arlington National Cemetery. He continues to volunteer at a local hospital, and as a tour guide at the National Marine Corps Museum adjacent to the Marine Corps

base, Quantico. Participant Five is methodical and orderly. He is very vocal in his opposition to anything in the church that is outside of perceived protocol.

To Participant Five, being an elder means, “keeping the church on that on the even keel on the right track.” Similarly, he served out that mantra in various capacities. He spent many years as congregational president and instituted a policy that all congregational presidents should first be on the board of elders. He was shaped by being president through significant challenging times in the history of the congregation. He referenced this repeatedly throughout his interview. As congregational president, he presided over a time when the associate pastor was accused of an affair, while the senior pastor was in Germany on sabbatical. He also presided over a long difficult building project that remains the largest building project in the congregation’s history. He was integrally involved in multiple revisions of the constitution and bylaws of the congregation. He has closely followed synod and district events for many years. To him, the elders are an integral part of congregational leadership, in all its facets. As the congregation survived trying times over many years, Grace Lutheran Church owes a lot to Participant Five’s leadership during these periods of struggle.

Participant Five is passionate about caring for members of the congregation. He, along with his wife, were diligent in visiting homebound and sick members on his care list while he served as an elder. He also began a practice of sending cards for birthdays, anniversaries, etc. to the members on his care list. He was one of the primary elders tapped by a previous pastor to regularly commune shut in members.

Participant Five served on the board of elders immediately following his most recent term as congregational president up until 2016. Multiple interviews of other elders indicated that the climate of the board was combative and difficult while he was a member of the board.

Participant Five's long congregational leadership, along with his military training, have left a mark on the culture of the board of elders, that remains. In speaking more in detail with Participant Five, it would seem that while he was an outstanding example of care for his members, the driving force in doing so was the written policy on elder care, and a duty to fulfill the various facets of his role, rather than a heart for the people or a relationship with them. As a past participant of the board of elders, Participant Five is not able to comment in a follow up interview. I did ask him if he had any thoughts on the board recently, and he simply expressed that he has come to know and trust his own assigned elder in recent months, which is of itself a great detail toward the research question's answer.

Participant Six

Participant Six is a retired military officer. He grew up in the LCMS but spent thirty years as a member of the ELCA and left about ten years ago after the ELCA's human sexuality decision. At his previous ELCA congregation, he served for brief stints in various leadership roles. He has a large family consisting of children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, most of whom live locally. Participant Six is a very dedicated family man. Participant Six has served as the board of elder's chairman for the past six years. He often checks in with me to see if he is still effective. This is because of a desire that the ministry of the congregation come before his personal desire to serve.

Participant Six finds a lot of joy in his vocation as an elder. He does not place a lot of personal pride in his service. He has a great outlook on elder care as an extension of relationships built over time, "on my elder care list, I have a good relationship with everyone there" He spoke at length about how he saw his role develop, especially as the chairman of the board, depending on who was the pastor. He is focused on the well-being of the church staff, and the pastors and

their families. His humble attitude and nature lend itself to being open to instruction and training. His dedication is lived out through a strong commitment to each task before the board. He works tirelessly to make sure each member of the board is well equipped, and well trained. Participant Six, like Participant Two, is an example of an individual elder, who despite military or government training, is committed to his vocation as an elder, because of his care for people, the congregation, and its ministry. Participant Six is thriving in recent months with more confidence in setting agendas, casting vision, and writing up reports. In follow up, Participant Six has come to recognize a faithful distinction between the two kingdoms, how they support one another, and what is out of the range of an elder's duty.

Participant Seven

Participant Seven began his professional career in the military. However, he spent most of his professional life in law enforcement within the metro Washington, DC area. Participant Seven is a lifelong LCMS Lutheran. He has no interest in stated leadership or accolades. Participant Seven is ready and willing to dig in and do whatever is needed around the church. He deeply cares for the congregation members, and the mission of the church.

Participant Seven seemed to understand his left-hand kingdom lean from his professional training. However, he is also involved with a philanthropic arm of law enforcement, which in tandem with his elder service, has helped foster a love for service and people. This has left him with a healthy sense of what it means to be an elder, focused on the right-hand kingdom.

Participant Seven, through personal study, understands the foundational principles of elder service. He does his best to learn and grow in numerous ways. From spending time with his people, to reading books on worship and theology, Participant Seven quietly does anything he can to fulfill his vocation as elder in meaningful ways. He indicated that during a previous stint

on the board of elders, at the same time as Participant Four, he also felt the board was combative and overly structured. He resigned after just one year. His previous stint on the board of elders began after having been asked by the pastor at the time if he would serve. Participant Seven expressed to the pastor that he felt unprepared and the pastor assured him that he would help mentor him to learn the vocation gradually. Participant Seven indicated that the pastor was gone just six weeks later, taking a position with the Department of Transportation. Participant Seven felt betrayed by this experience.

When asked about a more difficult situation he had experienced as an elder, Participant Seven's experience was quite relevant to the problem, and the starting point for the research question. The board of elders was to consider whether a visiting vicar could celebrate the Lord's Supper while the congregation was in vacancy. A member of the board of elders consulted the pastor of a neighboring congregation, who agreed that it was appropriate. Participant Seven did his own study on the topic. He brought up to the full board of elders, the Augsburg Confession which says that preaching and the sacraments are only to be done by one with a right call. Participant Seven was scolded by a longer serving elder, on the lone basis of questioning the pastor and a longer serving elder.

This is exactly the kind of difficulty that a board of elders trained in federal culture could run into simply by operating the only way they knew to be right-hand. Participant Seven knew something was off, but simply did not feel he could continue this argument. He left the board shortly thereafter. Some excerpts from this previous email exchange are as follows:

Members of the board of elders, the issue of consecrating the elements of Holy Communion by a vicar has surfaced in light of us not having a pastor and having a Vicar three times in the coming months. I have spoken to a pastor at Living Savior (who) advised me that Grace Lutheran Church's board of elders is empowered and authorized to give the Vicar the authority to consecrate the elements of Holy

Communion for specific services. I am requesting your concurrence for granting this authority... — Chairman, board of elders

I will concur with reservation ... In that section of the Augsburg Confession it states, “Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper {public} call.” Is that what we are doing...making a call to the Vicar to preach, teach and administer the sacraments (for specific dates)? Anyone that would like to council me, just weigh in. My other thought is that we must make it very clear to the members of Grace Lutheran Church what we are doing. I fear some will not understand and not think authority is granted to a Vicar and will opt not to receive. — Participant Seven

Keep in mind that others teach without a formal call from the congregation. We are also set up for a lay person to give a sermon in the event a pastor is unable to make it on a Sunday. I do think there are people in the congregation that will not accept communion from a vicar (or a lay minister, since we may have one of those in the future.) I would hope that does not cause them to leave Grace Lutheran Church. We are in a time when some might see an item like this as a great concern, potentially even enough for them to worship elsewhere... — Congregational President

As to (Participant Seven’s) reservation dealing with a ‘Call,’ I thought the Vicar was ACTUALLY ‘Called’ by Living Savior. ... Moreover, I’m concerned that we are questioning the advice and counsel of a Pastor and our longest serving elder - The Longest Serving Elder

I am not trying to question anyone ... I am just trying to make it clear in MY mind so that when someone asks me about it, I can give an educated and informed answer that would be the same as an answer given by any of us. I just want to be unified in my responses to those in my care.

I will remove my “reservation.” Thanks for the input and willingness to guide me ... Remember, I am new at this. - Participant Seven

In this exchange we see the problem that the research question sees. We see The Lord’s Supper, an issue of the right-hand kingdom needing left-hand kingdom good order and discernment. One member of the board consults the Lutheran Confessions, and is criticized for not having the rank of clergy or enough tenure on the board of elders to ask any question at all. Furthermore, the president of the congregation is on the chain of email, which would not be typical or appropriate for an issue of the board of elders, and could only serve to confuse the right-hand kingdom factors involved. Also, false assumptions are made about the situation and asserted as correct.

This is the kind of bureaucracy and discernment that has become infamous around Grace Lutheran Church, and Participant Seven's experience is a perfect illustration.

Participant Seven was the lone member of the board of elders to have understood the distinction between the two kingdoms, before this project. His experiences featuring some unfortunate interactions with less theologically trained elders, led him to go about his duties as an elder on his own. He was suspicious of many members of the board. In follow up he expressed that he is building better relationships with fellow board members, and that he is enjoying a greater sense of board confidence and partnership.

Participant Eight

Participant Eight is an attorney who specializes in labor law, who has argued before the Supreme Court. He is originally from Pennsylvania, is married, and has two college aged sons. Participant Eight joined Grace Lutheran Church after about 25 years as a member of an area ELCA congregation. He also left around the time of the ELCA's statement on human sexuality. Participant Eight's career and family obligations make his time limited, yet it is important to him to continue to be involved in supporting the congregation through service. Participant Eight is one of two members of the board of elders who has never directly worked for the federal government or the military. However, after over thirty years of practicing law, including at the Supreme Court level, he would obviously be familiar with, and influenced by federal culture.

Participant Eight displayed much of what might be expected from an attorney in his interview. When asked what an elder is, he responded, "well, of course there's the biblical passage. I mean, that we put right in our constitution and our bylaws." He knew this well as the recent main editor for a major constitution and bylaws revision for the congregation. In this capacity, Participant Eight seeks to use his unique skills to benefit his congregation. Participant

Eight knows the stated duties of the elders, which he goes on to recall. As such, he is very aware of where he is meeting or falling short within his vocation as a member of the board of elders. Participant Eight is very left-hand kingdom focused, as professional training would dictate, even outside of direct government employment.

Participant Eight is a fiercely proud and loyal family man. His vocations within his family, have deep roots inseparable from his Christian faith. This proved to be deeply influential for his life, in a holistic sense. He indicated that his family history guides and motivates him as an elder at Grace Lutheran Church. When asked where he finds the most fulfillment as an elder, he said, “I like serving communion. I mean, you're Christ's representative. That's a big deal. My mom and I had done it for years. I started doing it when I was, I think, a teenager at my old church I was confirmed in. I was frequently also a lector there.” Here Participant Eight has tied his joy in congregational service to his mother and thus his vocation as a son, and different periods of his life when his faith was lived out prominently. Throughout his interview, he also spoke highly of his sons and wife, relishing in his vocations as a husband and a father, which are also intimately connected to his faith.

Participant Eight, an “ELCA ex-pat” as he calls it, has seen what happens when the foundation of faith for his family is threatened. This motivates his service as an elder at Grace Lutheran Church, where his service can help preserve the right-hand kingdom of God not only his own family, but for many fathers' families. For these reasons, Participant Eight takes seriously his position as an elder, and deeply cares for the people and the ministry of right-hand kingdom work. He seems to have always had a sense of the balance where left-hand kingdom functions support right-hand kingdom ministry. Participant Eight would be an example where the research question might assume that he would have a deeply engrained left-hand kingdom focus

that is difficult to overcome within his vocation as an elder. However, his personal faith keeps him grounded in the distinctive right-hand kingdom nature of his service as a member of the board of elders. Since the retreat training, Participant Eight has indicated that feels that he has grown in confidence with his skills as an elder in terms of prayer, visitation, and his relationships with other members of the board.

Participant Nine

Participant Nine is a recently retired speech pathologist who enjoyed a lengthy career with the local public-school district. She is one of two female members of the board of elders. Participant Nine is the mother of two adult sons, and grandmother of one. She also serves on the altar guild, and organizes a congregational book club, and a women's Bible study. She was raised in Mississippi, and she is married to a recently retired military officer turned government defense contractor. She, along with Participant Eight, are the two members of the board of elders to have never been directly employed by the federal government or military.

The assignments of the congregational members onto elder care lists is done intentionally, and Participant Nine is the primary elder for homebound and elderly women. Occasionally, a homebound lady who falls ill is not willing to see an adult male, even the pastor. They all have a trusting relationship with Participant Nine, and they are always willing to see her. In these troublesome situations, Participant Nine shares devotions and prays with them, and the church is still able to serve these members through her efforts as an elder.

Participant Nine clearly sees the chief function of her vocation as an elder as caretaking and relationship building. She said regarding her greatest joy as an elder, "I value my relationships that I've made with these older ladies who enrich my life more than they ever know. I would have a hard time giving them up if I went off the board of elders at some point, because

I'm sure there are other people who would be much better, as an elder. I probably will still keep that relationship going with them, because they have become very, very important to me.”

Despite being a lifelong military and government contractor spouse, being recruited for the board by the congregation president, serving on the board of elders through what others interviewed called a more rigid time for the climate of the board, Participant Nine is completely focused on the people and the spiritual focus at the core of the elders service. The research question is seeking the board to use theological training to lead other members of the board of elders to follow in her faithful example. Participant Nine in follow up explained that she is finding joy in seeing fellow members of her board serving in new ways, and in partnership with one another. She also expressed a satisfaction that the morale of the board seems to have increased with increased peace in meetings.

Findings

Overall, I was surprised by the findings of my qualitative research. Considering the research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” and problem expected, to find that all government and military professionally trained members of the board of elders, would be of one mind approaching their elder vocation, purely as a left-hand kingdom function. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that some of the members of the board of elders, regardless of professional vocation, are highly effective at compartmentalization, and despite their understanding of the two kingdoms, they navigate the balance of the two kingdoms faithfully and effectively.

I believe that for an unknown reason unresearched in this project, there were members of the board who were simply more influential over the rest of the members of the board. These

influencers seem to have been the government or military trained persons who by training have bolder personalities and push left-hand kingdom structure. The “military mindset” as some of those interviewed called it, had long bled into the working of the board.

A healthy board of elders in an LCMS congregation understands their vocation as stewards of the right-hand kingdom who carry out their vocation with humility. At Grace Lutheran Church, government service and military rank were influential for some of the members of the board of elders. The way rank influenced the board of elders, was that members would only take seriously the comments from members of the board who had achieved a certain rank or tenure. Since this is an aspect of intense military and government training, the professionally lesser ranked elders, simply went along with the mindset and frequently left the board.

The board of elders had lost the integrity of holding confidentiality that their vocational responsibilities require. The elders often rivaled the church council, or worked in tandem with the church council, to carry out the left-hand kingdom needs of the congregation. These issues were amplified through periods of vacancy, and even a pastor who had similar federal experience, training, and values. These difficult factors were confirmed in the interviews with board members.

As the answer of the research question is becoming clearer, four of the board members came from an ELCA congregation which they left essentially because they believed the right-hand kingdom was under attack. These members of the board of elders exhibit a strong focus on the partnership between the two kingdoms, particularly because of trauma from this experience. Trauma from a previous church affiliation was another aspect of the situation that was simply not a factor that I thought would be so influential.

The follow up interviews produced some exciting findings. Participants expressed more peace in meetings, a better understanding of their role, and confidence in their vocation as an elder. They also described a sense of partnership with one another where they are actively encouraging one another and growing to trust each other better. The research question was being answered as each conversation unfolded.

Overall, there is still a strong impact from federal culture, but not the assumed universal one held by the original problem. The need of the research question remains, to train theology to the elders to help them understand better their role and more faithfully serve. This theological training will be an ongoing need, but one with very promising potential based on early findings.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY

The research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?”, is seeking a fresh start. The board of elders, as the problem detailed, were once a confused entity in the leadership structure of Grace Lutheran Church. They had the will to be leaders and care for the people but confused about how to carry out their vocation as elders. They were lacking education, and corresponding skills and confidence. This void caused the reputation of the board to suffer within the congregation.

Interviews and historical board minutes painted a picture close to the one that the problem anticipated. The federal and military culture had overtaken over the right-hand kingdom functions of the board of elders. Members of the board switched back and forth with serving on the church council with stunning frequency. Members of the board had opinions and concerns being minimized or not heard at all because of lesser professional rank or lack of military experience. Faithful discernment on issues of major importance were not given the discernment they deserved. A new era of training was indeed needed to restore effectiveness to the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church.

The most impactful component of this research project was the instructional retreat. The full board, the associate pastor, and vicar were all in attendance, despite the retreat being scheduled on a Saturday morning. Every member of the board of elders was active and engaged throughout the time together. They learned and seemed to have retained added information. They spent quality time learning from me, and from one another about how to better live out their vocations as elders. In reflection, interview participants were displaying increased confidence

even as the time progressed during the retreat training. Through observation and subsequent meetings, the culture of the board of elders has progressed because of the project.

Implications for Ministry

This Major Applied Project has positively impacted Grace Lutheran Church in noticeable ways. Over the past year, as congregation members would occasionally ask what I am researching, I would typically answer “elder training.” The common response from many was a sense of relief. The members of the congregation craved a solid, well trained, trustworthy board of elders. It was noticed by the congregation through spiritual care, that the elders had drifted more completely into the left-hand kingdom. They may not have understood specifically that a balance of the two kingdoms was missing, but they knew the board of elders had drifted from their spiritual focus. Some members of Grace Lutheran Church openly shared that they did not trust their assigned elder.

It is easier to have joy as a pastor in ministry when your partners on the board of elders are equipped and confident. Participant One said in his follow-up interview that he had already received feedback from members who were noticing that members of the board of elders were more visible and checking in on them. The elders have begun to place higher priority on intentional relationship building. This has led to better spiritual care for congregation members. The right-hand kingdom was coming back into focus. The seeds of the project were sprouting. I have seen the elders finding more joy in their role. There was once an issue with specific elders openly complaining about one another, and that has not been an issue for some time. I have noticed the members of the board of elders becoming closer in their relationships, and even praying aloud. The elders are learning and growing, and the congregation is noticing.

In response to the positive reception of the project, I have expanded the elders' role into some light worship planning and brought them into discussion sooner on difficult situations. This is done intentionally to implement a noticeable shift into two kingdom balance and spiritual matters. We have had meaningful discussions on worship planning where right-hand-kingdom essentials are discussed as such, and adiaphora are identified and implemented without written policy. For example, in choosing new settings for worship by season, decisions have been made to try a service setting without voting on a policy. Individual elders have specifically asked that discussion items be passed to other boards because they are more left-hand kingdom related issues of facilities or finance. Individual elders have referred members to talk with me after conversations that contained an awareness of Law and Gospel discernment. I have been well pleased with discussions and responses in comparison to just a couple of years ago and have noticed an increase in the joy elders display, as they serve out vocations with renewed focus and confidence.

It is one thing for a group of pastors and elders to decide to use a book, or template curriculum to embark on elder training. It is quite another thing to evaluate available recourses, and the setting to find an ideal combination of available resources, while constructing newly written resources. Examples of the impact of the literature review include the ongoing use of the personality assessment from *Pastors and Elders* and the spiritual gifts inventory from *Called to Lead*. The chairman of the board of elders occasionally uses the devotions from *Growing Together*, and each member of the board has their own copy of *Visitation*. As many of the reviewed resources encouraged boards of elders to focus on their own faith first, this has become an encouragement from board of elders' leadership.

The project created a custom onboarding for elders in the unique context within federal culture. As a new elder is elected by the congregation to join the board, they will need to make a clear shift from a member to an elder. The training created through the project will begin with the theological concepts of Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom Theology. As a direct result of the interviews conducted for this project, deficiencies in these three areas were revealed. With this theological foundation in place, *Pastors and Elders* will then be utilized. The literature review found this book to be theologically consistent with the positions of the LCMS, and it also contains valuable resources for custom personality awareness and skills recognition. Next, *Visitation*, and the 5 part collect hand out will be explained and supplied. Discussion based in care giving with best practices from long serving members of the board will be commonplace. The full training will be repeated in sections annually. The methodology of the project was able to assess localized needs, and then add them with specifically reviewed resources to create a custom training that was sorely needed for the board of elders at Grace Lutheran Church.

Furthermore, the board is getting into the practice of learning from one another when it comes to best practices. The women who serve on the board, continue to be great resources and models for faithful caregiving. The project continues to be a blessing for the elders at Grace Lutheran Church. The fact that this project documents the process and tailors training for the exact setting, is a treasure that will bear fruit for God's kingdom at Grace Lutheran Church for some time into the future.

Implications for Ministry in the Broader Context

The project in its finality has amazing potential to benefit ministry at Grace Lutheran Church, but it does also have value to impact similar congregational situations. The problem

initially identified military and government personnel acting within their professional training and was separating the two kingdoms by solely existing in the left-hand kingdom, while unaware of the right-hand kingdom. The board of elders were missing foundational theological components that are essential to understand the fullness of their vocation.

This same situation could exist in any congregation anywhere. In many congregations, the theology this project added into elder training, Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and the two kingdoms, could just as easily be missing from the training of the members of their own board of elders. Available template resources for training a board of elders lean heavily on these theological concepts, often without even defining them, which can cause great confusion. I would recommend this project and training for congregations situated near a state capital or military base geographically. In these locations the professional background of the congregation would be similar to Grace Lutheran Church. These congregations could be well served to follow the structure of this project, and the resulting custom training process. By following this project and process gaps in their own board of elders training can be found and addressed accordingly by teaching the concepts needed to help better understand the fullness of their vocation, and better serve others.

Implications for Personal and Professional Growth

Personal Growth Implications

Personally, the Doctor of Ministry program has been an outstanding growth opportunity in many ways. In the classwork phase of the program, a whole new rigidity was needed for time management to meet requirements for reading, writing, and online class obligations. There were times when personally it was quite difficult to keep up the required pace. There was one year that I preached a Good Friday service, went home to write a paper for a class, and went back to

church, and preached another Good Friday service. This program was the most I have felt challenged, perhaps in life, and I am a better pastor because of it.

The Major Applied Project only wove that pacing and challenge intimately in with my ministry. I can work harder, faster, and keep calm in tricky situations more effectively. My marriage has thrived because of my studies in the DMin program, as well. My wife, Alissa, is a Doctor of Education candidate at Concordia University Portland. For the entirety of our marriage, we have both been doctoral students. This led to a depth of understanding, support, and a spirit of cooperation. As we both embarked into the research phase of the programs, this project became a source of further discussion and support.

This project has enhanced the board of elders at the congregation where I serve as senior pastor, and the positive effects are seemingly unending, as the congregation is healthier in so many ways. Having a stronger board of elders brings relief in spiritual care demands, calms controversy, and shortens meeting times. This increases time at home and is healthier for families. More involved faithful elders increase staff and leadership morale. The benefits personally from this project would be professional satisfaction, reduced stress, better health, and stronger interpersonal relationships. I have been well blessed through participation in this program, and in particular through the Major Applied Project phase.

Professional Role Growth Implications

I have grown tremendously in my vocation as a pastor because of the Doctor of Ministry program, and specifically through this project. I have always felt comfortable with preaching and teaching delivery, but in reflection, the depth of scholarship that I engaged in congregational preaching and teaching, was becoming too shallow. As the classwork for the DMin program required a rigorous level of study of the Biblical text, and this project held me to better reflect on

the spiritual needs of the congregation as a whole, I had a realization that the baptized in my care deserve to see their Savior as clearly as possible.

Accordingly, I have implemented new rhythms of deeper preaching and teaching preparation. I am proud to have employed these in my ministry. At Grace Lutheran Church, I supervise an Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology program vicar. The skills that I have learned in this classwork make me a more effective and confident supervisor and mentor for this vicar. This project has inspired me to create a subcommittee of the board of elders specifically for support and encouragement of this vicar. This program and project have made me a more effective pastor in many ways.

The interview and teaching phases of this study specifically created even more growth in this area. They have caused me to personally understand more fully the individuals who support me in ministry at Grace Lutheran Church. I may have at one time been cynical as to presume that the board of elders was filled with bureaucrats. That they had lost the heart needed for the right-hand kingdom focus that their vocation as an elder required. Instead, through this project I found compassion and heart in the members of this board of elders beyond what I could have expected. I have come to believe that the confused congregational bureaucracy that inspired this project came from a heart and compassion of congregational leadership who loved their church, and only wanted to support it in the way they knew best.

Although this project created effective growth, there is still more work to be done for growth of the board of elders into the future, but the potential is amazing. I now see the gifts that God has given me in those who serve on this board. Beyond board work, I have a closer relationship with the individual members of the board of elders. The pastors and elders of Grace Lutheran Church simply understand each other better. They are now so often walking together

not only with the same goals, but in discussion of how to achieve those goals. Every member of Grace Lutheran Church will be blessed by the stronger relationship that now exists between myself and the board of elders, because of this project.

The Major Applied Project is designed to enhance the skills of pastors and bless ministries. I have seen exactly this in my own context. The whole congregation of Grace Lutheran Church will have been blessed by this process. This program and this project have blessed me as an individual, my marriage, my congregation, my board of elders, and the culture of the whole congregation I serve.

Recommendations

I would love to see elder training resources for the whole church begin to incorporate more specific theological depth as a foundation. When a typical person agrees to join a congregation's board of elders, they are not necessarily aware of biblical or historical foundations for their new vocation, nor the doctrines of Law and Gospel, two kingdoms, or Christian vocation. Current elder training resources from the LCMS, WELS, and ELCA all fall short when it comes to teaching foundational theology to new congregational lay elders. There is simply not this type of theological foundation available for the training of Lutheran elders. The resources that are available, particularly in the LCMS are useful resources, but they lack, or take for granted, this foundational theology.

I intend to continue elder training annually at a minimum, and to continue guiding toward the goals of this project. The board of elders have found a confidence in their footing as elders, which seems to have permeated the congregation. The use of an outside study, *Pastors and Elders* with specific training in Law and Gospel, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology for discernment and understanding will continue. Board discussions on best practices for care

will become more frequent. Elders will be supplied with *Vocation* and the five part collect handout right-hand at onboarding. This will result in a well-focused board of elders, trained to faithfully serve the congregation. The members of the board of elders are better equipped, and more confident to aid the pastors with whom they work and bless the congregation for whom they serve.

As I see the results unfold in my ministry at Grace Lutheran Church, I see an additional need that could be added into a future project. The individual elders learn well from one another. They are more confident caregivers after observing caregiving, and when working in pairs. I believe that a natural next step for this project would include the addition of a mentoring effort during the process of onboarding a new elder.

Another intriguing possibility for the future is the idea of continuing interviews for members of the board of elders. In a more casual setting, it would be valuable information to understand how individual elders are feeling about their vocation as an elder, and if their view may change over time. This would carry an exciting potential to make meaningful edits to the training, and onboarding of board members into the future

As I began this study, I was new in my call to Grace Lutheran Church. I was still new to the federal and military culture, and the ways in which it influences every corner of life, including within the congregation. I initially thought that this was on its own the problem. Instead I have come to believe that as most vocations are firmly focused on the left-hand kingdom, that most elders no matter the geography have similar difficulties in discerning the two kingdoms.

The problem I found was more with how these specific federal employees responded to difficult periods where there was a void of pastoral care for the congregation. They responded to

difficulties at their church exactly how they were trained their whole lives to respond to difficulties. They created rigid bureaucratic systems to keep the business, activity, and ministry of the congregation moving forward through good times and bad. These bureaucratic efforts did work to keep the congregation alive, but it created lapses in ministry and confusion of leadership. There was a void of Law and Gospel discernment, and Christian vocation, as well. A newly trained board of elders, with a renewed focus is what was needed, and is well on its way.

At a recent board of elders meeting at Grace Lutheran Church, a discussion on a policy for memorial projects was on the agenda. The discussion went instinctively toward the dollars and allocation. I mentioned at one point that I felt that the elders might want to send their notes to the board of finance, and that I thought we ought to keep our discussions with right-hand kingdom related issues. A knee jerk reaction of embarrassment and agreement followed, and the meeting was back on track.

This example shows that the mindset of the board of elders has not shifted entirely. However, I am thrilled that one quick reminder and off we go back to the spiritual work of the Lord. This rapid shift and immediate awareness would not have been the case just a couple of years ago. The results of the project are continuing to build momentum headed in the right-hand kingdom direction.

Once more to the research question, “How would it impact the board of elders if they were trained in Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology, as a foundation for their service and training?” The elders of Grace Lutheran Church have now been taught Law and Gospel discernment, Christian vocation, and two kingdom theology. They have been taught this theology to see their vocation as an elder more clearly. They have built on these principles to develop skills that aid them in serving more faithfully and confidently than before.

All this training and equipping was done in a way that was shaped for their individual surveyed needs. The congregation now enjoys a custom training program for the onboarding of new members to the board of elders. The results are very promising and headed in a direction that will continue to bless the faithful just outside of Washington, DC.

APPENDIX ONE

Qualitative Research Survey

Law and Gospel Leadership, Qualitative Research Survey
Board of Elders
Grace Lutheran Church
Woodbridge, Virginia
Fall 2019

1. How did you come to be on the board of elders here at Grace Lutheran Church?
2. What is the greatest joy of your position as an elder?
3. What is the most difficult part of being in leadership at Grace Lutheran Church?
4. If you have served with multiple senior pastors, did you notice your role change? If yes, How so?
5. If you have served under multiple board chairmen, did you notice your role change? If yes, how so?
6. How do you personally approach difficult issues that come before your board?
7. You have several families assigned to your care. How do you generally approach your role in their spiritual care?
8. What are the greatest difficulties for you personally in caring for the families assigned to you?
9. How do you live out your faith outside of the church building?
10. What is one way that your role could be made more effective?

APPENDIX TWO

Two Kingdom Adiaphora Discussion Quiz

Please indicate Y/N. Is the following an example of adiaphora?

1. Confirmation
2. Administering the Lord's Supper
3. Frequency of administering the Lord's Supper
4. Teaching the faith
5. The board of elders
6. Acolytes

APPENDIX THREE

Law and Gospel Discernment Quiz

Identify the following as Law (L) or Gospel (G):

_____ 1 John 2:12 - I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His sake.

_____ Exodus 20:15 - You shall not steal.

_____ Isaiah 53:5 - But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed.

_____ Luke 10:27 - You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.

_____ Genesis 3:11 - Have you eaten of the Tree of which I commanded you not to eat?

_____ Psalm 103:12 - As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.

And the following phrases as Law (L) or Gospel (G):

_____ Repent and believe

_____ He was bruised for our iniquities

_____ Praise the lord

_____ let us pray

_____ the lord be with you

APPENDIX FOUR

Qualitative Research Follow-up Interview Outline Questions

How do you personally approach difficult issues that come before your board?

You have several families assigned to your care. How do you generally approach your role in their spiritual care?

What are the greatest difficulties for you personally in caring for the families assigned to you?

How do you live out your faith outside of the church building?

What is one way that your role could be made more effective?

APPENDIX FIVE

Elder Training Retreat Agenda

1. Two Kingdom Discussion
 - A. Right-hand kingdom
 - B. Left-hand kingdom
 - C. Two kingdom interworking/balance
 - D. Comparing congregational offices and their focuses
 - E. Comparing professional training and service with elder service

2. Adiaphora Discussion
 - A. Definition
 - B. Quiz (Appendix 2) and discussion
 - C. Recent meeting minutes reviewed for two kingdom balance
 - D. Degrees of adiaphora importance

3. Discernment? Law and Gospel
 - A. Definitions and brief explanation
 - B. Luke 15:11-32 Prodigal Son Bible study
 1. Law
 2. Gospel/grace

4. Law and Gospel
 - A. Quiz and discussion

 - B. Walther discussion with quote prompts
 1. Right distinguishing Law and Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of a Christian (42)
 2. The most important doctrine is the proper distinction between Law and Gospel ... without this knowledge Scripture remains a sealed book (1)
 3. The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is not preached in its full sternness and the Gospel not in its full sweetness, when, on the contrary, Gospel elements are mingled with the Law and Law elements with the Gospel (1)
 4. The Word of God is not rightly divided when one makes an appeal to believe in a manner as if a person could make himself believe or at least help toward that end, instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by laying the Gospel promises before him (3)

C. Two Situations for Discussion

1. An unmarried woman from your care list contacts you and says that she needs to talk to you soon. When you do meet, she tells you that she is pregnant, has no plans of marriage as the father is now out of the picture, and she feels awful. How do the Law and the Gospel apply here? Which will you use in this situation?
 - a. When is the Law Needed?
 - b. When is the Gospel Needed?
2. One of the pastors has misused a matter of adiaphora, telling a parishioner that God commands their child to be confirmed instead of explaining confirmation as a means by which to teach the faith when a child is ready to learn it. Does the pastor need to hear Law or Gospel from the board of elders who have learned of this situation?
 - a. When is the Law Needed?
 - b. When is the Gospel Needed?
3. Consider how this influences elder care

D. Skills Discussion

1. Relationship building best practices- group sharing.
2. When to ask for help from a pastor or another elder?
3. Visitation best practices- group sharing.
4. Confidentiality reminders and discussion

E. Prayer

1. The Five Part Collect
 - a. an address to God (ex. Almighty and everlasting God)
 - b. a relative clause indicating the activity or attribute of God on the basis of which we approach him (ex. by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified)
 - c. the petition (ex. hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people)
 - d. Desired result (ex. that each in his vocation and ministry may serve you in holiness and truth)
 - e. Conclusion (ex. through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen)
2. Prayer Workshop
 - a. Pair off
 - b. Share prayer requests from self and elder care list

APPENDIX SIX

Prayer Structure Handout

“The Five Part Collect”

An Address to God

“Almighty and Everlasting God”

A Statement of Faith

(indicates the activity or attribute of God on the basis of which we approach him)

“by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified”

The Main Petition

“hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people”

The Desired Result

“that each in his vocation and ministry may serve you in holiness and truth”

Conclusion

“through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

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