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Equipping Lay Elders with the Spiritual Care Skills of Active Listening, Sharing Scripture, Offering Prayer, and Providing Follow Up at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL

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EQUIPPING LAY ELDERS WITH THE SPIRITUAL CARE SKILLS OF ACTIVE
LISTENING, SHARING SCRIPTURE, OFFERING PRAYER, AND PROVIDING FOLLOW
UP AT ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN WOOD RIVER, IL

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
David Schultz
December, 2021

Approved by:	Dr. David Peter	MAP Advisor
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To my father, Martin, who modeled for me a love for God's people and a joy in getting to serve them.

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Soli Deo Gloria

ABBREVIATIONS

DMIN	Doctor of Ministry
ESV	English Standard Version
CITI	Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
HBLT	Hook, Book, Look, Took
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
MAP	Major Applied Project

ABSTRACT

Schultz, David, MA. “Equipping lay elders with the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up at St. Paul Lutheran Church Wood River, IL.” Doctor of Ministry. Major Applied Project, Concordia Seminary, 2022. 122 pp.

Spiritual care is vitally important for all people. Unfortunately, too often those who are commissioned to provide spiritual care lack the necessary skills to help others. This MAP explores how a lay elder seminar might equip the lay elders of a congregation with the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. This MAP is focused less on *what* spiritual care is and more on *how* to provide it. Following the lay elder seminar qualitative research was done to evaluate how effective the seminar was in equipping the lay elders with the necessary spiritual care skills to care for the members of the congregation. The results demonstrated that the lay elder seminar was effective, and the lay elders learned how to provide spiritual care. Finally, recommendations were made on how to build on the lay elder seminar and continue the work of spiritual care.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Spiritual care is at the heart of pastoral ministry.¹ Unfortunately, in the twenty-first century spiritual care has taken on new meaning. Today spiritual care, often intertwined with pop psychology, “is concerned with boredom, lack of success, or low self-esteem often generated by unresolved inner conflicts.”² In essence, spiritual care no longer offers care from the Lord but instead has turned into “self-care”. Nevertheless, faithful pastors understand that spiritual care is concerned about, “a person’s relationship with God and the healing and renewal that can come only from Him through the means He has appointed to His church.”³ The Holy Spirit gives pastors and laity His means to care for people by bringing them into a right relationship with their God. God certainly grants people reason, winsomeness, charismatic personalities, and even compassionate hearts. However, the chief tools that the Spirit uses to bring true care to His people are His Word and Sacraments. Understood as caring for a person’s relationship with God, spiritual care becomes a great joy! Harold Senkbeil describes the work of spiritual care:

And you as pastor are his authorized agent to bring his presence and healing by means of the word and sacraments you bring his sheep and lambs in every circumstance of life, not just in those moments when life itself hangs in the balance, but also in those mundane, routine, ordinary ups and downs of life. You’re not a counselor or therapist, of course, but you are Christ’s sheepdog to do his bidding. You’re an errand boy for Jesus, sent to disseminate hope and peace in the most mundane circumstances of life. A fearful, anxious teen, a worried mother or harried father will find stability in your ministry. Not in you, but in God himself, who has chosen to do his consoling work through the word he’s given you to speak. The wondrous reality is that God himself is present by means of his word to settle anxious

¹ Richard Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross: God in the Midst of Suffering* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1994), 13.

² Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross*, 14.

³ Harold L Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 54.

hearts and quiet fear. ‘Thus says the Lord.’ Now that’s a mouthful of certainty in an uncertain world!⁴

Faithful spiritual care remains an important part of pastoral ministry. This is true at St. Paul Lutheran Church.

St. Paul Lutheran Church of Wood River, Illinois is a member congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). St. Paul is a medium-sized congregation in the LCMS boasting over 850 baptized members, nearly 700 confirmed members, with an average weekly worship attendance of nearly 300 people.⁵ St. Paul has traditionally been served by one pastor. Even as a medium-sized congregation, 850 baptized members, it consists of too many souls for one pastor to give proper spiritual care. There are simply not enough hours in the day to give the necessary attention to the spiritual well-being of God’s people.

St. Paul recognizes this concern for proper spiritual care and to that end has established a Board of Elders. The Board of Elders at St. Paul is charged with assisting the pastor in the spiritual care of the members of the congregation.⁶ In order to accomplish this task the congregation is divided into groups according to the number of lay elders. Currently, St. Paul has fourteen lay elders, therefore, the congregation is divided into fourteen groups. Each lay elder is charged with the spiritual care of those families to which he is assigned.⁷

Research Problem

In 2020, a global pandemic turned our world upside down. The Coronavirus and its

⁴ Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 54

⁵ Worship attendance reflects the pre-pandemic average attendance which began in March 2020.

⁶ St. Paul Lutheran Church. *Constitution and By-Laws of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Wood River, IL: St. Paul Lutheran Church, 2019), 27.

⁷ St. Paul Lutheran Church, *Constitution and By-Laws*, 28.

ramifications highlighted the need for spiritual care. As the virus made its way into our country, state, and finally into our community we witnessed things we never thought were possible. On March 20, 2020, JB Pritzker, the Governor of Illinois, issued an executive stay at home order. The executive order closed all indoor dining, all large crowd gatherings including professional sporting events, it forced schools to finish the semester online, hospitals and nursing homes were locked down, and, most disappointing, the executive order forced all congregations in Illinois to worship on-line for eight weeks.⁸ During these eight weeks the anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom among congregational members and the community were heightened. I personally witnessed a large uptick in pastoral counseling sessions. Those sessions ranged from youth who struggled to be isolated from friends to adults who lamented they couldn't visit aging parents in the nursing home.

Thankfully on May 29, Governor Pritzker issued a new executive order that gave fewer restrictions and allowed congregations to return to in person worship.⁹ However, over a year and a half later, the effects of the pandemic continue to affect the spiritual lives of God's people.

Halfway through 2021, one third of the pre-pandemic worshipping attendance is still not gathering for worship out of fear of the virus. Bible class and Sunday school are also experiencing an attendance drop. Congregational activities such as choir, handbells, church picnics, Vacation Bible School, and Advent dinners have all been canceled. Fellowship opportunities are all on hold. This has severely affected the spiritual lives of God's people.

Dr. Joel Biermann notices that the virus has impacted the godly habits of Christians. These

⁸ JB Pritzker, "Executive Order 2020-10", Illinois Government, March 20, 2020, <https://www2.illinois.gov/Pages/Executive-Orders/ExecutiveOrder2020-10.aspx>

⁹ JB Pritzker, "Executive Order 2020-38", Illinois Government, May 29, 2020, <https://www2.illinois.gov/Pages/Executive-Orders/ExecutiveOrder2020-38.aspx>

new habits are detrimental to their spiritual care.

When the church no longer serves as the foundation and the shape of a believer's weekly routine, when Sunday morning spent at church is no longer the keystone of a week that orbits around the life of the church, the remaining void must and will be filled with something else. Projects at home, a fresh Sunday morning hobby, newly discovered on-line friends, and influences, a newborn or more fully pursued passion of a pressing social injustice, a preoccupation with politics: life will be occupied with ideas and diversions and causes to give it meaning. The place once securely occupied by the church has been filled with other attractions. It happens. It has happened. It is happening. Satan does not squander an opportunity as remarkable and unexpected as a world completely undone by a virus. Seizing his advantage, he is waging war with the dependable and deadly weapons of apathy, distractions, comfort, and attrition – their reliable potency now amplified countless times over by the destruction of holy habits and the devastation of pious life routines. With the help of so many willing and unwitting soldiers, Satan is winning battles in the lives of saints that would have seemed impossible only months ago.¹⁰

Dr. Biermann is right, the pandemic has been detrimental to the spiritual well-being of God's people at St. Paul.

In the early weeks of the pandemic the Board of Elders at St. Paul recognized the effect the pandemic was having on the spiritual lives of the members of the congregation. It was decided, during our March 2020 meeting, that every lay elder would make a phone call to each family in his assigned elder group. The purpose of the phone call was to check in on the families of St. Paul and to offer spiritual care.

After the meeting, several lay elders approached me and asked a variety of questions concerning their phone calls to care on their assigned families. Some of the questions were:

- “What if I don't know the family?”
- “What am I supposed to say?”
- “What prayer should I say with them?”
- “Can you write me a prayer?”
- “Do I have to share a Bible verse?”
- “Which Bible verse should I share?”

¹⁰ Joel Biermann, “The Pandemic's Effects on the Church,” Issues Etc., December 11, 2020. <https://issuesetc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Post-Pandemic-Pew-A-Reflection-for-Pastors.pdf>

“What do I do with the information that I find out?”¹¹

These questions demonstrated to me that there was a problem among the lay elders. Many of the lay elders who are currently serving do not know how to provide spiritual care to those in their elder group. They lack the necessary spiritual care skills to care for those families which are assigned to them. Without these spiritual care skills, the members of the congregation will not get the proper care that they need.

Research Question

As I met with individual lay elders to address their questions about how to provide spiritual care for the families in their elder group, I wondered how I might be able to help them. The needs of the pandemic had brought these questions of spiritual care forward. However, the need to provide spiritual care stretches far wider than any pandemic. I knew that even when the pandemic was over the lay elders would still need to develop their skills in providing spiritual care. Through conversations with the lay elders as well as brother pastors the following research question emerged. “How might a training seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?”

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to teach the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. The development of these skills will better equip the lay elders to care for the families in their elder groups. These

¹¹ Five lay elders approached me with questions concerning their phone calls. They all asked similar questions. This is a summary of the questions they asked.

skills will bless them as they provide spiritual care to people both during extraordinary times of pandemic as well as the ordinary seasons of life. These general skills will enable the lay elders to provide spiritual care in a host of different settings. They can use these skills as they visit someone in the hospital, nursing home, or at home. They can also use these skills as they make phone calls to members, have intimate conversations following a worship service, or casual conversation in the narthex before church. These skills will allow the lay elders to feel more comfortable and confident as they offer spiritual care to the members of the congregation.

A lay elder, when offering spiritual care, might use a variety of skills, such as people skills, small talk, social awareness, empathy, etc. However, I am choosing to narrow my study and my elder training seminar to four basic skills; active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. I have chosen these skills because I believe they are the main areas of spiritual care. Central to spiritual care is the proclamation of the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins.¹² If lay elders can actively listen to members, then they will know what Word of God either Law or Gospel to bring to an individual in need. They will also know what to pray for concerning the individual. The training will equip them to use scripture and offer prayer appropriately in each visit. They will learn how to follow up with the individual they care for after the visit as well as how to communicate needs to the pastor. These skills are the basics needed to offer spiritual care.

The anticipated outcomes of this project are:

- The lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church grow in their ability to actively listen, share scripture, offer prayer, and follow up as appropriate.
- Individual lay elders feel more comfortable and confident with caring for the members of the congregation.

¹² Timothy J. Mech, *Pastors and Elders: Caring for the Church and One Another* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 30.

- The lay elders help the pastor in member care allowing for more of the congregation to receive spiritual care.
- Individual lay elders strengthen their relationships with the families in their elder groups.
- An elder training resource to develop the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, prayer, and follow up will be made available to the church at large in an effort to help other congregations train their elders in member care.

The Process

All members of the Board of Elders will attend a seminar to obtain the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. The seminar will be held on Saturday from 8:00am to 1:00pm. The training session will cover five units. The first unit will unpack the challenges that face St. Paul Lutheran Church and establish the purpose of the seminar. There are two challenges that face St. Paul Lutheran Church. First, St. Paul is a large congregation with more people who need spiritual care than one pastor can adequately provide by himself. Second, the lay elders lack the necessary skills to provide spiritual care. The purpose of the seminar is to equip the lay elders with the skills of spiritual care and teach them how to provide it.

The second unit will teach and develop the skill of active listening. After a short teaching on active listening, lay elders will be given a partner to practice active listening. Lay elders will need to listen and summarize what their partner has told them.

The third unit will teach the skill of sharing scripture. After a short teaching on sharing scripture, lay elders will again partner up to practice this skill. They will each be given a resource and a Bible that they can use to share God's Word.

The fourth unit will teach the skill of offering prayer. This unit will again begin with a teaching from the pastor concerning the practice of prayer. After the teaching, lay elders will join

their partner to practice saying prayers publicly.

The final unit will teach the skill of providing follow up. The lay elders will learn the importance of checking back in with those they cared for at a later date. They will also learn the importance of sharing with the pastor the needs and concerns of the members of the congregation. There will be a short exercise to help the lay elders practice following up with the pastor.

Following the seminar, I will use qualitative research to assess my project. Seven lay elders will be chosen to interview. Although all fourteen of the lay elders would qualify to be interviewed based on their role as a lay elder in the congregation, I will purposefully select certain lay elders to get a good representation of the body of lay elders. For instance, I will choose one lay elder who has served for more than twenty years as well as one lay elder who has served for less than two years. I also will choose one lay elder who is a trained church worker and one who is a layman. This variety of interviewees will give more depth to my research.

After individuals have been identified and are willing to participate, I will meet with them following the lay elder seminar for a 90-minute interview. The interview will consist of questions pertaining to the research question, “How might a seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing Scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?”

Finally, the researcher will use the information received from this research to revise the lay elder seminar so that it might be more effectively used with other lay elders at St. Paul in the future as well as congregations elsewhere.

Summary

In this chapter I identified a problem at St. Paul Lutheran Church. The lay elders lack the

necessary skills to provide spiritual care to the members of the congregation. Since they lack these skills the members of the congregations are not receiving proper spiritual care. I also established my research questions. “How might a training seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?” Next, I described the purpose of my research which is to equip the lay elders with the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. Finally, I listed a summary of the process I will take in order to answer my research question. The heart of the process is hosting a lay elder seminar and follow-up interviews to find out the effectiveness of the seminar.

Having provided an introduction to my project, in the next chapter I will explore recent literature concerning my project. I will evaluate what others have said and build off of their work. I will also demonstrate how my project is different than what others have done as I want to explore more deeply the question of *how* to provide spiritual care.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROJECT IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

It would be naïve for me to think that my congregation is the only congregation where lay elders under trained to provide spiritual care. It would also be naïve for me to think that I am the first person to ever research lay elder training. Therefore, as I explore how to equip the lay elders of St. Paul Lutheran Church with the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation it is important that I first research what others have studied before me. By studying their work, I hope to glean insight on how I might better train and equip the lay elders in my congregation. In my research I also plan to build on what others have studied and to go further and explore more than *what* spiritual care is but *how* to do it.

Originality

In recent years there have been several books and articles written on the topic of lay elders.¹ Moreover, there have also been several Doctor of Ministry MAPs which have focused on the role of lay elders.² On top of that Concordia Publishing House has produced a resource, *Pastors and Elders*, by Timothy Mech in 2011 which has become a helpful resource for many congregations. Another paper on the role of a lay elder might seem redundant. However, my MAP is unique in several ways. First, the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing

¹ Arthur J. Clement, *The Shepherd's Assistants: A Handbook for Church Elders or Deacons* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2007); Victor A. Constien, *The Caring Elder: A Training Manual for Serving* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986); Albert Collver, "Lay Elders—A Brief Overview of Their Origin in the Missouri Synod: Implications for Elders Today," *Concordia Journal* 30, no. 1 (2006)

² Jones, Bruce A. "Reclaiming the Biblical Role of Elders: Equipping the Saints to Lead the Local Congregation." DMin Diss. University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, 2011; Hagan, Robert. "Ministry to Inactives in a Large Congregation in a Rural/Small Town Setting." Concordia Seminary, 2011.

scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up are not found in any one resource. My MAP will put these four skills together so that any board of lay elders can study and grow in these areas.

Second my MAP is unique because it seeks to help develop the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. Many other books on the role of lay elders simply state what lay elders do. For instance, they may say that lay elders care for members of the congregation. However, they never teach lay elders *how* to care for them. My goal is to help lay elders accomplish caring for members of the congregation with the use of these spiritual care skills.

Literature Review

Defining the Role of an Elder

For two thousand years, since the mother church in Jerusalem, the Christian Church has had lay leaders serve in the Church. An example of this is seen in Acts 6 where Stephan and other laymen were chosen to serve in the Church. The New Testament sometimes calls these men deacons. Deacons are men who served in the church but were distinct from the pastoral office. Deacons might be considered equivalent to our modern day lay elder.³ For roughly two hundred years Lutherans in America have had an office of lay elder in the Church.⁴ You might think that in two thousand years of Christendom and the last two hundred years of Lutheranism you would find an agreed upon definition of the role of a lay elder. However, the role of lay elders is as different and unique as the body of Christ. For instance, in my own family I have two brothers who are pastors. I asked each brother what the role of a lay elder is in their

³ A more thorough discussion of this topic will be taken up in chapter 3 of this MAP.

⁴ Collver, "Lay Elders," 40.

congregation. My older brother, Rev. John Schultz, said that at his congregation, St. John in Plymouth, WI, lay elders have the responsibilities to care for the pastors and the members of the congregation. They also oversee worship in conjunction with the pastors. They also oversee Stephen Ministry. However, the Board of Elders is not a governing board.⁵ When speaking with my younger brother, Rev. Jacob Schultz, he said that his congregation, Concordia in Kirkwood, Missouri, that they do not even have a Board of Elders. They only have a Board of Directors.⁶ In my own congregation, the Board of Elders has the responsibility to care for the pastor and the members of the congregation. They also oversee worship in conjunction with the pastor. However, the Board of Elders is also a governing board. They determine salaries, hire staff, and oversee the preschool.⁷ In just three different congregations we find two different roles of a lay elder and in one case a congregation which has no lay elders at all. This highlights the challenge of defining the role of a lay elder.

One reason for the difficulty of defining a lay elder is the fact that the Bible does not mandate the office of lay elder but instead only mandates the office of pastor.⁸ Walther in his work, *Church and Ministry*, gives a helpful understanding of the role of a lay elder. Walther says in Thesis VIII, “The Pastoral Ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church.”⁹ Although a lay elder is not mandated in scripture Walther recognized that auxiliary offices, such as a lay elder, are beneficial to the Church in carrying out the ministry. In 1864, Walther defined the role of a lay elder as, “those who do not work in the

⁵ Rev. John Schultz, personal conversation, August 1, 2020.

⁶ Rev. Jacob Schultz, personal conversation, August 1, 2020.

⁷ St. Paul Lutheran Church, *Constitution and By-Laws*, 28.

⁸ Constien, *The Caring Elder*, 9

⁹ C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry: Witness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*. Translated by T.J Mueller. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1987), 289.

Word or in the Teaching, but are to help those who are in the Office of the Word in the rule and in the administration of discipline and order in the congregation.”¹⁰ Walther’s work on the topic of lay elders has shaped how many Lutherans understand lay elders today. For instance, Victor Constien makes a similar point about the role of lay elders when he says,

elders are not assistant pastors. They assist their pastor. They are not officially called to perform the Office of the Keys. They work closely with the pastor, who is called to perform this office. We might say that elders are assistants to the pastor. They help generate excitement and support for the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.¹¹

Arthur Clement also sees lay elders as an auxiliary officer. He defines the role of a lay elder simply as, “charged with assisting the pastor in the spiritual care of God’s people in the local congregation.”¹²

Since a lay elder is not a mandated office but rather an auxiliary office the role of a lay elder becomes different for every congregation. Lay elders simply get to do whatever the congregation needs or desires them to do. Since their office is not mandated each congregation has the Christian freedom to assign them whatever duties that they wish.¹³ Although free to establish unique roles to lay elders most Lutheran congregations in America agree that the role and duties of a lay elder generally involve assisting the pastor in caring for the members of the congregation.

The majority of works on the role of a lay elder agree that the general duties of a lay elder include care of the pastor, care of the spiritual life of the members, calling and visiting members, and maintaining membership records. Clement says that he chose these roles because they are

¹⁰ Collver, “Lay Elders,” 46.

¹¹ Constien, *Caring Elder*, 10.

¹² Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistants*, 10.

¹³ Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistants*, 11.

the duties that were found in numerous constitutions and bylaws in congregations in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as well those that fit reasonable importance.¹⁴ I would agree with Clement that these duties are the general duties of a lay elder. These duties are all reflected in the constitution and bylaws in my parish, St. Paul Lutheran in Wood River, IL.

The Lay Elders' Role in Caring for the Pastor

In many congregations the lay elders are charged with being the ones to care for the pastor. Often the pastor is the one who does the caring. At times, people can forget that the pastor needs to be cared for too. In one sense, every member of the congregation should care for the pastor. However, as Bruce Hartung said, "When everyone is responsible, no one is responsible."¹⁵ Therefore, many congregations, including St. Paul have designated the Board of Elders to be in charge of caring for their pastor. Some ways that lay elders can care for their pastor is by supporting the pastor in supervising the doctrine and practice of the congregation, serving as special assistants to the pastor helping him in various ministry needs. Lay elders can also care for the pastor personally by keeping him and his family in their prayers and being approachable so that the pastor has someone he can confide in and share his concerns.¹⁶

The Lay Elders' Role in the Care of the Spiritual Life of the Members

The lay elders are charged with the spiritual care of the members of the congregation. The heart of spiritual care flows from the divine service. Therefore, it is important for lay elders to be in worship to receive the gifts of God so that they can take those gifts of the Gospel to the

¹⁴ Clement, *Shepherd's Assistants*, 11.

¹⁵ Ted Kober, *Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 201.

¹⁶ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 27.

members of the congregation. Some of the ways that lay elders can care for the members of the congregation are by praying for them, encouraging them to attend worship and Bible class, and to visit with them and listen to their needs.¹⁷

Lay Elders' Role in Calling and Visiting Members

Many congregations have divided their congregation into elder groups. Each lay elder is assigned to several families in the congregation. He assists the pastor in providing special spiritual care to these families. Some of the ways lay elders carry out this task is by sending cards on special events such as birthdays and anniversaries, making visits such as home, hospital, or shut-in, introducing new members to current members, and assisting new members with assimilating into the congregation.¹⁸

Lay Elders' Role in Membership Records

A final general role of a lay elder is to make sure that the membership records are in good order. One of the easiest ways to care for members of the congregation is to have an active up to date list of all current members and contact information. Without a list of membership information some members may be forgotten about. Lay elders also approve membership changes such as transfer in and out, membership releases, and adult instruction. Finally, lay elders meet regularly to discuss membership concerns and how best to reach out and care for brothers and sisters in Christ.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 30

¹⁸ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 34

¹⁹ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 36.

A Need for Training

These generally agreed upon duties of a lay elder are extensive. Still, many congregations have unique roles that are additionally assigned to their Board for Elders. For instance, at St. Paul Lutheran in Wood River, IL, the lay elders are tasked with these general roles plus they are also responsible for overseeing our preschool. Since a lay elder is responsible for many areas in the life of the parish there is a great need for training. Unfortunately, what often happens is that lay elders receive little to no training. Instead, they receive a baptism by fire as they are thrown into the role and left to figure out the odds and ends by themselves. Clement expresses this truth when he says,

[elders] do not benefit as [the pastor] does from formal training in the ministry of the Word. At times the lack of training actually hinders the elder in carrying out his duties with efficiency and effectiveness. It is sad but true that many a situation has been lost in dealing with church members under discipline simply for the reason that the right words were not spoken at the right moment. This occurred because the elder had little knowledge of how to meet and talk with the people he was asked to counsel. The need is surely there for thoroughly trained church elders.²⁰

Constien echoes a similar statement when he says,

Parish constitutions and bylaws sometimes do little more than state briefly the elders' duties. Orientation or training sessions for elders may be superficial, if conducted at all. However, the elders of a congregation need and deserve more than a handshake to welcome them to their jobs.²¹

At St. Paul in Wood River, lay elder training is limited to handing the new lay elders a handbook which talks about Sunday morning procedures as well as a short lesson on how to set up for Holy Communion.²² However, new lay elders are not trained in all other duties. Instead, they are expected to figure it out along the way.

²⁰ Clement, *Shepherd's Assistant*, iii.

²¹ Constien, *Caring Elder*, 5.

²² St. Paul Lutheran Church, *Board of Elders Handbook: Procedures and Policies* (Wood River, IL: St. Paul Lutheran Church, 2013).

I agree with these authors that lay elders need to be trained. If the lay elders are poorly trained or have received no training at all this can create problems in the congregation. It might create practical problems as certain tasks and functions do not get completed, such as unlocking the church doors on Sunday morning or failing to set up Holy Communion. More than physical problems a lack of training can also create cultural and relational problems, such as new members not greeted or felt welcomed, members not visited or checked up on, the pastor not being cared for. Without proper training the lay elders will not be able to fulfil their duties properly and appropriately. When that happens, there are bigger consequences than just the lay elder's reputation. Rather, when lay elders fail to do their duties the members of the congregation get hurt. Small things slip through the cracks, relationships fail to be nurtured, and God's gifts might not get delivered to His people. Training is of utmost importance.

Focus on the Role of Care

Recent authors such as Clement, Constien, and Mech have written books that serve as a handbook for training lay elders in how to do their work in the life of the parish. These resources do a fine job of training a lay elder for general duties in the parish. However, one element that seems to be lacking is member care. Although each author describes the necessity for member care there is little to no details about *how* a lay elder cares for the members of the congregation. Mech in his book, *Pastors and Elders*, does a better job of describing how a lay elder can care. Mech suggests that a lay elder should call members and state his name, listens tentatively to the individual, and close with a prayer. Mech also provides some video examples of what member care visits might look like.²³ However, even Mech allots just one page in his book to describe

²³ Timothy J. Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 34.

how to care for the members of the congregation. In my MAP I want to expand upon the work of Clement, Constien, Mech and others who write about the role of a lay elder and the need for training. I would like to explore how to train lay elders specifically in their role in offering spiritual care for the members of the congregation. I believe in order to offer spiritual care the necessary skills lay elders need to learn are active listening, sharing scripture, prayer, and follow up.

Active Listening, Sharing Scripture, Offering Prayer, and Providing Follow up

One of the chief duties of a lay elder is to provide spiritual care to the members of the congregation. Ken Haugk in his work on Stephen Ministry defines spiritual care as, “helping people to hear and believe that God loves them.”²⁴ Haugk goes on to say that those who offer care understand that the abilities of those who offer care are necessary, but never enough. True spiritual care comes from hearing God’s Word and trusting in His promises.²⁵ John Kleinig in his book, *Spirituality for Today*, makes a similar point to Haugk when he says, “Christian spirituality is, quite simply, following Jesus.”²⁶ If spirituality is following Jesus, then spiritual care is helping others to follow and see Jesus. Perhaps, Harold Senkbeil gives the best understanding of spiritual care as he says,

The whole process of the care of souls, as I mentioned in chapter one, revolves around the operation of the Holy Spirit. You and I as spiritual physicians are not interested in generic “spirituality.” According to Scripture, what is truly “spiritual” flows from the person and work of the Holy Spirit...And when we speak, we need more than human wisdom; we need instruction from God’s own Spirit by means of his word.²⁷

²⁴ Stephen Ministries and Kenneth C Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 2000), 661.

²⁵ Stephen Ministry and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 662.

²⁶ John W. Kleinig, *Grace upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 23.

²⁷ Senkbeil, *Care of Souls*, 54

As lay elders offer spiritual care to the members of the congregation, they offer more than kind words, they lead people to Jesus.

There are many situations that lay elders find themselves in where there is a need for providing care to the members of the congregation. Some of those situations include hospital visits, shut-in visits, home visits, phone calls, and even small conversations following the worship service on Sunday morning. Each of these situations are different and unique and a lay elder will need to handle them with proper care. With so many different care situations it might be overwhelming to have to learn how to care for an individual in each situation. However, I believe that if a lay elder learns the four skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer and providing follow up he will be able to use these basic skills in any spiritual care situation. Whether he goes to the hospital, visits a member in their home, or simply makes a phone call, he can use these four skills and be able to provide real spiritual care for the members of the congregation.

Active Listening

One of the first steps in providing any kind of care to an individual is active listening. Even secular professionals agree that active listening is an important component in care. In her introduction to counseling book Jan Sutton says, “Active listening is a powerful tool for improving understanding. It enhances mutual trust and respect; it demonstrates interest in the client and illustrates that you are keen to hear about and grasp, the client’s situation.”²⁸

According to Sutton active listening is more than just simply hearing what the other person has to say. Instead, active listening uses all our senses to gain a full picture of what an individual is

²⁸ Jan Sutton and William Stewart, *Learning to Counsel: Develop the Skills, Insight and Knowledge to Counsel Others* (Oxford: How to Books, 2010), 84.

sharing.²⁹

Christian professionals also agree that active listening is an important component in providing spiritual care. Although listening might seem like a basic skill it is actually a powerful caregiving tool.³⁰ Ken Haugk suggests that in order to be a good listener a person must have desire, commitment, and purpose. A person must have a desire to listen. They cannot fake it or go through the motions. A person must also have a commitment to listening. They must be disciplined to commit to care for the person even when they are tired or not wanting to listen. Finally, to be a good active listener a person must be patient. They cannot rush an individual or try to speak too soon. They must patiently wait for them to share everything they desire to share.³¹

Active listening also involves reflecting what an individual has said. In a way, those who are actively listening are serving as mirrors showing an individual what they hear and see.³² Although listening is an important part of spiritual care it is not helpful to simply listen and not respond.³³ Reflecting is a way of listening to what someone has said and then summarizing it in your own words for them. Reflecting is a useful tool in active listening as it helps those providing care to know how well they heard an individual and it can also help individuals receiving care who might not have known or realized that what is reflected back to them is how they feel.³⁴

As lay elders offer spiritual care to the members of the congregation, active listening is an

²⁹ Sutton and Stewart, *Learning to Counsel*, 85.

³⁰ Stephen Ministries and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 39.

³¹ Stephen Ministries and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 40-41

³² Stephen Ministries and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 44.

³³ Sutton and Stewart, *Learning to Counsel*, 40.

³⁴ Stephen Ministries and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 47.

important part of that care. Constien says, “Elders who visit with parish members in order first of all to listen to them help build reconciling relationships. We know from our own experience that we are more likely to trust a person who really hears us. Elders gain the trust of the people in their zone by actively listening to them.”³⁵ Mech makes a similar point when he says that the main purpose of a visit is to listen to people. It is important to listen to others without evaluating them, judging them, or trying to solve their problems.³⁶

Harold Senkbeil in his pastoral theology book says that when a pastor offers spiritual care the first step he takes is to listen. He listens not just with his ears but with his whole being. The pastor must practice patience and tact while providing spiritual care. He should not be too hasty with solutions to problems. Instead, he should watch and listen.³⁷ Senkbeil’s advice for pastors is also applicable to lay elders who assist the pastor in caring for the spiritual needs of the congregation. As lay elders go out and serve God’s people it is important that they are slow to speak and quick to listen. As they listen, they show care for God’s people. As they listen, they will be well suited to provide true care as they in turn point people to Christ and His promises for them.

Sharing Scripture

It was my first year at Concordia Seminary. I was taking a class called *Synoptic Gospels* with Dr. James Voelz. One day in class he gave a surprise quiz. Unfortunately, no one in class was prepared and most of us did fairly poorly on the quiz. I remember distinctively Dr. Voelz

³⁵ Constien, *Caring Elder*, 43.

³⁶ Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, 35.

³⁷ Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls*, 68-69

saying, “You have to know stuff to be a pastor.”³⁸ Dr. Voelz’ words of the need of knowing things are important in providing spiritual care. Although active listening is a great place to start and an important part of spiritual care, if that’s where the care ends then the individual doesn’t receive the care they need. After listening, a lay elder needs to respond. They need to know something and share it with the person they are caring for. They need to know the Scriptures.

Clement talks about the grave importance of caring for an individual is the fact that these people are ones whom Christ died for. He goes on to say that the greatest tool we have to care for people is a thorough understanding of God’s Word.³⁹ Senkbeil makes a similar point when he says, “The word of God is the sole source and norm of all teaching in the church and therefore the sole source and norm for all pastoral work.”⁴⁰ Although people skills, winsomeness, and small pleasantries are great ways to connect and build trust with an individual, these are never substitutes for God’s Word. God’s Word is always the core and focus of spiritual care. Haugk agrees with this as certain as he says, “The most important activity in spiritual care is God’s activity.”⁴¹ Senkbeil also says, “If you and I are to be true physicians of souls in these dark and foreboding times, we’ll need tools for accurate diagnosis.” He goes on to say, “The only tools I had been given: the firm sure promises of the word of God and his precious sacraments.”⁴² As lay elders learn to care for God’s people, the core of their care is sharing God’s Word and His promises.

Although most agree that sharing scripture is an important part of lay elders giving spiritual

³⁸ James Voelz, “Synoptic Gospels”, Class notes, Spring 2011.

³⁹ Clement, *Shepherd’s Assistant*, 29.

⁴⁰ Senkbeil, *Care of Souls*, 37.

⁴¹ Stephen Ministries and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 661.

⁴² Senkbeil, *Care of Souls*, 40 and 50.

care, many writers do not demonstrate *how* elders do that. Many lay elders are left staring at the Bible overwhelmed by its many pages and unaware of which passage to use or how to use it with the people they are caring for.

One author, Lawrence Richards, has developed an easy to remember lesson plan for sharing the scripture with others. Richards' model is called hook, book, look, took (HBLT). In this model the teacher begins the lesson by getting the student's attention. Next the teacher and the student explore the Bible together and gather basic information from the passage. Third, the teacher and the student look at how this Bible passage relates truths and applications to everyday life. Finally, the teacher leads the student to specific actions or life change.⁴³ Richards' HBLT model could be used by a lay elder to share scripture. One problem with this approach is that a lay elder would need to be prepared with a certain Bible passage before his care visit. However, what often happens is that the Word of God you believe you should share before the visit is often different than the Word of God you need to share after your visit begins. Another problem with this approach is that it can be too rigid. It doesn't give flexibility of change once you start meeting with an individual.

Sometimes the best way to share the scriptures with an individual who needs spiritual care is to use a Christian resource. Unfortunately, sometimes lay elders are nervous or reluctant to use resources. Some lay elders feel that if they read a prayer, it is not as good as if it were spoken from the heart. It is important for lay elders to remember that Christian resources are not a second class attempt at spiritual care. Rather they are a resource at a lay elder's disposal to bring the Word of God to bear. Lay elders should rejoice in resources as aids and helps. In a similar way doctors use, stethoscopes, x-ray machines, etc.. When lay elders care for others they can

⁴³ Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1970), 170–77.

proudly use resources and tools as well.⁴⁴

There are many resources that lay elders can use to share scripture with others. Some of those resources include *Lutheran Service Book*,⁴⁵ *Luther's Small Catechism*,⁴⁶ *Pastoral Care Companion*,⁴⁷ *Visitation*,⁴⁸ and *Hope When Your Heart Breaks*.⁴⁹ Mech in his introductory video encourages resources especially simple Lutheran resources such as the hymnal and the small catechism. These are resources that every Lutheran has read during confirmation and sung on Sunday mornings. These are easy practical ways to connect scripture to people's lives.⁵⁰

Another way that lay elders can share Scripture is by writing down ahead of time certain Bible passages. There is no shame in being prepared, in fact it is encourage. It can be helpful to identify several passages on a variety of topics such as comfort, guilt, sin, hope, etc. One resource that can assist lay elders in finding these passages is *Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling* by John Kruis. In his book, Kruis identifies several categories of scripture and gives numerous helpful Bible references.

Sharing scripture is an important part of spiritual care because through the Word Jesus himself is present. Lay elders who desire to care for the spiritual needs of God's people need to bring God's Word to their lives. Lay elders do this by being in Bible Study and growing in their own faith. Through Bible study they learn passages they can share with those they care for. Lay

⁴⁴ Kenneth C. Haugk, *Christian Caregiving-a Way of Life* (St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 2013), 102.

⁴⁵ The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, ed., *Lutheran Service Book*, Pew ed (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006).

⁴⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism, with Explanation* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2017).

⁴⁷ The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and Commission on Worship, *Pastoral Care Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007).

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

⁴⁹ Michael W. Newman, *Hope When Your Heart Breaks: Navigating Grief and Loss* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017).

⁵⁰ Timothy J. Mech, *Pastors and Elders*, Video Introduction

elders can also use a vast amount of resources as aids in sharing God's Word.

Offering Prayer

Prayer is a powerful tool for spiritual care. God's people have been given this wonderful gift of prayer. This gift gives us access to the most powerful person in the universe, our God. When we pray, we have a direct line to the Father and He promises to hear us, listen to our opinions, and even change His course of action based on our prayers. With such a power tool, when we pray for others, we are doing far more than all the leaders of the world with their political activity.⁵¹

As lay elders care for the spiritual needs of the members of the congregation an important skill to have is prayer. After lay elders have listened to the concerns of those they are caring for and have shared with them God's Word for their life, lay elders, and those they care for get to take those concerns to the Lord. Most authors agree that prayer is an important duty of a lay elder. For instance, Clement lists six things that a lay elder should pray for as part of his duty.⁵² Although most everyone agrees that lay elders should pray, but very few offer advice or training on *how* lay elders should pray. Thus, causing many lay elders to feel lost, uncertain, or awkward when asked to pray. They do not know where to begin or what to say. Lay elders should not be discouraged. Even Jesus' disciples needed to learn how to pray.⁵³

In 1535, Martin Luther wrote a short letter to his barber teaching him how to pray. Luther suggested that a simple way to pray involved 4 parts: instruction, thanksgiving, confession, and prayer. First, Luther would read a passage of scripture and then he would meditate on what the

⁵¹ Kleinig, *Grace upon Grace*. 153-156

⁵² Clement, *Shepherd's Assistants*. 24

⁵³ Luke 11:1-4

passage was teaching him. Then he would give thanks for what the passage taught. Next, he would confess how he failed to keep that passage of scripture. Finally, he would use the passage to say a prayer. For Luther, this was a simple and easy way to pray.⁵⁴ Lay elders could easily use Luther's structure on prayer when offering spiritual care. This would be a helpful structure to enable lay elders to know what to say.

Another simple way to pray is the collect. A collect prayer is one of the earliest forms of liturgical prayer. A collect prayer "collects" or focuses the prayer on the theme of the day. In the setting of spiritual care, the collect prayer would focus on the spiritual need of the person being cared for. A collect prayer has five parts: the address, the rationale, the petition, the benefit, and the conclusion. A collect prayer begins by addressing the prayer to God. Then the collect moves to the reason why God is being addressed. Next the petition or request is made. Then the collect prayer states the expected consequence of this request. Finally, the prayer ends with a trinitarian conclusion.⁵⁵ A collect prayer may be useful to a lay elder because it has a structure and the lay elder could simply fill in the five parts.

Another way a lay elder can pray is with an ACTS prayer. An ACTS prayer has 4 parts: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. An acts prayer begins with addressing God. Then the prayer moves to confessing sins. Next the prayer gives thanks to God. Finally, the prayer makes specific requests to God. An ACTS prayer is another structured prayer that a lay elder can use which allows him to plug in parts into the prayer.

As with sharing scripture, resources are also a great way to pray. There is no shame in

⁵⁴ Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray: For Peter, the Master Barber*. Translated by Matthew Harrison. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2012), 3–5.

⁵⁵ Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests: A Guide to Worship in the Lutheran Church*, 2nd ed (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 415–16.

memorizing a prayer ahead of time, praying written prayers, or reading one out of a book. Some resources for prayers include *Pastoral Care Companion*,⁵⁶ *Visitation*,⁵⁷ *Starck's Prayer Book*,⁵⁸ *Lutheran Book of Prayer*,⁵⁹ *Lutheran Service Book*,⁶⁰ and of course the chief prayer, The Lord's Prayer.

Prayer is a valuable tool for spiritual care. It should not be left unused because lay elders are untrained. It should not be used as a means to end a conversation. Rather, prayer should be used and treasured as a wonderful gift from Jesus. When we pray, we take people to Him, and He promises to hear us and answer us.

Providing Follow up

Follow up is an important part of spiritual care. Sometimes when a lay elder gives spiritual care to a member of the congregation one encounter is enough. More often than not however a lay elder who offers spiritual care will need to follow up after their visit. Follow up involves two things. First, lay elders check in with the pastor so that they can care for the members of the congregation together. Second, lay elders check back in with those they have cared for in the past.

Lay elders always need to work with the pastor. They do not need to share confidential information. However, it is important that the pastor knows how he can join the lay elder in caring for the members of the congregation. Sometimes, the spiritual care that the member of the

⁵⁶ Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and Commission on Worship, *Pastoral Care Companion*.

⁵⁷ Just and Kinnaman, *Visitation*.

⁵⁸ Johann Friedrich Starck, W. H. T. Dau, and William Weedon, *Starck's Prayer Book: From the German Edition of Dr. F. Pieper*, Rev. Concordia ed (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009).

⁵⁹ *Lutheran Book of Prayer*, Rev. ed (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005).

⁶⁰ The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book*.

congregation needs is more than the lay elder can offer. At that time, it is important for the lay elder to continue to be a good active listener and then the lay elder needs to encourage the member to talk with the pastor. It is also important that the lay elder informs the pastor of the parishioner's need so that the pastor can be proactive and contact or visit the member. This is not a weakness in the lay elder. Rather, a strength that the lay elder knows he needs more help. In fact, there are times the pastor will need help and will refer a member to a professional counselor.⁶¹

Ken Haugk in his book *Stephen Ministry Training Manual* writes about the necessity of follow up. Haugk encourages Stephen ministers, those who offer spiritual care, to meet twice a month for two and a half hours in a small group to discuss how best to care for those they are caring for. During these meetings names and details which could identify a person are left out. However, Stephen ministers report back how their caring relationship is going. During these meetings other Stephen ministers give feedback and support for how to best continue to offer care.⁶²

Ted Kober makes a similar point regarding lay elders. He encourages all lay elders to offer spiritual care for the members of the congregation. These visits can be home visits, phone calls, etc. After the visit is over, Kober suggests that lay elders follow up with their Board of Elders and the pastor so that everyone is informed, and the pastor can know how best to continue to offer care.⁶³

Another important part of follow up is checking back in with the member who receives care. After an initial visit, sending a card, saying hello at worship, or scheduling another visit

⁶¹ Sutton and Stewart, *Learning to Counsel*, 78.

⁶² Stephen Ministries and Haugk, *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, 374-375.

⁶³ Kober, *Built on the Rock*, 258.

strengthens the relationship between lay elder and parishioner.

Summary

We have seen in this chapter that the role of a lay elder is difficult to define. Each congregation assigns general duties as well as unique duties that suit the congregations needs. Although most agree that one of the general duties of a lay elder is to offer spiritual care for the members of the congregation there are little resources that share *how* a lay elder offers care. Lay elders need training in order to offer the best care. Building off the work of others, I believe that if lay elders learn the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up they will be well suited to offer spiritual care to the members of the congregation.

In my next chapter I will explore theologically spiritual care in the scriptures and make a theological case for lay elders. I will also look at the history of lay elders in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Finally, I will look at the history of lay elders in my own congregation, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PROJECT IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The scriptures are filled with the practice of care. They begin with creation as God cares for His people in the garden of Eden and they end with God recreating this fallen world and caring for His people for all eternity. From beginning to end the scriptures are about God's loving care for His people. His loving care is centered in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

God cares for the spiritual needs of people by providing to them His means of grace. These means are delivered to people through other people, those whom God appoints as His agents of care. God calls pastors to preach and teach His Word and administer His sacraments. These men also provide spiritual care to others in visitation and counseling. But God also uses lay people, including and especially lay elders, to deliver care through the "mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters".¹

This MAP is about how lay elders can learn to provide spiritual care for people. Specifically, it is about how they can care by active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. This chapter, the theological basis of this MAP, will explore two areas. First, I will explore care in the Scriptures. Specifically, I will explore how Jesus models care in his conversation with the woman at the well in John 4. I will also examine Acts 6 where the apostles raise up lay leaders to care for people. Finally, I will examine Colossians 3 where St. Paul encourages all Christians to care for one another by virtue of their baptism into Christ Jesus.

The second area for the theological basis of this MAP will be a systematic study of the

¹Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 319

Office of the Ministry and the duty of its occupants to provide spiritual care. In this study, I will make a theological case for lay elders. I will make a case that the Office of the Ministry delegates spiritual care to lay people. For the sake of the Church, lay people are needed to serve by caring for others.

Biblical and Theological Foundation

Spiritual Care in the Scriptures

John 4

This MAP is about how lay elders can learn to provide spiritual care for people. Therefore, it is fitting as I lay a theological foundation for spiritual care that we examine how Jesus cared for people in the scriptures. One place we observe Jesus caring for a person is in John chapter 4 with the woman at the well.

Many commentators when reflecting on John chapter 4 tend to theologize the narrative. They skip over the real woman who is at the well and boil down Jesus' exchange with her to a teaching about living water and what it means to worship in spirit and truth. In my own church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Dr. Weinrich makes this allegorical claim in his commentary on John when he states,

It is wholly reasonable to detect in the mention of the five husbands an allusion to the five heathen nations who, with their gods, had been displaced and settled in Samaria. According to 2 Kings 17, after the king of Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and capture Samaria, he exiled many of the Israelites ... The Assyrian monarch then resettled people from five nations in the cities of Samaria (2 Ki 17:24) ... The man whom you have who is not your husband (John 4:18) may allude to the syncretism of Samaritan worship of Yahweh.²

Michaels, however, rejects the allegorical reading of the passage because, “This interpretation

² William C. Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 490–91.

reduces the woman to a mere symbol or representative of “Samaria.”³ Dr. Schmitt, in his work *Telling God’s Story* makes the case that a danger in sharing the scriptures is that preachers telescope God’s story. They share only fragments of God’s Word and reduce it down to basic teachings and fail to deliver the larger story of God.⁴ Although I do agree with Dr. Weinrich that this narrative in John 4 teaches us that Jesus is the living water and that Jesus is the one we worship in spirit and truth,⁵ I also believe the larger story reveals to us something more. In John 4, we witness Jesus offering spiritual care.

Many commentators view the woman at the well as one who has committed serious sin. For instance, Weinrich believes that Jesus reveals her sin to demonstrate that he is a true prophet.⁶ Likewise, Köstenberger says that this woman is looked down on by her community for her low reputation.⁷ However, Schmitt rightly understands that the woman at the well, although a sinner, is more victim than harlot. The woman at the well comes to the well alone at noon during the heat of the day. Normally, women would come to the well early in the morning in the cool of the day. They would also come in a group with other women. Since this woman at the well comes by herself at an inappropriate time it signals the shame and the reputation she has in the community. Schmitt views her five husbands as those who have taken advantage of her. They have used her and discarded her from one guy to the next. Finally, she is with a man who won’t even show her the respect of claiming her as his wife. This woman is not a harlot. Rather, she is

³ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 247.

⁴ David Schmitt, “Telling God’s Story,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 2 (2014): 13, 109.

⁵ Weinrich, *John 1*, 498.

⁶ Weinrich, *John 1*, 490.

⁷ Andreas Köstenberger. *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 148.

one who is hurting and in desperate need for spiritual care.⁸

Into this woman's life comes Jesus. The rest of the town looks on her with derision, yet Jesus engages her in conversation. When everyone else avoids this woman, Jesus listens to her. When the woman challenges Jesus and asks Him questions Jesus engages her and does not dismiss her or walk away from the conversation. He witnesses her struggle, not just for water at a well, but in life. He cares for her and offers her something greater than water. Jesus who is the Word of God made flesh offers to her Words of life. He offers living water which when she drinks of it, she will never be thirsty again. Bruce Schuchard says that the living water is Jesus, His death and resurrection poured out for her.⁹ Jesus tells her what matters is not where you worship but that you worship in spirit and in truth.

In this narrative of the woman at the well we witness several actions of Jesus in how He cares for the woman. First, Jesus listens. He does not avoid her. He does not give her one-word answers. He genuinely listens to her and cares for her needs. Second, Jesus shares God's Word. He certainly alludes to Old Testament passages such as Ezek. 47 with streams of living water flowing from the temple. But even more, Jesus is the Word of God. He shares God's revelation that He is the Messiah. He is the source of living water and what matters is faith in Him. Third, in verse 40, after His conversation with the woman he stays two days with her and the town. Jesus follows up. He does not just have one conversation, but His care for the woman and the town is seen in his desire to strengthen their faith in Him through multiple encounters. Jesus does not solve all her needs. Her reputation does not suddenly disappear. However, Jesus provides for her the spiritual care she needs. He restores her soul as He shares with her what is needed for

⁸ David Schmitt, "Gospel: John 4:5-26 (27-30, 39-42) (Lent 3: Series A)," 1517, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.1517.org/articles/gospel-john-45-26-27-30-39-42-lent-3-series-a?token=32>.

⁹ Bruce Schuchard. "John and the Catholic Epistles", Class notes, October 13, 2014.

eternal life, Himself.

Acts 6:1–6

The scriptures reveal God’s loving care for His people. God’s care for His people is seen clearly in John 4. It is also seen clearly in the scriptures that Jesus’ followers care for people too. One place we see people caring for other people is in Acts 6. In Acts 6 we hear a descriptive account of the early church. There are people who are in need and the people of God respond by caring for them.

A problem developed amongst the early Christians. Among the disciples of Jerusalem there were two groups. There were Hebrew speaking believers and Greek (Hellenist) speaking believers. The problem was not over theological issues but practical issues. A complaint arose from the Hellenists that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.¹⁰ As the church was rapidly growing the need to care for people became more than the twelve apostles could care for on their own. The twelve needed more help in providing care.

Rather than neglect the widows a solution was developed to appoint seven men to serve and care for the widows and to supervise the daily distribution. Those selected were to be men of good repute and full of the Spirit and wisdom. “This is done so that the more important tasks, ‘prayer and the ministry of the word,’ may continue without distraction for those of the Twelve.”¹¹

There has been some debate about the role or office that these seven men were put into. Most commentators, however, rightly agree that these seven are distinct from the pastoral office.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, Rev. ed. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 120.

¹¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol. 31, *The Acts of the Apostles*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 344.

F.F. Bruce argues that many connect Acts 6 to the institution of the office of deacons, although the word deacon is never used in this text.¹² Robert H. Smith writes, "The Seven are not called deacons, although their qualifications are similar to those laid down for that office (1 Tim. 3:7–8).¹³ David Peterson also says, "These seven men were not ordained to an office but were commissioned to fulfill a specific administrative task. In due course, the roles of Stephen and Philip changed, so that they became preachers like the apostles."¹⁴ In my own church body, C.F.W. Walther makes the case that Acts 6 is not describing the pastoral office but the role of laity.¹⁵

I agree with the commentators above that the seven listed in Acts 6 are laity and not members of the pastoral office. Therefore, this narrative of Acts 6 demonstrates how laity care for one another. Laity work with the pastoral office to make sure the needs of the members of the congregation are met. The need for care in the congregation is too great for any one pastor to do by himself. Therefore, all laity by virtue of being disciples of Jesus are called to care for others.

In these short six verses we see descriptive actions of disciples caring for fellow disciples. The early church cared by listening. There was a complaint that a need was not being met. Although the need might fall second to the need to share God's Word the need was still real and had to be addressed. The early church listens, engages, and responds. We also see in this passage laity providing care through follow up. The need for the daily distribution to be given to all people including the Hellenists widows is not a one-time need. This is a daily, weekly, monthly need. This kind of care will involve intentional and purposeful care. Although we don't hear if

¹² Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 122.

¹³ Robert H Smith, *Acts* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 111.

¹⁴ David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Nottingham, England: Eerdmans, 2009), 235.

¹⁵ Collver, "Lay Elders," 46.

the seven offer any prayer or sharing of scripture with those whom they care for it can be assumed that as men full of the Spirit they would also offer comfort from their God in the form of prayer and the sharing of His Word.

Colossians 3:1–4, 12–15

Acts 6 is a descriptive narrative of how the early church cared for fellow believers who were in need. In other passages of the New Testament, St. Paul gives prescriptive narratives of how all Christians are called to care for one another. One of those passages is found in Col. 3. This chapter goes together as one unit. However, for the sake of this study I have decided to focus closely on verses 1–4 and 12–17 which specifically talk about how Christians are called to care for fellow Christians.

In Col. 3, Paul turns his attention to Christian instruction. Before he unpacks what Christian living looks like (vs. 12–15) he first grounds his instruction in the reality that took place in baptism (vs. 1–4).¹⁶ For Paul, baptism has changed the identity of followers of Jesus. Although Paul never mentions the word baptism the language he uses is dripping with baptismal language. For instance, he writes, “If then you have been raised with Christ” (3:1),¹⁷ he also writes, “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3). Paul’s language of dying and rising is parallel language to his discussion of baptism in Romans chapter six. This baptismal language is participatory language. For Paul Jesus has accomplished in His death and resurrection the work of salvation. Through baptism, disciples participate with Jesus in His death and resurrection and join Him in his victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil.¹⁸ Scot

¹⁶ Jeffrey Kloha, “006. Colossians 3:1-11,” *Colossians*, February 22, 2013, <https://scholar.csl.edu/lalcol/6>.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

¹⁸ Kloha, “Colossians 3.”

McKnight describes further the participator language of baptism when he says, “in their baptism they were dipped into the death of Jesus and arose from the water in union with him in his resurrection.”¹⁹

As those joined to Jesus in Baptism, Paul calls Christians to set their minds on things that are above. Jeff Kloha rightly attests that this is not a call to Gnosticism. Paul is not encouraging Christians to flee from this material world to a more spiritual world. Rather, Christians who are joined in the victory of Christ through their baptism are to have their minds set on the things of His kingdom and not on the things of the kingdoms of this world. Christians are supposed to think like Jesus.²⁰ “Their baptism incorporation has granted to them eternal salvation. The consequence of such a change in their future is a corresponding change in their present conduct.”²¹

After first grounding a Christian’s identity in their baptism Paul then turns in verse 12–15 to describe how a Christian’s life in Christ is lived out. St. Paul says,

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:12–15).

If a Christian is called to set their minds on the things above, then they are called to cloth themselves in the way of Christ. His ways are compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving, and love.²²

This Christian way of living is relational. These virtues are not accomplished by isolating

¹⁹ Scot McKnight, *The Letter to the Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 289.

²⁰ Kloha, “Colossians 3.”

²¹ Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2003), 138.

²² McKnight, *Letter to the Colossians*, 320.

from other people. They cannot be lived out individually but must be carried out in the context of a community. The Christian way of living is in service and care for other people.

One can display ‘a heart of compassion’ (3:12) only as he is willing to stoop down from the benefit of one in need. We only show ‘kindness’ (3:12) as we treat others with consideration for their feelings. A Christian evidences ‘humility’ (3:12) only by putting himself beneath another. Similarly, ‘gentleness’ (3:12) describes the way in which the believer is to treat other people. Likewise, we can practice ‘patience’ (3:12) only in contact with those whose conduct will try our patience. So also no one can practice ‘putting up with’ others or forgiving others (3:13) in isolation from them and their disagreeable and even hurtful conduct.²³

The greatest virtue of Christian living is love. For Paul, love is more than a feeling or an emotion that can be fleeting. Instead, love is a matter of the will. Love flows from our Lord Jesus who showed his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Love is sacrificial. Its putting someone ahead of yourself. That’s the kind of love that Jesus has for us and that’s the kind of love that Jesus calls us to love others with. To put their needs and their care above our wants and desires. Love is what binds all these other virtues together. Love is at the center of caring for fellow believers.²⁴

Col. 3 reveals how Christians are called to care for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. John 4 and Acts 6 are descriptive narratives that reveal how Jesus and the early church cared for people. In contrast, Col. 3 is a prescriptive text that reveals how all Christians throughout all time and place are called to care for others by virtue of their baptism into Christ. Therefore, since lay elders are baptized children of God, they are called to offer care to fellow believers.

Paul’s exhortation in Col. 3 is not categorized neatly into the four areas of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. Nevertheless, the Christian virtues he lists are characteristics of care. Lay elders who embody compassionate hearts, kindness,

²³ Deterding, *Colossians*, 156.

²⁴ Deterding, *Colossians*, 157.

humility, meekness, patience, bearing with others, forgiving others, and love will be well equipped to offer spiritual care. Compassion and humility will enable lay elders to actively listen. The virtues of humility and meekness will help lay elders find strength and confidence not in themselves but in the very Word of God. Love will give lay elders the desire to lift brothers and sisters in Christ before God's throne of grace and mercy in prayer. Love will cause lay elders to provide follow up so that fellow believers do not get forgotten but receive the continued care they need and deserve.

Conclusion

These three scripture passages demonstrate care in the scriptures. John 4 is a descriptive passage that shows how Jesus cares for the woman at the well. Acts 6, is also a descriptive passage that reveals how the early church cared for those who were in need. Finally, Col. 3 is a prescriptive passage where Paul exhorts Christians by virtue of being connected to Christ in their baptism to care for others. These passages of scripture show a theological foundation for spiritual care.

A Theological Case for Lay Elders

On the one hand, lay elders find a purpose and vocation individually as members of the priesthood of all believers. The apostle Peter while speaking to fellow Christians says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."²⁵ The royal priesthood of the New Testament is different than the priests in the Old Testament. The royal priesthood of the New Testament is not limited to a small group of people, like the

²⁵ 1 Peter 2:9

Levites in the Old Testament, instead it includes everyone who has been baptized into Christ Jesus. “God makes priests in Baptism.”²⁶ Therefore, all Christians, including lay elders, by virtue of their baptism are priests. The royal priesthood has a threefold job description; sacrifice, prayer, and teaching.²⁷

Members of the royal priesthood of all believers do not offer animal sacrifices. Instead, they offer spiritual sacrifices. “Spiritual sacrifices of the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), [include] the living sacrifices of their bodies (Rom. 12:1), sacrificial deeds of obedience (Heb. 13:16), sacrificial donations they offer for the support of others (Phil. 4:18) and the sacrifice of thanks and praise found on their lips (Heb. 13:15).”²⁸ Lay elders as members of the priesthood of all believers offer sacrificial deeds of support and care for those in need. They sacrifice time and resources to provide spiritual care for members of the congregation.

Members of the royal priesthood pray for the body of Christ. They are in constant prayer (1 Thess. 5:17) to the Father for themselves and for their neighbor with full confidence that God hears them. As a member of the royal priesthood, lay elders pray. They offer up prayer as a means of spiritual care for others.

Members of the royal priesthood teach. Specifically, they teach others about Christ! Lay elders share the Gospel. The Gospel is the only means that provides lasting care in this world. Lay elders share God’s Word, a means of grace delivered to people who so desperately need to hear it.

Lay elders serve as priests as they sacrifice their needs and wants for the sake of others,

²⁶ “The Royal Priesthood: Identity and Mission” (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, September 2018), 14.

²⁷ “The Royal Priesthood,” 15.

²⁸ “The Royal Priesthood,” 15.

pray for those in need, and proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. They serve as priests within the context of their vocations. They care for those in their family, neighborhood, circle of friends, occupation, city, and country. They share Christ personally within the context of the vocations that God has placed them into.

On the one hand, lay elders find a purpose and vocation individually as members of the priesthood of all believers. On the other hand, lay elders as an established chosen group of men find their role in the delegation of duties of the Office of the Ministry.

Articles 4 and 5 of the Augsburg Confession resemble a single unit. This is seen clearly by article 4 not condemning anything in its conclusion while every other article offers a condemnation. Article 4 is at the heart of being a Lutheran. Article 4 states,

we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work or satisfaction, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.²⁹

In Article 4, Philip Melanchthon argues that a person is justified not on account of their works, but by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Article 5 continues the unit by stating,

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, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe.³⁰

To obtain justifying faith, God instituted the preaching office. The preaching office is charged with proclaiming the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. Pastors are therefore, called by God to deliver His gifts of Word and Sacrament to His people. God delivers His forgiveness

²⁹ Kolb and Wengert, AC IV, 38 and 40.

³⁰ Kolb and Wengert, AC IV, 40

through the pastor. When a parishioner is looking for God's forgiveness he goes to His pastor.

Although all the baptized children of God get to serve Him as royal priests and offer spiritual care to fellow members of the body of Christ, God has intentionally called certain men to serve in a unique role in His church as pastors. These men are called to publicly proclaim God's Word and administer the Sacraments. This role is unique to the priesthood of all believers. All Christians are priests but not all Christians are pastors. Article 14 of the Augsburg confession states, "Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call."³¹

God cares for the spiritual needs of people by providing for them through His means of grace. God calls pastor to be His holy agents that publicly deliver His means of grace to His people. Therefore, the pastor's main purpose is to be the one who delivers God's gifts. By delivering God's means of grace the pastor provides spiritual care for the congregation.³²

As the one who delivers God's means of grace to His people the pastoral office is very important. C.F.W. Walther comments in his work on Church and Ministry that, "The pastoral ministry [*predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stem all other offices in the church."³³ Walther goes on to say,

When the Lord instituted the apostolate, He instituted only one office in the church, which embraces all others and by which the church of God should be provided for in every respect. Hence the highest office is that of the ministry of the Word, with which all other offices are also conferred at the same time. Every other public office in the church is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry, whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17 or the rulers (Rom. 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a

³¹ Kolb and Wengert, *AC XIV*, 46.

³² Joel Biermann, "Systems IV", Class Notes, March 10, 2015.

³³ Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289.

narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular person for special administration.³⁴

Thus, Walther argues that there is only one office in the church, that of the pastor. All other offices flow from the pastor's office. This is not to suggest that other offices or auxiliary offices are inferior to the pastoral office, but it is a recognition of where the auxiliary offices flow from.

God established the pastoral office so that His grace would be given to His people. In God's plan He also allows pastors to delegate duties to lay people so that the spiritual care of God's people can be fulfilled. In my own church body (LCMS) many pastors are extremely busy. There is plenty of work in the parish is to keep a pastor busy, preaching and teaching, counseling and offering spiritual care, meetings and activities, outreach and evangelism, and so on. However, with a shortage of pastors, the work becomes even greater. As of February 2021, the LCMS recorded 527 pastoral vacancies.³⁵ With so many vacant congregations many pastors are called upon to serve multiple congregations. In my own circuit four out of eleven congregations are currently vacant.³⁶ For the past fifteen months I have been serving as vacancy pastor for Faith Lutheran Church in Godfrey, IL. Which means I have 400 addition souls added to my care.

In many congregations there is simply too much work for any one pastor to accomplish, and more importantly there are too many souls for any one person to give appropriate care. Therefore, pastors delegate certain duties to lay leaders, especially to lay elders.

Walther encourages this practice in his work *The Form of a Christian Congregation*. He writes,

³⁴ Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 290

³⁵ "Pastoral Vacancy Statistics in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from September 1998 to February 2021" (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, February 2021).

³⁶ Faith – Godfrey, IL, St. Matthews – Brussels, IL, St. John – Kampsville, IL, Hope – Jerseyville, IL

A congregation shall also establish the office of such elders or overseers as do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine) but assist the incumbent of the office of the divine Word in ruling, discipling, and keeping order in the congregation.³⁷

In Walther’s work *Church and Ministry*, he cites Acts 6 as an example of the pastoral office delegating duties to lay elders.

Hence at Jerusalem the holy apostles in the beginning administer not only the pastoral office but also that of the deacons until the growth of the congregation made it necessary that this office should be entrusted to others in order to reliever the apostles (Acts 6:1-6).³⁸

Lay elders receive their role out of the pastoral office. Lay elders work alongside the pastor in order to provide spiritual care for the members of the congregation.

Conclusion

Lay elders individually are members of the priesthood of all believers by virtue of their baptism. Nevertheless, as an established group in the church the role of lay elders flows out of the Office of the Ministry. For the sake of caring for the spiritual needs of God’s people lay elders are appointed to assist the pastor in caring for whatever needs arise in the parish. Lay elders are not pastors. Yet, they are a treasured gift as they assist the pastor in caring for the spiritual needs of God’s people.

After exploring care in the Scriptures and making a theological case for lay elders I will now turn my attention to the history of lay elders. For the sake of this project, I will limit myself to a brief sketch of lay elders in the LCMS and then the role of lay elders at my congregation, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL.

³⁷ C. F. W Walther, *The True Visible Church; and the Form of a Christian Congregation*. Translated by J.T. Mueller. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 101.

³⁸ Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289.

Historical Context

In 2021, many congregations in the LCMS have an established board of lay elders. The board of elders is often taken for granted and it is generally assumed by most laity that the church has always had lay elders. This is partly due to the fact that there is not much written on the origin of lay elders. In recent years there have been manuals on what lay elders do. However, there has not been much written on how lay elders were developed. Many parishioners would be surprised to learn that the role of lay elders has only been extensively used since C.F.W. Walther. Walther, the first president of the LCMS, is largely responsible for the use of lay elders. The events of the Saxon immigration to America played a large role in Walther's desire for lay elders. The clericalism debacle of Martin Stephan along with the challenges and debates of Church and Ministry convinced Walther of the need for lay elders.³⁹

In his *Pastoral Theology* Walther notes the need for lay elders in America.

Since the church exists independently of the state here in America, the preacher has an even greater obligation to work toward having the *office of overseer* established in his congregation to help him, to apply church discipline all the better, to maintain good order with and outside of public worship gatherings and other gatherings, to administer church goods conscientiously and appropriately, to supervise the school, and the like.⁴⁰

The church structure functioned differently in Germany. The government's involvement in the church, which protected it from gross clericalism meant that the church did not need lay elders. However, in America where church and state are separate and a congregationalist model was developed there arose a need for lay elders to help organize and structure the church.⁴¹

As president of the LCMS Walther had many avenues to influence the LCMS on the use of

³⁹ Hagan, "*Ministry to Inactives*," 35.

⁴⁰ C. F. W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, Walther's Works (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2017), 421.

⁴¹ Collver, "Lay Elders," 42.

lay elders. One of the most practical ways he influenced the LCMS was by sharing his congregation's constitution with the synod. Walther's congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis became a model constitution for many parishes. In Trinity's constitution it recognizes and establishes the role of lay elders. Walther published Trinity's constitution in his newspaper *Der Lutheraner* which was sent out to all the congregations in the synod. Furthermore, during Walther's thirty plus years of teaching at Concordia Seminary he used Trinity's constitution as a model constitution for young pastors who were graduating and going out into the parish. Through Walther's influence the role of lay elders became widely established.⁴²

In 1858 Walther wrote a series of articles on lay elders defending their role and purpose. Walther received criticism from some Lutherans in America concerning lay elders. The General Council claimed that lay elders were a product of the Reformed church and not something that Lutherans have had. Walther rightly disagreed and even argued that Luther envisioned the use of lay elders. Perhaps Walther's greatest argument for lay elders comes in his work on *Church and Ministry*. In article VIII he argues that lay elders flow out of the pastoral office. Article VIII as discussed above, Walther uses Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 5 to demonstrate that lay elders were already established in the early church. Therefore, lay elders are not a Reformed idea. Rather, lay elders are part of what the Church has always done.⁴³

Following Walther, Theodore Graebner also contributes to the use of lay elders in the LCMS. After Walther's death there was still confusion over the origin of lay elders. Graebner in his work *Handbook for Congregational Officers* brings the discussion of lay elders into the English language.⁴⁴ As the LCMS transitioned from a German speaking synod to an English-

⁴² Hagan, *Ministry to Inactives*, 34.

⁴³ Collver, "Lay Elders," 46.

⁴⁴ Theodore Graebner, *Handbook for Congregational Officers* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1939).

speaking synod Graebner's work became the new standard. As the work on lay elders was written into English it became the resource that the new English-speaking church read. The use of lay elders continued to be established.⁴⁵

Through the work of Walther and Graebner lay elders became an important part of the structure of the LCMS. Walther and Graebner both assert that lay elders are not pastors. Yet, they assist the pastor in caring for the needs of the congregation. Those needs may vary between each congregation. In his *Pastoral Theology* Walther says,

The preacher should see to it that the congregation gives the overseers a *written directive* in which the scope and the limits of their obligations are precisely stated; particular care should be taken that the overseers are not tempted to stand as a hindrance in the way of the pastor in his ministry, to interfere in the ministry of the Word.⁴⁶

Walther clearly sees the role of lay elders as distinct from the Office of the Ministry. He understands that each congregation establishes duties of lay elders that fit the needs of the congregation in assisting the pastor in caring for the people of the congregation.

History of Lay Elders at St. Paul, Wood River.

St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL has a rich history over 100 years old. Throughout the life of the congregation, it has always had an established board of lay elders. Since lay elders are optional and have duties assigned to them by the needs of the parish it is important to understand what St. Paul has designated the lay elders to do on their behalf. In her constitution, updated in 2019, it states that, "the basic objectives of this Board are the spiritual welfare of the Pastor(s) and congregation members, individually and corporately, and the

⁴⁵ Collver, "Lay Elders," 50.

⁴⁶ Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, 430.

supervision of everything pertaining to congregational worship.”⁴⁷ The constitution continues by listing fifteen ways the board can achieve these objectives. Some of these objectives include caring for the spiritual, emotional, and physical health of the pastor, reviewing the pastor’s salary and making recommendations, take spiritual charge and oversight of the family groupings assigned to them, facilitate reception of new families, etc. Furthermore, the constitution also states that when the congregation is vacant the Board of Elders serves as the call committee for a new pastor. The constitution is clear that the lay elders work alongside the pastor in caring for the spiritual needs of the pastor and the congregation.

Although the constitution is clear on the role of a lay elder, other documents suggest additional or different roles. For instance, in the Elder Handbook it lists duties of a lay elder to include such things as locking and unlocking the church, turning on thermostats, turning on and operating the sound system. The Elder Handbook recognizes that although there are many spiritual issues that elders need to care for there are also practical jobs that need to take place for the church to function properly.⁴⁸ Also not listed in any official document the lay elders are also charged with hosting the congregational picnic each September. Hosting the picnic involves practical things such as grilling hamburgers and hot dogs, setting up a tent, organizing games for kids, purchasing soda and drinks. There are many “other duties as assigned” that elders do so that the church can function.

Finally, although the lay elders have clear duties outlined in the constitution and the Elder Handbook the lay elders at St. Paul function in a different way. The lay elders function as the top board of the congregation. Although St. Paul has a Church Council which as outlined in the

⁴⁷ St. Paul, *Constitution and By-Laws*, 27.

⁴⁸ St. Paul, *Board of Elders’ Handbook*.

constitution “conducts the overall business of the church on behalf of the congregation”⁴⁹ the Board of Elders also functions as a decision-making group at St. Paul. Often the lines get blurred between whose role it is to make decisions between the Council and the Elders. Practically speaking if a big issue develops the Board of Elders will weigh in and give their recommendation regardless of if it is concerning the spiritual needs of the congregation or if it is concerning the business side of parish life.

The role of lay elders is determined by the congregation. At St Paul lay elders assist the pastor in caring for the spiritual needs of the congregation as well as making decisions for the larger mission and plan of the parish. Sometimes the lay elder’s role in being involved in all the work of the congregation takes them away from their primary duty of offering spiritual care for the pastor and the congregation.

Summary

In this chapter I began by examining spiritual care in the scriptures and I made a theological case for lay elders. Next, I explored lay elders in the history of the LCMS and in my own congregation. I established that lay elders care for the spiritual needs of other by virtue of their baptism and they receive their role as lay elders as delegated by the Office of the Ministry. Lay elders are free to function however a congregation chooses. In my congregation, they are to care for the spiritual needs of the pastor and the congregation.

⁴⁹ St. Paul, *Constitution and By-Laws*, 24.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The Board of Elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL are composed of faithful men who love their Lord, Church, and pastor. As my work on this MAP began the Board of Elders were incredibly supportive and eager to participate in my project. The idea of additional training and the opportunity to serve God's people even more faithfully excited these men. They too desired to learn the answer to my research question, "How might a training seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?"

To provide training to the lay elders of my congregation and answer my research question I held a five-hour training seminar at St. Paul Lutheran Church. The seminar provides training on how to provide spiritual care. To pursue an answer to my research question I followed up the training seminar by interviewing 7 lay elders to find out if the training seminar was effective.

In this chapter I will offer a detailed description of how I went about answering my research question. I will begin this chapter by describing a step-by-step implementation of my project. Next, I will examine my methodological approach and research methodology. Finally, I will examine assumptions, limitations, my role as the researcher and I will provide an implementation timeline.

Research Design

The idea of this project began during the early months of the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic. It was during that time that the need for spiritual care was heightened, and it was clear that the lay elders in the congregation lacked the necessary skills to provide it. With the idea of lay elder

training, I began to write the first few chapters of my MAP. I studied how the Scriptures reveal the importance of providing care. I studied how the Office of the Ministry delegates to lay leaders to assist in providing spiritual care. I also looked at recent literature and found many resources on elder handbooks. However, I never found a resource that provides the necessary tools to teach lay elders *how* to provide spiritual care. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 were instrumental in my project. They provided the necessary lens and material to be used in my lay elder training seminar.

Elder Training Seminar

The first step in planning my project was to pick the right date. After meeting with the chairman of the Board of Elders we set May 22, 2021, as the date for the training seminar. The reason for choosing this date was that it took place on a Saturday and would allow lay elders who worked during the week to attend. This date was also chosen because it took place before graduation parties and summer vacations began which in turn would keep participants from attending. Therefore, this date would allow as many people to attend as possible. The time for the training seminar was from 8:00am to 1:00pm. Again, the time was chosen purposely so that I had enough time to properly teach the seminar, cover the material, and allow the lay elders to practice offering spiritual care. The time was also chosen to end at 1:00pm so that the lay elders were still able to enjoy a large majority of their Saturday and spend it with their families. Once the date and time was chosen, I shared the information with the Board of Elders in our monthly March meeting. This allowed two full months for members of the Board of Elders to arrange their schedules.

The lay elder training seminar took place in St. Paul Lutheran Church's Auditorium. This is the normal meeting place for Bible studies and other large events. The Auditorium is equipped

with technology for PowerPoint, microphones, whiteboards, and other teaching devices that could be used for the seminar. The Auditorium is also furnished with round tables which allow for better communication, collaboration, and participation.

On the day of the seminar lay elders arrived at 8:00am and were greeted, offered coffee and donuts, and handed an informational packet and pen. The informational packet included an agenda, student handouts, sharing scripture cheat sheet, collect prayer format, and a spiritual care report. The informational packet can be found in Appendices One through Six. When all the lay elders who could attend had arrived, I began the seminar with a brief outline of what we would do that day. I also shared with them that following the seminar several of the lay elders attending the seminar would be asked to participate in an interview for the purpose of trying to determine the effectiveness of the lay elder training seminar. In total, ten lay elders attended the seminar out of a possible fourteen.

The lay elder seminar consisted of five units. The first unit addressed the need for spiritual care at St. Paul Lutheran Church. The second unit explored how to actively listen to those you are providing care to. The third unit focused on how to share scripture with those you are caring for. The fourth unit helped guide you on how to pray publicly. The fifth and final unit expressed the need for providing follow up and how to carry it out. After each unit we took a break at which time people could get coffee, use the restroom, and stretch their legs. The seminar was designed that each unit (except for the 1st) would offer a short teaching followed by an opportunity for the lay elders to practice the skills they learned. The primary focus of this seminar was not teaching *what* spiritual care is, but rather *how* to provide it when caring for members of the congregation.

The first unit of the seminar was titled, “The Importance of Spiritual Care.” This unit was

thirty minutes long and unlike all the other units this unit did not provide a time to practice spiritual care skills. The purpose of this unit was to lay a foundation for the rest of the seminar. This was by far the unit that I lectured in the most. Lay elders learned what spiritual care is, why it is important, and their role in assisting the pastor in providing spiritual care to the members of the congregation. Finally, the participants learned that the four basic skills of spiritual care are active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. The full student handouts and leader materials can be found in Appendices Two and Three.

The second unit of the seminar was titled, “Active Listening.” This unit was 50 minutes long. This was the longest unit because it required the most teaching. Although active listening might seem like a commonly understood term in the academic world it is still an unfamiliar term amongst the lay elders of my congregation who are mainly blue-collar workers. In this unit, participants learned that active listening is the first step in providing spiritual care. Before you can offer care, you must be able to diagnosis the problem and that happens through listening. Lay elders also learned the three activities of active listening: paying attention, paraphrasing, and asking questions. They also learned what to listen for. Finally lay elders were made aware of good and poor characteristics of listening.

After about twenty-five minutes of learning about active listening the unit concluded with two exercise which allowed the participants to put the skills of active listening to practice. Each lay elder was told to select a partner and find a place in the room where they could talk. This was easy to do because there were many empty tables in the auditorium for lay elder partners to sit at. The first exercise was to share with your partner for five minutes what you did for Easter this year. While one partner shared the other partner practiced active listening. After five minutes the partners switched. The first exercise was meant to be easy and give confidence to those

practicing active listening. The second exercise also allowed lay elders to practice active listening for 5 minutes at a time, but this time Pastor Schultz gave each partner a separate scenario to act out and listen to. While participants practiced the skill of active listening I walked around and observed conversations. Following the second exercise I brought the participants back together and we discussed what it was like to actively listen to someone and the challenges and joys of learning this new skill. The active listening scenarios and the full student handout and leader material can be found in Appendices Two and Three.

The third unit of the seminar was titled, “Sharing Scripture.” This unit was 40 minutes long. The reason this unit was shorter than the previous one is because I held an assumption that the lay elders knew why it was necessary to share Scripture. I held this assumption for two reasons. First, the lay elders at St. Paul are godly men. Second, in the first unit, we learned that God’s Word is the center of spiritual care because God is the one who offers true care. Since the lay elders already knew the importance of sharing Scripture the focus of this unit, like the other units, is on *how* to use this skill.

The unit began with a short teaching on the importance of sharing Scripture. Lay elders learned that after accurately diagnosing the spiritual needs of their conversation partner through active listening sharing Scripture was the tool needed in order to help them. Lay elders were also taught several transitional phrases they could use when moving from listening to sharing scripture.

To prepare for this unit I developed a *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet*. This sheet is designed to be folded in half and placed in a bible or notebook. The *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet* contains Pastor Schultz’s nine favorite Bible passages that he frequently uses when providing spiritual care. These scriptural passages offer a great starting point when providing spiritual care.

The *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet* also contains several helpful Bible references divided into topics. Topics include contentment, comfort, death and resurrection, feeling alone, healing needs, the importance of gathering for worship, overcoming sin, reconciliation, rejoice, and seeking forgiveness. These topics were chosen because they are frequent concerns and troubles that lay elders might encounter when providing spiritual care.

Lay elders were not just given the *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet*, but they also learned how to use it. They learned that it was okay if they did not have the entire Bible memorized. They learned it was appropriate to be prepared for spiritual care visits. Being prepared means to have one or two passages picked out ahead of time. Finally, they learned if the need for spiritual care does not present an opportunity for them to be prepared ahead of time it is okay to take out the *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet* and share it with the person they are caring for and find a Bible passage together that can offer care. The *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet* can be found in Appendix Four.

After explaining the *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet*, the unit concluded with an exercise that allowed the participants to practice sharing Scripture. Once again, lay elders were asked to partner up and spread out across the auditorium. This time participants were given ten minutes each to practice sharing Scripture. Pastor Schultz gave each participant a different scenario. Each participant was asked to share with their partner the scenario they were given. Their partner was asked to practice actively listening and then share an appropriate Scripture passage in order to provide spiritual care. After ten minutes partners were asked to switch. During the exercise Pastor Schultz walked around the auditorium and observed lay elders practicing their skills. After the exercise was finished, I encouraged the lay elders to gather together again to discuss the joys and challenges of sharing scripture. The exercises and full student handout and leader material

can be found in Appendices Two and Three.

The fourth unit was titled, “Offering Prayer.” This unit was 30 minutes long. Like the previous unit it is shortened in length because I made an assumption that the lay elders knew what prayer was and why they should pray. Therefore, this unit focused not on *what* but *how* to offer prayer.

The unit began with a short teaching on why offering prayer is an important part of spiritual care. Lay elders learned that because God is the source of all spiritual care we bring before His throne of grace and mercy all the things that trouble and concern us. Next, participants learned a specific prayer called the Collect Prayer. A Collect Prayer is a structured prayer. It contains five parts. The beauty of a collect prayer is that it allows those who struggle with knowing what to pray for to simply add in the five parts. The five parts of a collect prayer are:

1. An address to God
2. The rationale
3. The main petition
4. The desired result
5. The Conclusion

After looking at several examples of collect prayers from the previous Sunday services, and identifying their parts, the lay elders were ready to practice their skills. The collect prayer format and summery can be found in Appendix Five.

Once again, lay elders were asked to partner up and spread across the auditorium. This time, lay elders were given ten minutes each to practice their skills. Pastor Schultz gave each elder a different scenario. Each lay elder was asked to share the scenario with their partner. Their partner was supposed to actively listen, share an appropriate Scripture passage, and finally conclude with a collect prayer. After ten minutes partners were asked to switch. Following the

exercise, I invited participants to join back together. We discussed the joys and challenges of offering prayer.

The fifth unit was called, “Providing Follow Up.” This unit was 30 minutes in length. In this unit participants learned the importance of providing spiritual care together. They learned about the importance of confidentiality. They also learned what to share with the pastor and what not to share. Finally, they also learned what they must share even if the person they are caring for desires they keep it a secret.

This unit focused on two parts of providing follow up. First, the need to follow up with the person that they are providing spiritual care to because spiritual care is not always a onetime event but something that requires continued conversation and care. Second, the unit focused on the need to follow up with the pastor since spiritual care always takes place together.

In order to help the lay elders provide follow up with the pastor I developed a *Spiritual Care Report*. This report is a half sheet and is meant to fit inside a folder or binder. This report is designed to be simple. The lay elder is asked to record the date, their name, and the individual they cared for. They are also asked to record what type of conversation they had. Examples include in-person, phone, text, or email. The lay elder is also asked to record information that the pastor should know. Next, they are asked to record if a follow up conversation is needed by either the lay elder or the pastor. Finally, they are asked to record the contact information of the individual they cared for. The purpose of this sheet is to help keep records of spiritual care. It will also allow the pastor and the lay elders to work together to make sure the members of the congregation receive the best care available to them.

After explaining the *Spiritual Care Report*, the lay elders once again were asked to partner up and spread out across the auditorium. Once again, lay elders were given ten minutes each to

practice their spiritual care skills. Pastor Schultz gave each lay elder a different scenario. Each participant was asked to share the scenario with their partner. Their partner was supposed to actively listen, share scripture, offer prayer, and practice filling out the *Spiritual Care Report*. Since, the lay elders were asked to do so much in just 10 minutes each scenario was shortened for this activity. Pastor Schultz recommended the lay elders jump quickly into sharing Scripture, offering prayer, and filling out their Spiritual Care Report. Following the exercise, the participants were asked to gather together again. We discussed the joys and challenges of filling out the *Spiritual Care Report*. The *Spiritual Care Report* can be found in Appendix Six.

Post Seminar Interviews

Ten lay elders participated in the lay elder training seminar hosted on Saturday May 22, 2021. Four lay elders were not able to attend the training seminar. At the conclusion of the seminar, I shared once again that several of those who had participated would be asked to participate in interviews to help answer my research question of whether or not the seminar was effective. Almost all of the lay elders present eagerly volunteered and acknowledged that they would be happy to participate. I thanked them for their willingness to participate. However, I told them I would be in contact in the next few days. I shared that I need a diverse group to interview, and I needed to share with them an informed consent form before they participated.

On September 8, 2020, I completed a Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program called Human Subjects Research. The completion of this program authorized me as an independent learner to conduct interviews with other adults. Following my CITI certificate, I submitted an IRB (Institutional Review Board) form to Concordia Seminar to begin research. On October 30, 2020, I received approval from the Concordia Seminary — Institutional Review Board (IRB) that authorized me to begin interviews.

For my MAP I have decided that qualitative research will be more helpful than quantitative research in seeking to answer my research question. Qualitative research will allow me to ask more open-ended questions with the goal of receiving in depth information and gain a better appreciation for how well the lay elder training seminar equipped the lay elders of my congregation with the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing Scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up.

Once I was approved by Concordia Seminar to begin research and I determined that qualitative research would be most helpful I then chose to use a purposeful method to select research participants. All participants were required to attend the lay elder training seminar held on May 22, 2021. Ten lay elders attended the seminar and were eligible to be interviewed for my research. Of the ten individuals I wanted to interview seven of them. One of the benefits of purposeful sampling is that “this sampling technique should allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading.”¹ I purposefully chose lay elders to interview who were different from each other. For instance, I chose to interview a lay elder who had served for over thirty years, and I chose to interview a lay elder who had served for less than two years. I chose to interview a lay elders in his seventies and I chose to interview a lay elder in his early forties. I chose to interview a lay elder who had a white-collar job and a lay elder who had a blue-collar job. By selecting a diverse group of participants my goal was to be able to gather as much information as possible.

After identifying which lay elders I wished to interview. I called and asked them if they would be willing. Most responded on the phone that they wished to participate. Nevertheless, I

¹ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, Fifth edition (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019), 58.

reminded them they would need to read and sign an Informed Consent Form before they participated. I gave copies of the Informed Consent Form to each participant before the meeting, so they had time to read over the document. I told those participating that we would meet in the church lounge and that they should plan for a 90-minute interview.

In preparation for the interview, I developed a basic list of nine questions that I planned to ask each participant. The questions were designed to help draw out of each participant how effective the lay elder seminar was in equipping them in how to provide spiritual care. A complete copy of the interview questions without annotation can be found in appendix seven.

1. How long have you been a member of the Board of Elders and describe your experience on the Board of Elders?

This question was developed to give ease to the research participant. This question was a way to allow the research participant to feel comfortable and introduce themselves. This question also allowed the lay elders to describe their work as a lay elder in the past.

2. Why is spiritual care needed at St. Paul Lutheran Church?

This question was an important foundational question. I sought to find out if the lay elders understood the need for spiritual care.

3. What is your experience in the past of providing spiritual care to the members of the congregation?

In this question I had hoped to learn what amount of spiritual care experience they had in the past, if any at all.

4. How do you intend to practice active listening in your spiritual care visits?

This question specifically addresses information covered in the 2nd unit. This question is not focused on receiving a definition of active listening. Rather this question helps draw out from the participant how they intend to practice active listening.

5. How do you intend to share scripture in caring for the spiritual needs of those you visit?

This question like the previous seeks to discover how lay elders will care spiritually for individuals in the congregation and if they understand that scripture is at the center of that care.

6. How do you intend to pray for those you visit?

This question tries to understand if participants are more comfortable praying after learning about prayer in the seminar. Hopefully, participants will answer that they intend to use the collect prayer structure taught at the seminar.

7. How will you practice confidentiality when caring for those you visit?

This question focuses on unit five. The question's goal again is to understand the *how* of practicing confidentiality.

8. Why is it important to follow up with the pastor after providing spiritual care to those you visit?

This question focuses on unit five. It seeks to draw out from the participant their understanding of providing follow up.

9. How has the seminar influenced your service as a lay elder, especially in the task of member visitation?

This is a good closing question. It is at the heart of answering my research question. It allows the lay elders to share how the seminar has equipped them with the skills of spiritual care.

At the time of the interview, participants met me in the church lounge. The church lounge is a private room. This is the normal room we use at St. Paul Lutheran Church for small gatherings. It provides a quiet intimate setting that allows for participants to feel comfortable and relaxed while being interviewed. I scheduled interviews to take place when no one else would be in the building. This gave us as much privacy as possible.

When participants arrived, I welcomed them and engaged in a few minutes of small talk.

Then I thanked them for their willingness to participate and then handed them a copy of the Informed Consent Form and read the form to them. After I finished reading the form, I asked the lay elder if they wished to participate. I had each participant sign two copies, one for my records and one for theirs.

After signing the Informed Consent Form, I then turned on an audio recording device. I used a Sony digital voice recorder to record the interviews. Following the interview, I downloaded the audio file onto a computer in my office that is password protected and is only accessed by me. By placing the files on a password protected computer in my office it allows for the utmost privacy and confidentiality.

Next, I used a program called *Sonix*.² Sonix is a software device that transcribes audio files. Once Sonix had transcribed the files for me, I then read over them to check for accuracy but didn't clean them up in order to keep authenticity and accuracy. After the transcriptions were completed, I then sat down to analyze the material. I first read over the transcripts several times to get a better understanding of the data. After, reading through the transcripts a few times I then highlighted themes and began to organize them. A fuller description is made available in chapter five.

Methodological Approach

The methodological approach I choose for my project is action research. Action research is a new type of research method that allows the researcher to also be an insider or participant in the study. Action research is unique in that it is typically written in a narrative style.³ “Action

² *Sonix*, n.d., <https://sonix.ai/>.

³ Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 2.

research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation.”⁴ My position in this study is as an insider.⁵ For this project I recognize that I cannot separate myself from the fact that I am the pastor of the congregation I am studying. I am also the pastor of the lay elders that I am interviewing. I recognize that the ability to answer my research question and equip lay elders with spiritual care skills does impact my work as pastor. I also recognize that I am uniquely an insider in that I am also a son of the congregation. Although I hold a relationship with the lay elders of the congregation as their pastor, I also hold a thirty year relationship prior to being their pastor. For many of these men I am a lifelong friend. Nevertheless, I believe action research is the best methodological approach to use. It allows me to be honest about my role as the researcher and allows me to work with other insiders to answer my research question.

Research Methodology

As stated above, for my MAP I believe qualitative research will be most beneficial for my research. Qualitative research will allow me to acquire more in-depth answers from the lay elders of my congregation. I will lead the elders of my congregation through a seminar teaching them the skills of active listening, sharing Scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. Following the seminar, I purposefully chose seven lay elders to interview to learn about the usefulness of the seminar. I asked each lay elder ten open ended questions. These questions sought to understand their knowledge of the skills of spiritual care and their confidence in caring for members.

⁴ Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation*, 4.

⁵ Herr and Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation*, 41.

Assumptions, Limitations and Role of Researcher

For the purpose of this MAP, I made an assumption that active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up were the basic skills needed to offer spiritual care. There may in fact be other skills that a person might use while providing spiritual care. However, these are the ones I focused on and assumed in my MAP as the foundational skills for spiritual care.

I also made an assumption in my MAP concerning the units taught during my lay elder training seminar. In each unit I made an assumption that my lay elders knew *what* the topic was about. However, they lacked the ability of *how* to carry it out. For instance, in Unit 3 on sharing Scripture I assumed that the lay elders knew that sharing God's Word was important. Therefore, I did not give them a Bible study on the means of grace focusing on how God works through His Word. Instead, I focused our time together on practicing *how* to share God's Word with others. Also, in unit 4 on offering prayer I assumed that the lay elders understood what prayer was and why we pray. Therefore, I did not teach a Bible study on prayer. Instead, I focused our time together on practicing *how* to offer prayer for those they are providing care to.

Finally, I assumed that the lay elders who attended the training seminar were genuinely there because of a desire to care for the spiritual needs of God's people. These men were not there simply because the pastor requested. Rather, they participated because they have a love to care for God's people more deeply.

One of the limitations of this project was time. Although the lay elder training seminar covered five hours in length, I realize that even more time would have benefited the lay elders. For many of the lay elders this was their first time practicing these skills. Additional opportunities to practice would benefit their confidence in providing spiritual care to others.

Another limitation of this project was population sampling. Since this MAP focuses on

how to train lay elders the possible participants for this study were limited to the 14 lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church. The elder seminar date and time were chosen to allow as many participants to attend the training seminar as possible. However, there were still four lay elders who were not able to attend. Some of those four would have been good choices to participate in the qualitative interviews following the seminar. By having such a small pool of research participants, it limited the choices for interviews.

I recognize that my role as a researcher also impacted my MAP. Using the methodological approach of action research brings to the forefront that I am researching my congregation as an insider. I have a personal relationship with the men I led through the lay elder training seminar and interviewed. Many if not all of them have had me over to sit at their kitchen tables and enjoy meals. I recognize that these men love their pastor and want him to succeed in his academic aspirations. There is a possibility that during the interviews the lay elders would respond in a positive way in order to help me do well in my research. Some of the answer they gave could be biased in an effort to help me.

Implementation Timeline

The whole research process took approximately four and a half months. The first three months of the process I planned my elder training seminar. During the first month I planning and prepared materials for Unit 1 and 2 on the need for spiritual care and active listening. In the second month I planned and prepared materials for Unit 3 on sharing Scripture. It was at that time that I developed the *Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet*. During the third month I planned and prepared materials for Units 4 and 5 on offering prayer and providing follow up. After three months of planning, I help the elder training seminar on May 22, 2021. At the conclusion of the seminar, I spent two weeks interviewing seven lay elders who attended the meeting. For two

weeks after the interviews, I worked on transcribing the audio files and checking them for accuracy. For another two weeks after transcribing the files I then worked on organizing them into themes and analyzing the data.

Summary

In this chapter I described a step-by-step process of my research project. I described in detail my lay elder training seminar as well as the steps taken to interview seven lay elders following the seminar. I also discussed my methodological approach, methodology, assumptions, limitations, and my role as a researcher. Finally, I identified an implementation timeline that I used to complete my project.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DATA

In chapter four I offered a detailed description of the steps I took to answer my research question, “How might a training seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?” In order to answer my research question, I provided a five-hour seminar teaching the lay elders of my congregation *how* to provide spiritual care. Following the seminar, I interviewed seven lay elders who attended the seminar to learn if the seminar was effective.

In this chapter I will give an evaluation of the data from the lay elder interviews. The data from those interviews will help me understand whether the lay elder seminar was effective in forming in the participants the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation. These findings will thereby answer my research question.

I will begin this chapter by introducing my research participants. Next, I will order my analysis around the nine interview questions I asked each lay elder participant. Although, some lay elders expressed themes that showed up in different questions I asked, for the sake of clarity I will gather them together under the appropriate question. Each interview question is designed to draw out from the participants what they learned from the seminar and how effective it was in providing spiritual care skills. A more detailed explanation behind each interview question is given in chapter four. Finally, I will share the expected findings and an answer to my research question.

Meet the Participants

In order to gain an honest and comprehensive understanding of the impact the lay elder seminar had on teaching the lay elders the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up I choose certain lay elders to be interviewed. I purposely choose a diverse group of men. Their ages range from forty-one to eighty-four. Their experience on the Board of Elders ranges from one year to forty years. Their occupations make up both white color and blue color jobs. Finally, when asked about their experience with providing spiritual care in the past some acknowledged having no experience while others acknowledging having a lot of experience.

Participant One

Participant one is in his sixties. He is a lifelong Lutheran. He has been a member at St. Paul for twenty years and a member of the board of elders for over fifteen. His wife, children, and grandchildren are every Sunday worshipers. Participant one works in sales where he spends a lot of time interacting with people on a daily basis.

Participant Two

Participant two is in his fifties. He is also a lifelong Lutheran. Yet, he has only been a member at St. Paul for the past seven years. In previous congregations he has served in a variety of roles including congregational president and chairman of the Board of Elders. Currently at St. Paul he is an every Sunday worshiper with his wife. He has been serving on the Board of Elders for the past year. He works for a large company in St. Louis where he holds a white color position.

Participant Three

Participant three is in his seventies. He grew up going to a Baptist church. However, fifteen years ago he became a Lutheran and a member of St. Paul. He has been a member of the Board of Elders for the past three years. He and his family are every Sunday worshipers. He has served St. Paul in a variety of roles including time on committees, boards, and other areas of service. He previously worked in sales. Currently, he is recently retired and enjoys spending time with his wife and family.

Participant Four

Participant four is in his forties. He is a lifelong Lutheran whose family has deep Lutheran roots. In fact his family has even established Lutheran congregations in the past. He has been a member of St. Paul for twenty-one years and a member of the Board of Elders for fifteen years. He and his family are every Sunday worshipers. He works for a small company holding a white color position.

Participant Five

Participant five is in his eighties. While growing up he attended a Baptist church. However, he has been a Lutheran and a member of St. Paul for over sixty years. He has been serving on the Board of Elders for over forty years. He has also served in a variety of other ways in the congregation including time on boards, committees, and other areas of service. He and his family are every Sunday worshipers. Although retired, he previously worked as a skilled blue-collar worker in Wood River, IL.

Participant Six

Participant six is in his forties. He is a lifelong Lutheran and member of St. Paul. He is

new to the Board of Elders having just recently joined this past year. He is also active serving on various committees within the congregation. He and his family are every Sunday worshippers. He works in sales where he spends the majority of his time interacting with people.

Participant Seven

Participant seven is in his sixties. He is a lifelong Lutheran and member of St. Paul. He has been serving on the Board of Elders for over twenty years. He is active at St. Paul serving on a host of different committees including evangelism and funerals. He is an active every Sunday worshiper. He enjoys his retirement. Previously, he worked a blue-collar job.

Participant Summary

The participants chosen to be part of this project hold many things in common. They are all members of the Board of Elders. They are all long time Lutherans and many lifelong members of the congregation. Finally, they are each regular worship attenders and are active in the life of the parish. Nevertheless, it is important to notice how they are diverse. They differ in age, years of service in the congregation, and years of service on the Board of Elders. They also are unique in their life outside of St. Paul and the occupations they hold. These differences make up the body of Christ and present different skill sets and abilities. Who they are as individuals is important to be aware of as I evaluate whether or not the elder seminar was effective.

Data Analyses

Question One: How long have you been a member of the Board of Elders and describe your experience on the Board of Elders

Question one served as an introductory question. The goal was to allow the individual being interviewed to feel comfortable as we began the interview. Much of the information concerning time served on the Board of Elders is listed above as I described each participant.

Nevertheless, as individuals described their experience on the Board of Elders three themes developed: no training, informal training, and in some cases some training.

The first theme that several lay elders expressed was that their service on the Board of Elders has been met with little or no training. In a spirit of frustration participant two states,

There's never been any instruction given. And I think that there is too much expectation on an elder, especially one that hasn't had any kind of training...In my mind, it's something [elder training] that should happen anyway and not for the sake of research, it should be happening in all the churches.

Likewise, participant six expressed a similar feeling of lack of training. He said, "I think the seminar that you had was very informative and I think it would be great for all the elders to be involved in that." Participant six was disappointed that not all the lay elders were able to attend the elder seminar.

When describing his experience on the Board of Elders participant four said,

I mean, it's a rewarding job. It's good to be able to work with people at church. To be honest, I haven't done a lot with the congregation, with, you know, reaching out. And it's definitely an area that could be improved. But it's also a little tough when you work a full-time job and don't have a lot of time to, you know kids, little kids at home...but I definitely enjoy helping out in church and, you know, everything that we do as elders.

Participant four says that he doesn't have much experience with the congregation, and he expresses that his stage of life with little kids makes it difficult. Later when asked directly if the Board of Elders has done training in the past he said, "Not to me knowledge."

Participant seven also expressed feelings of lack of training. He shared that he was originally serving on the Board of Evangelism. At that time the majority of the members on the Board of Evangelism were retired and could meet during the day. However, since he worked, he could only attend meetings held in the evening. He acknowledges that the meeting times caused some friction amongst the board members. In an effort to make peace, the chairman of the Board of Elders at that time asked him to join the Board of Elders since they met in the evening.

Participant seven expressed shock that he was considered worthy to be an elder. He claimed he was thrust into the role simply to keep the Evangelism Board happy and was given little training. Although many of these men have served on the board for many years and become good lay elders, they each expressed a feeling of lack of training.

A second theme that participant one expressed was that his service on the Board of Elders had been met with informal training. Participant one shared that when he first joined the Board of Elders he was invited to sit next to the chairman of the Board of Elders during their monthly meetings. It was while sitting next to the chairman that he learned about being an elder. Participant one also expressed that another experience of being on the Board of Elders was helping serve Holy Communion. He shared that he was just given a quick lesson before the service from the seminarian field workers as to how to serve Holy Communion.

A final theme that several of the lay elders expressed was that they had lots of experience in their role as an elder. For instance, participant five, the longest tenured lay elder at St. Paul shared that he had a lot of experience in his role as a lay elder. He commented,

I have lots of fond memories, great memories of tending to the flock, you know, praying, visiting, the hospitals, going when they are having surgery. And when Pastor Jacobson was our vacancy pastor, one of them, and he signed up to do all our calls and I volunteered to assist him.

Participant five shared that he took time to get to know people. He would even make special stops before he arrived so that he had a treat to give to them. One such treat was White Castle cheeseburgers because he knew they were enjoyed by the person he was visiting. Participant five also suggested that the greatest experience is practice.

Participant three also expressed a theme of having been trained and having lots of experience. Perhaps to no surprise, participant three claims that participant five is the one who trained him. When he first came on the Board of Elders, he sought out participant five and asked

him to take him on calls. Participant five trained him how to care for people.

The themes drawn from question one reveal that many of the lay elders did not have much training on the Board of Elders. Even the one who did express that he had training and experience caring for others, acknowledged that for most of them that experience was gained simply through practice.

Question Two: “Why is spiritual care needed at St. Paul Lutheran Church?”

Overall, the seven participants responded well to question two. They demonstrated that they understood what spiritual care is and why it is important. Nevertheless, there was one participant who expressed an answer that was contrary to what was taught in the elder seminar. The overall positive responses can be summarized again in three themes; concerning Christ, care of souls, and something that is for all.

The first theme that was highlighted from the responses to this question was that spiritual care is all about Christ. Participant four expressed this view when he said, “I guess it’s a simple question. I just think we all need the spiritual care; we all need to be reminded that it’s all about Christ, and that, you know, God’s the one in charge of our lives.” Participant two said something similar, “[Spiritual Care] is needed to add Christ to everyday situations.” Participant two went on to say that spiritual care begins in Sunday morning worship, but it goes out into our lives during the week. Participant six agreed that spiritual care is about Christ, and it happens also outside of the Divine Service. He said,

[Spiritual Care] it’s just not at church. You need to be able to have it throughout the week. So, we talked about doing home visits. We talked about going to the hospitals. And then you also have the situations where you have people coming and going [with] different needs. You might need to talk with them too.

Participant five, when reflecting on a spiritual care visit, shared that it is centered in the Gospel and out of Christian love. Participant one also shared that spiritual care is different from

other kinds of care. Spiritual care, centered in Christ, is what the church is about.

The second theme that was highlighted was that spiritual care is needed for the care of one's soul. Participant three said,

Oh, my goodness, I think [spiritual care] is needed because and I can only relate it to when I wasn't going to church every Sunday that I didn't go to church. The more I drifted away from church, the more my relationship with God got less and less. And that's the danger that I think if you don't have contact with people and that relationship with the church, then you might lose your soul.

He went on to say that this puts a big responsibility on the pastor and the lay elders. It makes the task of spiritual care so important because it concerns a person's soul. Participant three also found spiritual care centered in Christ and His church. He highlighted the importance of church when talking about the world we live in as he said, "But if you don't have your life centered in your church and God, then you just probably won't get through these things."

Participant five shared a similar concern for people's souls as he emphasized the importance of spiritual care. He said,

I think it's really important it's been hard with this pandemic not going to church. I mean, you can't go to the hospitals. You can't go and do this. You can't do that. But now we can, and things are going back to normal and now we can start taking and making those hospital visits and doing the things that we haven't done for well over a year, year and a half...It's too long. It's too long. And then we elders need to learn how to make regular rounds with your people, you know, and you will be blessed.

Participant five recognized the importance of being in church and then going out and being the church to the members of the congregation.

A final theme I observed is that spiritual care is needed by all people, and it is not a one-time event but needed continuously. Participant one makes this case when he says,

Spiritual care, it's just not a group of people that need it. You know, I believe spiritual care, [is needed] even for myself. I think it's just something that, I think it is important that everybody is looked upon and taken care of...sometimes you think of the [prayer] list in the bulletin, of the people that are sick. Spiritual care is for everyone, you know, for everybody.

Participant four also echoes participant one when he says, “I just think we all need the spiritual care.” Participant five agrees too that spiritual care is for everyone. He says that spiritual care is needed so that some people do not slip through the cracks. He believes that spiritual care is even for those who not very active.

Although most of the lay elders acknowledged that spiritual care is important and that it is centered in Christ, there was one participant who answered contrary to what was taught at the elder seminar. One lay elder when asked why spiritual care was important, he said it is because more people go to visit other churches. Participant seven said that spiritual care is finding out why people are leaving our church to go to another church. Then, if we find out the reason, we will be able to change what we are doing and keep them here. In essence, the lay elder compared spiritual care to consumerism.

Overall, the themes expressed from the answers to the second interview question reveal that the lay elders understood why spiritual care is needed at St. Paul. Although, one lay elder answered in a different way than that which was taught at the seminar the other six lay elders seemed to have learned from the elder seminar.

Question Three: “What is your experience in the past of providing spiritual care to the members of the congregation?”

Overall, each participant responded well to question three. They all have some level of experience whether great or small. The majority also desired to have more experience and training.

Each participant responded that he had some level of experience providing spiritual care in the past. That experience ranged from saying prayers to making nursing home visits. Yet, they all had some experience. Participant one shared that he provides most of his spiritual care outside of church. While at work, his Christian love for others has motivated people to come to him and ask

for prayers. He gladly prays with them. Likewise participant two has provided spiritual care to those outside church. He often invites friends and neighbors to attend worship with him.

Participants three and five have great experience visiting people in the nursing homes and hospitals. They each said that while visiting they share scripture and say a prayer. Participant five has even gathered several individuals at the nursing home together to have a devotion together as the Church.

Participant four shared that for him spiritual care takes place organically. He doesn't often look to provide it. Rather, he will be at work or home and an opportunity will come to share what God has done for us. Participant six expressed that he does have experience making spiritual care phone calls. Participant seven, shared that he has gone to the hospital before to say a prayer with a member of the congregation.

The majority of participants expressed a desire for more experience and training in spiritual care. For instance, participant four said, "Yeah, I would say that it's pretty new to me to go out and do those visits. It's not something that I have done historically here. And like I said, I think a lot of those reasons are for the job [I have] and a pretty busy life at this point in my life." When asked if there has ever been any type of training he said, "Just a brief training on how to take care of the [Sunday] service. And like all those specific details, but not a lot as far as reaching out spiritual care." Participant seven echoed the same sentiment. He said that by now, over twenty years as an elder, he should have much more experience than he has received. He expressed a wish for a mentor. He believes if he had a mentor in the beginning, he might be really good at providing spiritual care today. Participant six also expressed that the pandemic has made it hard to have much experience since it has kept people away from one another. Finally, participants one and two shared that they do not have much experience with spiritual care inside

the congregation.

The answers given by each participant reveal that the majority of lay elders have little experience with providing spiritual care. The responses show that they have a desire for more training and experience. Their answers show that teaching on spiritual care is welcomed and appreciated.

Question Four: “How do you intend to practice active listening in your spiritual care visits?”

There were several themes that arose out of the response from the participants concerning question four. These themes included listening with your whole body, asking open ended questions, and identifying a problem. Like responses from other questions that were asked there were a couple of participants that answered in ways that diverged from what was taught at the elder seminar.

One theme that was recorded from several participants is listening with your whole body.

Participant three remarks about the importance of listening when he says,

You know, I have a tendency to sometimes when I have a conversation, to, I'm thinking ahead. You see this a lot with people. They will ask you a question and they want you to go ahead and answer it. But they want to get on to our next question. You know, hurry up with that question, I don't want to listen to it that much...But what I learned at the seminar...the eye contact, the body language, people can tell if you are interested in them or not.

Participant three also says that when listening it is important that, “you concentrate on them and less on yourself.” Participant six also recognizes the importance of listening with your whole body when he says,

It's all about engagement with the conversation, nodding your heard, ask open ended questions, I think is the biggest thing...I have also found that if you have them in a comfortable setting, they are more apt to talk to you. If you are in a big group, they are probably not going to talk to you as easily.

A second theme was the importance of asking open ended questions. Participant seven

acknowledged that open ended questions were important to help your conversation partner share more information. Participant six also shared that asking open ended questions helps your conversation partner to open up so that you are able to help them. Participant three, when asked about the importance of practicing active listening said,

Actually, when you listen, if you are going to interrupt them, do it because you want to find out something a little bit more elaborate on what you are saying to me, you know, 'I didn't quite understand what you are saying.' 'What does that mean?' You know, and if you really are an active listener, you will concentrate on them more and less on yourself.

Participant three shares that asking open ended questions serves as a way to gather more information.

Another theme that several participants expressed was active listening helps identify a problem. Participant one states that exact theme as he says active listening helps identify a problem. Active listening helps the conversation partner understand what is troubling the person who is sharing. Participant five agrees active listening is a tool that helps to get to know a person. By getting to know a person, and caring for that person, it allows them to open up and share what they are truly dealing with.

Although the majority of participants expressed these themes which were taught at the elder seminar, there were two elders who expressed ideas that diverged from what was taught at the elder seminar. For instance, participant two acknowledged that active listening is something he needs to work on. He believed practicing will help him be a better listener. Although practicing is something he should do, He never expressed what active listening was and how it is different than passive listening. Participant four likewise shared a response that was different than taught at the seminar. He said he intends to practice active listening daily. He also said that listening is one half of the communication. However, when using active listening to provide spiritual care a person wants to listen much more than one half of the time. Listening half of the

time is suited best for normal conversations and not spiritual care conversations.

The answers given to question four had mix results. Still the majority of participants' answers revealed that they learned how to use active listening. Nevertheless, the fact that two lay elders didn't grasp how to use active listening is unfortunate. This will be noted in chapter six as I discuss improvement or suggestions for the future.

Question Five: "How do you intend to share scripture in caring for the spiritual needs of those you visit?"

Once again, three themes were found in the responses of the participants. These themes included: the value of a cheat sheet, doing your homework before you go, and God does the work. Once again, there was one participant who responded in a way that diverged from what was taught at the seminar.

The first theme that was identified by all participants was the value of the cheat sheet. During the elder seminar a cheat sheet was handed out that provided key Bible passages and also Bible passages arranged based on topics. Each participant found the cheat sheet to be helpful in sharing Scripture. Participant two expressed these thoughts when he said,

I never knew how to incorporate scripture other than, there are like, I have a Bible website on my phone. And it's the only avenue that I had as far as scenarios to meet what was presented to me. And I would look up scripture according to whatever the scenario was. But now after the elder seminar, you have given us a great guide to carry along with us and it's nice to have that in front of you so that you can work straight from it instead of being in a conversation and trying to scroll through your phone.

The second theme that was expressed by several participants was the importance to do your homework before you go. Participants shared that it was necessary to be prepared before you provide spiritual care. Participant two said, "If you are going to visit someone, do your homework before you go." He went on to say that it's important to think what is the person's need and what Word of God can I bring to their need.

Participant five also expressed a need to do homework ahead of time. One way to do your homework is by marking up your Bible. He said,

You go through my Bible here. It's scribbled all over because it's been used...And if you look in every page that I have got marked, you see my Bibles marked in the verses...I think it's a good sign when you pick up somebody's Bible [and its marked]. My wife taught me this, her Bible, it was her mother's Bible lays open at psalm 121. Her favorite reading. But it was right there on her corner of her dresser. Never closed. So, you use what you got. And that's our Bible.

Participant seven also acknowledged that it is important to work ahead. He stated he would feel much more comfortable to share scripture if he already had something written out for him.

Finally, the third theme found by the participants was that sharing scripture is how God is at work. Participant six shared that, "finding the right scripture reading and sharing that puts God first. We are trying to help them. We want to put God first and then use that as a way to help them over all...God is the one doing the work." Participant one said that sharing scripture is at the heart of what we are doing. It's where people need to look to for help. Participant three also echoed that God is the one doing the work when he said, "I think that the Bible in life's troubles and trials and everything, I think there is an answer to it in God's Word. There has to be. You have to know where to look for him...the Word can heal, or it can comfort."

Although most participants responded in these three themes, there was one participant whose answer was contrary to what was taught at the seminar. When asked how he intended to share scripture participant seven said that he would share scripture if it was needed. However, there might be a time when people only needed a handshake or a pat on the back and that was enough. Unfortunately, spiritual care is more than just good wishes or physical contact. True spiritual healing comes only from God through His Word.

The answers given to question five were encouraging. Most of the participants recognized that God's Word is at the heart of spiritual care. The expressed that they were going to

incorporate sharing scripture when they provided care. Although, one participant answered contrary to what was taught at the seminar it was encouraging that the rest learned how to share scripture.

Question Six: How do you intend to pray for those you visit?

Unlike the previous questions that provided several themes, participants who answered question six all shared a similar theme: a structure prayer. There were also two other responses. These other responses were not unfaithful; however, they were different than what was taught at the elder seminar.

The main theme expressed by the majority of participants was that they intended to pray for those they visit with a structured prayer, namely the collect prayer. Participant four expressed why he believes a structured prayer is important, “But prayer, it’s like if you are...just making up off the top of your head, there is always a little part in the back of your head that says you are going to mess up or forget the words or not channel the right words, or stumble...I think a plan helps.” Participant two also likes a structured prayer. He said, “I’m going to revert back to the seminar and being able to have a structured prayer and learning what structured prayer meant is key. And so reviewing the five steps and practicing that will give me the ability to pray with someone.” Participant six shared that a collect prayer gives one a roadmap or a guide on how to pray. Participant three said he never knew prayer had a structure before and now that he knows he will use it. He said, “When I pray, you know, I might have to have a little cheat sheet first. But that’s what I’m going to use. And next time they ask me at a family gathering to have the pray, that’s what I’m going to do.”

There were two other responses to how participants intended to pray. Participant five said he plans to pray from the heart. He shared that a person should feel confident and not be worried

about stumbling. He should just pray from the heart. Although extemporaneous prayers are faithful, the elder seminar purposely taught a collect prayer structure to help lay elders fill in the parts. This participant suggested a different type of prayer.

Participant seven also suggested a different way to pray. He said that he would always close with the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is the chief prayer because Jesus taught it to us. However, this participant seemed uncomfortable to pray publicly and therefore wanted to pray the Lord's Prayer together with his conversation partner.

The answers given to question six were mainly positive. I was happy to see that five of the seven participants planned to use the structured prayer of the collect. It was interesting that two lay elders suggested a different way to pray. Although those prayers are still faithful, they were not the ones taught at the elder seminar. This will be noted in chapter six as I discuss improvement or suggestions for the future.

Question Seven: How will you practice confidentiality when caring for those you visit?

The majority of participants' responses to question seven were in unison. Each participant acknowledged that confidentiality is of utmost importance, and they plan to practice it. Nevertheless, there were two participants who made one exception to confidentiality.

All participants agreed that confidentiality is important. One of the ways participants will try to practice confidentiality is by asking if the information shared to them is confidential. Participant six shared this opinion when he said, "100% confidentiality! And asking the question first off. I mean, you have the conversation with them in confidence. As the conversation goes on, they open up more and more. Maybe towards the end, you say, is this something maybe I could share with pastor." Participant seven agrees that asking if the conversation is confidential is important.

Participants four, five, and six shared that practicing confidentiality builds trust and respect with the person you are talking with. Participant six said, “You want to build confidence with them right off the get go and then that credibility and confidentiality. And then from there, they open up to you.” Participant four says something similar when he states, “[confidentiality] it definitely is a way to build trust. Build rapport with people that we are reaching out for.” Participant five notes that confidentiality is a way to show love and respect towards those we are caring for.

Although all participants recognize the importance of confidentiality, participants one and seven shared that they believe they should always tell the pastor. Although they have great intentions in keeping the pastor informed confidentiality includes even the pastor. There are times members share things that they do not even want the pastor to know. Lay elders need to respect those bounds of confidentiality.

The answers given in response to question eight expressed well what was taught at the seminar. I was pleased that all lay elders found confidentiality important when providing spiritual care. Although, two participants wanted to share confidential information with the pastor, I recognize that many feel that the pastor by nature of his position is okay to share information with. Again, I will address that concern in chapter six as I discuss suggestions for the future.

Question Eight: Why is it important to follow up with the pastor after providing spiritual care to those you visit?

Each participant stated that they believe following up with the pastor is important. As the participants shared reasons why they believed follow up was important, three themes emerged. The themes included people assuming the pastor already knows, the pastor can help lay elders provide care, and as the spiritual leader the pastor needs to know.

The first theme that was shared was people assume the pastor already knows. Participant one expressed this opinion. He noted that often times when people share information with one of the lay elders, they naturally assume the lay elder will tell the pastor. When the lay elder doesn't follow up with the pastor it can create a problem. It can give rise to a situation where the pastor is caught off guard or blindsided by a situation or event. Participant four shared something similar, "Just so you [the pastor] are aware of what things are going on in your congregants' lives."

Another theme as to why follow up is important is that by following up with the pastor it allows you to work together. Participant two shared that, "the importance in my mind is, for starters, reassurance that the avenue that I took was correct and also looking to you for guidance or further instruction." Participant one also shared a similar view as he said that sometimes the pastor knows more information and he can clue you into more that is going on.

The final theme drawn from the participants' responses was that follow up with the pastor is important because he is the spiritual leader of the church. Participant three said, "You are our shepherd, and you are our leader. You are our guide. And I think if you lead this church, you have to know these things. You don't want to be caught cold...I think you need to know [about every visit]." Participant six said that the pastor needs to know because spiritual care is not a one and done event. Rather, it often requires multiple visits or calls. Since it is an ongoing event the pastor needs to know what care is being offered at the Church.

The answers given to question eight were overwhelmingly in agreement. The participants showed that they learned from the seminar why follow up is important and how they intended to use it. The responses from the participants reveal the effectiveness of this part of the elder seminar.

Question Nine: How has the seminar influenced your service as an elder, especially in the task of member visitation?

Question nine was an open-ended question that allowed participants to give a wide range of answers. Although participants could have answered in a variety of ways it is interesting that there were once again a few themes that developed as multiple participants gave similar answers. These themes included the importance of the lay elder task and instruction.

The first theme that arose in response to how the elder seminar influence their service as an elder was the importance of the lay elder task. Several participants shared that the elder seminar highlighted the wonderful work and also important work of providing spiritual care. Participant one shared this view when he said,

I think it [elder seminar] was one of the best. And I'm not just saying that because I'm sitting here talk to you, but I really think it's one of the best things that I have attended that really kind of reignited and maybe organized my process for spiritual care for others. And maybe, you know like I said, lit a fire, you know, maybe being more aware, looking out more and you know knowing that I have these tools that God has given me, I need to be using them maybe a little more.

Participant three when talking about the importance of spiritual care said,

If you are not going to church and you are not a regular attender, the devil is going to be talking to you, not Christ, not the word and all, and so man, that hits home really seriously. And so, as an elder, if you see people that aren't attending, I think it's just your responsibility to call them.

Another theme that came out of question nine was the thankfulness to receive instruction.

Participant six share this view when he said,

The seminar was very helpful to me. Again, being a new elder it kind of gave me some rules of engagement, so to speak in regard to how you would go about meeting with different people, how you can help carry on a conversation and kind of the process that you would go through with that meeting. So, it was very informative in regard to you the initial meeting with them, make sure that you are sharing scripture with them and praying and then follow up. I think it is critical right now if you don't do a follow up with them the problem may not get resolved.

Participants two, three, and four also expressed thankfulness for the instruction and structure of

spiritual care visits that arose out of the elder seminar. Participant seven shared that he enjoyed instruction but more than that he enjoyed being able to put the instruction into practice. One of his favorite parts of the seminar was being able to team up with a partner and role play. The role play activities gave him a chance to learn how to use the new skills he had been taught.

Although the majority of responses to question nine were positive, participant five expressed that the elder seminar is extremely helpful to the young elders. He said all young elders need to go through this training. However, he is a senior elder and he already knew all the information. This is a response that I will address in chapter six as I talk about suggestions and improvements for the future.

Expected Findings

Overall, the majority of the information I reported in this chapter I expected to discover. I expected the participants that I interviewed to have lacked previous training and experience. Outside of two participants this proved to be true and even those two expressed that they never had formal training only experience. I also expected that the lay elders in the congregation had a desire to learn more and improve in the area of spiritual care. This fact was demonstrated by the participants' reception to training and ability to retain it. In fact, participant six noted that he took several pages of notes because he wanted to get better in the area of spiritual care. I also expected that a few lay elders would be apprehensive about providing spiritual care. This too proved to be true as a couple of participants shared in their interview information that was in variance to what they learned in the elder seminar.

One unexpected finding was how quickly the lay elders would implement what they learned into practice. I initially believed that even with training, the task of spiritual care would take the lay elders a long time to get into the practice of doing. I was pleased to discover, in an

area outside the scope of this project, that many lay elders have been at work with their “flock list” calling on members and putting into practice the *how* of providing spiritual care.

Answering the Research Question

In chapter one I began this MAP by identifying my research question. “How might a training seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the spiritual care skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?” This question was motivated by the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic which had significant consequences for my congregation as families were kept away from in person worship. After completing the elder seminar, and then interviewing seven lay elders to understand if the seminar was effective, the answer to my research question became clear. A training seminar did in fact help the lay elders of my congregation obtain the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up. Even though a few lay elders shared answers which differed from that taught at the seminar, the overwhelming majority of answers proved that the seminar was effective in teaching the skills of spiritual care.

Summary

In this chapter I introduced my research participants. Next, I detailed the data analysis gained through the seven interviews with each lay elder. I ordered the analysis around each interview question. Then, I shared my expected and unexpected findings. Finally, I revealed an answer to my research question.

In the next and final chapter, I will offer a summery and conclusion to my study. I will explore how this project has impacted my ministry at St. Paul Lutheran Church and also explore how this project can be used and benefit the Church at large. I will also offer some recommendations on how to improve this project in the future.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY

As I began the Doctor of Ministry program, I was the third generation in my family to enroll in the Doctor of Ministry program at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. By God's grace, I will be the first to finish the program. I am not finishing the program because I am a harder worker or more intelligent than my father or grandfather. On the contrary, my father and grandfather were well respected in the Church at large and beloved in their local congregations. The reason my father and grandfather often cited for not finishing what they started in the Doctor of Ministry program was that the needs of the parish were too demanding. My father always said that continuing education is valuable and important but real people matter most. I have the same love and zeal for the parish and the people in it that those in my family have had before me. In fact, there were times during this program that I wondered if I would ever finish. It seemed that every time I budgeted time to write my final project, I had two or more funerals pop up unexpectedly or I would have an abundance of counseling requests from the members of the parish. Perhaps the biggest challenge I endured was a sister congregation who asked me to be their vacancy pastor the same month I began writing my final MAP. I served the vacancy for eighteen months, the entire time in which I wrote my final MAP. Yet, despite the challenges and needs of my local parish, by God's grace, I was able to wrestle the time away to finish the coursework and complete my final MAP.

The fact that I am only the first in three generations to finish the Doctor of Ministry program from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis highlights the importance of this MAP. The spiritual needs of God's people are great, and pastors always find that there is not enough time in the day to care for all the needs of God's people, which is why my father and grandfather were

never able to finish the Doctor of Ministry program. Therefore, it is necessary that a board of lay elders assist the pastor in caring for the spiritual needs of the congregation, and it is important for those same lay elders to be equipped with the skills to faithfully carry out that work. As detailed in this MAP, those skills include active listening, sharing scripture, active listening, offering prayer, and providing follow up.

Implications for Ministry

Local Ministry

The idea for this MAP was created out of the spiritual concerns that arose because of the COVID19 pandemic in 2020. The pandemic left St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL with many challenges. Some of those challenges included being forced to worship online for twelve weeks, a major drop in attendance in both worship and Bible class, and social gatherings that were postponed and often canceled. Despite how difficult those challenges were the pandemic highlighted an even greater problem. The baptized people of God at St. Paul needed spiritual care but unfortunately, the lay elders of the congregation, who were elected and commissioned to provide that care, were not equipped to provide it.

The work of this MAP has greatly affected the spiritual care taking place at St. Paul Lutheran Church. By all accounts the elder seminar that was offered was the first of its kind or at the very least the first in recent memory. For those who were able to attend, the seminar equipped the lay elders not only to know *what* spiritual care is but more importantly *how* to provide it. The lay elders learned how to actively listen, how to share scripture, how to offer prayer, and how to provide follow up. Following the seminar, the interviews with the lay elders revealed that they were equipped to provide spiritual care. In fact, several lay elders who could not attend the seminar expressed remorse for having to miss the seminar. They also were eager to

find out when another training seminar might be offered in the future.

The elder training might not increase worship attendance or Bible class and Sunday school attendance. It might not change how successful social gatherings and congregational fundraisers might be in the future. Nevertheless, the elder training will make an eternal difference. The lay elders are not only equipped with how to provide spiritual care, but they are also eager to put their training into practice by communicating with those in the “flock lists”. Through individual phone conversations, visits to the hospital or homes or elder care institutions, or face-to-face conversations before or after worship the lay elders will be able to lead people to our Lord Jesus Christ and the gifts that He offers to His people.

The major implication for my congregation is the development of lay elders who are trained in spiritual care so that through their training more members of the congregation will receive spiritual care. Another implication for ministry at St. Paul is that this elder seminar could be adapted and taught to other lay leaders or members of the congregation. The basic skills of spiritual care are not limited to the pastor or the lay elders and could be practiced by other members of the congregation. Therefore, this seminar could easily be offered in the form of a Bible study or general training seminar so that even more members of the congregation could be taught *how* to provide spiritual care. Lay leaders who are trained could partner with the Board of Elders to accomplish a greater impact in the spiritual care of members of the congregation.

Broader Impact

Throughout this past year at my monthly pastoral circuit meetings, I have had the opportunity to discuss my MAP with several of the local pastors. I have appreciated their wisdom and guidance along the way and their desire for me to accomplish the work I started. Several of the fellow brother pastors have taken great interest in my topic of spiritual care and

have even asked for resources I have used for my project that might be helpful for their congregation. I have even had one fellow pastor who scheduled to meet with me privately so that we could talk about how he could host his own elder seminar and the possibility of having me speak and share what I have learned.

I am convinced that this project could be used by most congregations in our synod. Whether a congregation is large or small there is always a need for more spiritual care. The problem of a shortage of trained lay leaders who know *how* to provide spiritual care is not unique to my congregation. Also, the problem of a Board of Elders who are not equipped to carry out the main purpose of their function as lay elders is not unique to my congregation. In fact, as I have talked to many other pastors it appears to be a problem that plagues many of our congregations. By hosting an elder seminar, congregations would be able to train their lay leaders to assist the pastor in providing spiritual care. I believe that this would make congregations in our synod healthier. In a time where congregations are closing it seems possible and even likely that if there was more spiritual care for the members of the congregation than perhaps those congregations would remain alive, mission minded, and a place where God's gifts are still being heard and received. Spiritual care makes an impact not just in the health of a congregation, but it also has an eternal difference in the life of the congregation as Christ and His gifts are more aptly made known to His people.

Personal Impact

The Doctor of Ministry program as a whole has had a significant impact on me personally. It has been a challenge to balance the program with my duties as a parish pastor as well as my duties as a father and a husband. These past five years have been stressful and have pushed me to work harder than at times I wanted to work. It has taken away any chance to be lazy and has

forced me to be more organized and diligent with how I use my time. Overall, this has been a blessing in my life. Although the late nights and few days off were taxing at times, the discipline it has given me will be a blessing in my life far after this program concludes.

The final project for this program has also impacted me personally. Spending multiple years entrenched in the topic of spiritual care has increased my own personal spiritual care and the way I care for others. It has improved my own spiritual care by leading to more time in God's Word through prayer and personal devotions. This study has instilled in me that spiritual care begins first with receiving God's Word and Sacrament. My life has been blessed by centering my day more firmly in the Word. Nourished in His Word I have been more equipped to care for the spiritual needs of others. The resources I have read which explore the art of spiritual care have helped me grow in my skills. They have also helped me develop new ways to teach others how to do the task of providing spiritual care through active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up.

Profession Impact

The Doctor of Ministry program has tremendously impacted me as a professional. The course work in the first part of the program has formed me into a better teacher, preacher, counselor, and an all-around parish pastor. One of the joys I have had from this program is that every class I took I found to be useful for my life in the parish. Classes I have taken have led to dynamic Bible classes, sermon preps, or helpful strategic planning for my congregation. There were no "blow off" classes or classes I dreaded to take. Rather, each class I firmly believe helped me be able to care for the members of my congregation.

This project has also impacted me professionally through the training of the lay elders. Now that lay elders are equipped to provide spiritual care it means that more people can partner

and help me in this task. The needs of the parish are many and the work of the parish pastor is never done. By having others who are equipped to help with spiritual care means that I will be able to care for more needs of the parish. I will be able to work on “other piles on my desk”. It also means that more people in the congregation will receive care.

Recommendations for the Future

As this study has come to completion it is important that as I reflect on my project, I consider recommendations to improve the elder seminar in the future. It is also important to reflect on where this project will lead me in the future in the area of spiritual care. Finally, I wish to recommend how other congregations might build on the work that I studied.

As my project has come to a close, I recognize there are areas that I would improve in the future concerning my elder seminar. For instance, as noted in chapter five, although the elder seminar proved to be effective in teaching *how* to provide spiritual care based on the majority of the responses by the lay elders in their interviews it was still the case that some lay elder gave responses that were in variance to what was taught at the seminar. Although I cannot force participants at the elder seminar to retain all the information that was taught, I believe there might be ways to help the participants process and retain what they learned more fully. One way to do that would be to have short quizzes at the end of each unit. The purpose of the quiz would be to offer one more opportunity to drive home the information that was taught. The short quiz could be taken together as a group, and it would serve as a way to review the information from the unit. Another way to increase positive responses from the elder seminar would be to offer more time. I am well aware that the elder seminar covered a lot of material in a short amount of time. If there could be fifteen more minutes added to each unit to allow for another round of practice, I think it would increase the retention from the seminar and elicit positive responses. A

final idea would be to host the seminar over multiple days. By spreading out the seminar over multiple days, it would allow the opportunity to review each topic. Hopefully with more time and more review the participants would each properly understand *how* to offer spiritual care.

As I explore how to improve my elder seminar in the future it is also important to reflect on where my study will lead me in the future in the area of spiritual care. Offering spiritual care has always been a passion of mine. One of my favorite parts about serving in the parish is being with people and sharing God's Word and Sacrament in order to care for them.

Going forward, I plan to continue teaching and equipping the lay elders in *how* to provide spiritual care. The seminar was very effective, and I plan to build on it and offer at a minimum a yearly training session where we sharpen our spiritual care skills. I plan to create little scenarios and have the lay elders pair up and practice *how* to care for people. I also plan to increase the spiritual care at the Board of Elders meetings. The board meetings have fallen into a bad practice of opening and closing in prayer but then everything in the middle is only business to discuss. Prayer simply becomes a way to start and end a meeting rather a focus of our purpose as a board of lay elders. I plan to remedy this and reorienting the Board to its main task of caring for the spiritual needs of the congregation by spending fifteen to twenty minutes at the beginning of the meeting to study God's Word together and grow in our own faith so we can care for the spiritual needs of others.

Another area that this study will lead me in the future in the area of spiritual care is to put this training into practice. The scope of this study did not allow me the time needed to send each lay elder out on a spiritual care visit and then interview them on how the visit went. Yet, in the future that is exactly what I hope to do. I am hoping as lay elders gain experience in the area of providing spiritual care, further interviews would allow them to discuss how their spiritual care

visits went and how they could improve them in the future. This would be a great long range training program.

This study is a benefit to St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL. It will be a blessing to the lay elders as they serve the members of this congregation, and it will be a blessing to the parishioners as they receive more spiritual care. Nevertheless, this project has the opportunity to benefit far more individuals than just St. Paul it could easily be adapted and used by congregations in my circuit, district, the greater LCMS, and even other Christian congregations.

This study could simply be offered by another congregation. The need for spiritual care is great and many congregations struggle to find trained lay leaders to assist the pastor. Therefore, if a congregation wanted to start training lay leaders in the art of how to provide spiritual care, they could hold their own elder seminar.

However, if a congregation wanted to build on the work I have done in this MAP, I would recommend that they develop their own spiritual care plan. Once lay elders know *how* to provide spiritual care it would be beneficial to find a way to deploy them throughout the congregation. One way to do this would be to use a church management software which allows you to keep track of worship attendance. The pastor and the lay elders could identify those who have not worshiped recently. Then those in each individual lay elder “flock lists” who have not attended recently would have their lay elder visit them and provide spiritual care.

Finally, I recommend that all pastors and congregations continue to study the area of spiritual care, especially how to teach the laity how to provide it to others. We live in a fallen world and the only remedy is God’s Word and Sacrament. As more individuals are equipped to provide spiritual care the more the people of God will be blessed and strengthened in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Summary

I began this study seeking to answer my research question, “How might a training seminar help the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church obtain the skills of active listening, sharing scripture, offering prayer, and providing follow up in order to care for the members of the congregation?” The answer demanded a lot of study, training, and equipping. Yet, I am thankful that I can confidently say that the lay elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wood River, IL have learned the skills of spiritual care, and more importantly they have learned *how* to provide it to individuals in their elder groups. Lay elders at St. Paul are not perfect men. They are sinners like everyone else. Yet, by God’s grace He is at work using them to care for the spiritual needs of the congregation.

APPENDIX ONE

Lay Elder Seminar Agenda

Elder Seminar: Learning the Skills of Spiritual Care Agenda

8:00 – 8:15	Arrival and Breakfast
8:15 – 8:30	Welcome and Introduction
8:30 – 9:00	Session 1 – The Importance of Spiritual Care
9:00 – 9:10	Break
9:10 – 10:00	Session 2 – Active Listening
10:00 – 10:10	Break
10:10 – 10:50	Session 3 – Sharing Scripture
10:50 – 11:00	Break
11:00 – 11:30	Session 4 – Prayer
11:30 – 11:40	Break
11:40 – 12:10	Session 5 – Follow up
12:10 – 12:40	Lunch
12:40 – 1:00	Wrap up and sign up for interviews

APPENDIX TWO

Lay Elder Seminar: Student Material

Session 1 – The Importance of Spiritual Care

What is spiritual care?

How is spiritual care different than other types of care?

Why is spiritual care so important?

How has the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for spiritual care at St. Paul Lutheran Church?

What is the danger of God's people not receiving spiritual care?

What is the difficulty of providing spiritual care to a large congregation?

Who assists the pastor in providing spiritual care to the members of the congregation?

What concerns about spiritual care did several Elders express during the Covid19 pandemic?

What are some general skills you might use to provide care for others?

What are the four basic skills of spiritual care?

Session 2 – Active Listening

The first step in providing spiritual care is to listen. Why do you think listening is so important?

What is active listening?

Three main activities of Active Listening

1.

2.

3.

What to listen for?

Characteristics of a good listener

Characteristics of a poor listener

Practicing Active Listening

Session 3 – Sharing Scripture

How does active listening prepare an individual to provide further spiritual care?

After diagnosing the spiritual needs of your conversation partner what are the tools needed to provide proper spiritual care?

Who does the work of spiritual care?

If God does the works, what do we do?

Transitions from active listening to sharing scripture

- “Can I share a devotion with you?”
- “One of my favorite verses in the Bible is _____.”
- “That reminds me of what God says in _____.”
- “I have found _____ to be comforting to me in times of trouble.”
- “I don’t know why these things are happening to you. But I do know what God has promised. In _____, He says...”

Practice Sharing Scripture

- Find a partner and take turns actively listening and then share God’s Word to provide the means of spiritual care.
- Use the Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet as a guide to find the right Word of God to share.
- Pastor will give each partner a different scenario to share.
- Time: 20 minutes (10 minutes for each partner)

Session 4 – Offering Prayer

Why is prayer an important part of spiritual care?

Collect Prayer Structure

1. An address to God
2. The rationale
3. The main petition
4. The desired result
5. The Conclusion

Example of a Collect Prayer

Practice offering prayer

Exercise 1

- Find a partner and take turns actively listening, share God’s Word, and offering prayer.
- Use the Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet as a guide to find the right Word of God to share.
- After sharing Scripture, ask your conversation partner if you can pray for them. Lead a prayer using the collect form.
- Pastor will give each partner a different scenario to share.
- Time: 20 minutes (10 minutes for each partner)

Session 5: Providing Follow Up

Why is caring for others something we do *together*?

What is the importance of confidentiality in spiritual care?

What should you do if you feel the pastor should be aware of the spiritual needs of the individual you are offering care to?

Do you need to share all the details of your conversations with your conversation partner with the pastor?

What types of details should you not share with the pastor?

What details should you share with the pastor?

What details must you share with the pastor even if the individual you are speaking with does not want the pastor to know?

How does following up with the pastor benefit the individual you are caring for?

How does following up with the pastor benefit the elder offering care?

Providing Follow Up Exercise

- *Take out your “Spiritual Care Report” sheet. Follow along as pastor shares how to fill it out.*

APPENDIX THREE

Lay Elder Seminar: Teacher Materials

Session 1 – The Importance of Spiritual Care

What is spiritual care?

- *Caring for a person's relationship with God through the means He has provided to us; Word and Sacrament.*
- *Centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*
- *The work of the Holy Spirit.*

How is spiritual care different than other types of care?

- *There is a great focus on caring for our physical, emotional, and mental health. We find care in these areas from doctors, psychologists, and counselors. We might even seek medicine or surgery to help us with care. These types of care are focused on us and improving health in this life alone.*
- *Contrary to other types of care, spiritual care is focused on God and what He has done and is doing for His people. Spiritual care is not about fixing individuals problems. Rather, spiritual care is concerned about an individual's faith in Jesus and their eternal salvation in Him.*

Why is spiritual care so important?

- *Spiritual care is important because it deals with the life or death of a soul.*
- *Spiritual care has eternal blessings or consequences.*

How has the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for spiritual care at St. Paul Lutheran Church?

- *It has separated people from God's gifts of Word and Sacrament.*
 - *For 12 weeks (March 22 – June 7, 2021) our congregation was not able to gather in-person for worship.*
 - *For 5 months (March 22 – August 23, 2021) our congregation was not able to gather for Bible Class or Sunday school*
 - *Currently (May 22, 2021) our congregational attendance is down 20% of our normal Sunday morning attendance before the pandemic began.*
- *It has separated people from the community of faith.*
 - *For over 1 year (March 22 – June 1, 2021) our congregation was not able to have social gathering, including; choir, handbells, youth group, men's and women's groups, advent dinners, etc...*
 - *The Smalcald Articles state that the mutual conversation and consultation of brothers and sisters is a means of grace (Article 4). The importance of gathering together should not be downplayed or minimized. Although, social media has attempted to offer an online community presence, the lack of face to face interaction has brought about feelings of isolation, loneliness, anxiety, boredom, etc....*

What is the danger of God's people not receiving spiritual care?

- *Without gathering together as the people of God to hear His Word and receive His sacraments the people of God are in a vulnerable position. Without God's gifts they are left prey to the devil, the world, and their own sinful nature.*
- *"When the church no longer serves as the foundation and the shape of a believer's weekly routine, when Sunday morning spent at church is no longer the keystone of a week that orbits around the life of the church, the remaining void must and will be filled with something else. Projects at home, a fresh Sunday morning hobby, newly discovered on-line friends, and influences, a newborn or more fully pursued passion of a precession social injustice, a preoccupation with politics: life will be occupied with ideas and diversions and causes to give it meaning. The place once securely occupied by the church has been filled with other attractions. It happens. It has happened. It is happening. Satan does not squander an opportunity as remarkable and unexpected as a world completely undone by a virus. Seizing his advantage, he is waging war with the dependable and deadly weapons of apathy, distractions, comfort, and attrition – their reliable potency now amplified countless times over by the destruction of holy habits and the devastation of pious life routines. With the help of so many willing and unwitting soldiers, Satan is winning battles in the lives of saints that would have seemed impossible only months ago."*¹ – Dr. Joel Biermann

What is the difficulty of providing spiritual care to a large congregation?

- *Spiritual care requires a lot of work. It is not completed in one day or even after one year. Spiritual care in an ongoing process as you walk with believers and keep them strong in their faith in Jesus.*
- *For a large congregation to provide proper spiritual care there needs to be more individuals helping than just the pastor.*

Who assists the pastor in providing spiritual care to the members of the congregation?

- *The Board of Elders.*
- *The congregation is divided up into "flock" lists based on the current number of elders (14). Each elder has approximately 30 families in his "flock" list.*
- *The elders assist the pastor in providing spiritual care for the members in their flock list.*

What concerns about spiritual care did several Elders express during the Covid19 pandemic?

- *"What if I don't know the family?"*
- *"What am I supposed to say?"*
- *"What prayer should I say with them?"*
- *"Can you write me a prayer?"*
- *"Do I have to share a Bible verse?"*
- *"Which Bible verse should I share?"*
- *"What do I do with the information that I find out?"*

What are some general skills you might use to provide care for others?

- *People skills, patience, winsome, good listener, empathy, social awareness*

What are the four basic skills of spiritual care?

- *Active Listening*

¹ "3461. The Pandemic's Effects on the Church – Dr. Joel Biermann, 12/11/20," accessed January 12, 2021, <https://issuesetc.org/2020/12/11/3461-the-pandemics-effects-on-the-church-dr-joel-biermann-12-11-20/>.

- *Sharing Scripture*
- *Offering Prayer*
- *Providing Follow up*

Session 2 – Active Listening

The first step in providing spiritual care is to listen. Why do you think listening is so important?

- *Before you can provide proper care, it is important to diagnosis the problem.*
- *Listening might seem like a simple step that comes naturally. However, active listening is an art that takes skill and practice.*
- *Being a good listening requires a lot of hard work.*

What is active listening?

- *Active listening is more than just passively hearing words from your conversation partner. It is a way of genuinely listening to others without trying to fix their problems. Active listening is a way of understanding others by paying attention, paraphrasing what you heard, and asking questions.*

Three main activities of Active Listening

- **Paying Attention**
 - *Paying attention helps your conversation partners know that they can trust you.*
 - *Demonstrating to your conversation partners that you are paying attention involves more than just having your mind focused. It involves using your whole body.*
 - *SOLAR is an arcanum that can help you pay attention with your whole bodies.²*
 - *S – sitting at a comfortable angle or distance*
 - *O – Open posture. Arms and legs uncrossed*
 - *L – Leaning forward from time to time. Looking genuinely interested.*
 - *E – Eye contact*
 - *R – Remaining relatively relaxed*
- **Paraphrasing**
 - *It might seem strange that listening involves speaking. But passive listening without responding can be demeaning or give them impression you don't care. It is important that an active listener responds to their conversation partner. The goal is to help the person you are listening to be able to share more.*
 - *Minimal encouragers – are single words or short phrases that demonstrate to your conversation partner that you are paying attention. Examples include*
 - *Oh...*
 - *Uh-huh*
 - *Umm-hmmm*
 - *Tell me more...*
 - *Then?*
 - *Go on...*
 - *Paraphrasing – it is helpful to repeat back to your conversation partner what they shared with you. It is important not to parrot back word for word but to show them that you understood what they told you. Paraphrasing can help bring clarity to what your conversation partner has shared with you.*
- **Asking Questions**

² Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper: A Problem-Management and Opportunity-Development Approach to Helping*, 8th ed (Australia ; Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2007). Pg. 75-77

- *Active listeners encourage their conversation partner to continue speaking by asking questions. Active listeners know that asking the right questions are important for caring for others.*
- *Open ended questions are the right questions to ask. Open ended questions allow your conversation partner to continue sharing. Examples of open-ended questions:*
 - *“How were you feeling when that happened?”*
 - *“What did you think of Vacation Bible School this week?”*
 - *“What did you think about pastor’s sermon this morning?”*
 - *“How do you feel about the way our church has handled the COVID19 pandemic?”*
- *Closed questions are the wrong questions to ask. Closed questions do not allow your conversation partner to continue to speak. Rather, they bring the conversation to a close. Examples of close ended questions*
 - *“How did that make you feel happy?”*
 - *“Did you like Vacation Bible School?”*
 - *“Did you like the pastor’s sermon?”*
 - *“Are you happy with the churches COVID19 procedures?”*

What to listen for?

- *Themes or patterns*
 - *Active listening happens as both one time and reoccurring conversations. It is important as you listen to find themes or patterns that come up. This will help you understand what they are struggling with.*
- *Nonverbal communication*
 - *Active listeners pay attention to body language. They take note of posture, sound of voice, hand gestures, fidgeting, rate of breathing, color in their face, muscle tension, eyes, and choice of clothing.*
- *What is not said*
 - *Active listeners will notice information that there care receiver might not be sharing. Sometimes care receivers will be silent about what is troubling them the most.*

Characteristics of a good listener

- *Empathetic*
 - *The ability to care and understand what someone is feeling.*
 - *The ability to “put yourself in someone else’s shoes”.*
- *Intentional*
 - *It is important to be intentional in listening. There are many distractions or other commitments that an individual might have. However, to be a good listener you must be intentional on giving your conversation partner your full attention. You must actually want to listen.*
 - *Being intentional means, you set aside distractions (cell phone, checking the time, mind wandering).*
- *Dedicated*
 - *Being a good listener takes time. You must be patient as you listen. It takes time to build trust with someone you share personal information with. Listening cannot be rushed to a quick resolution. By being patient, you show your conversation partner that you are genuinely concerned about their needs.*

Characteristics of a poor listener

- Not paying attention
 - *daydreaming, wandering off, clock watching, checking cell phone*
- Half listening
 - *acting interested while planning what to say next*
- Shallow listening
 - *avoiding subjects that you feel are too emotional or make you feel uncomfortable*
- Interrupting
 - *stopping your conversation partner from talking so that you can talk, dominating the conversation*
- Over Agreement
 - *agreeing with everything your conversation partner shares instead of helping them reflect challenges or problems they are sharing with you.*
- Being judgmental
 - *Make judgements about your conversation partner instead of allowing them to talk freely and listening to what they are feeling and experiencing.*
- Poor body language
 - *slouching in your seat, giving an impression of boredom or being uninterested in what your conversation partner is sharing.*

Practicing Active Listening

Exercise 1

- Find a partner and take turns actively listening to what they did for Easter this year.
- Time: 10 minutes (5 minutes for each partner)

Exercise 2

- Find a partner and take turns actively listening
- Pastor will give each partner a different scenario to share
- Time: 10 minutes (5 minutes for each partner)

Exercise 2 – Partner 1 Scenario

- *You are a member of the congregation who is upset about the current COVID19 procedures at St. Paul. You wish everyone would wear a mask during the entire service. You think we should be sitting every other pew. You think the pastor is putting the health and lives of the members of the congregation at risk. You want the elder to fix the pastor and make him add more restrictions. If things do not change you are not coming back to church.*

Exercise 2 – Partner 2 Scenario

- *You are a member of the congregation who is upset about the current COVID19 procedures at St. Paul. You feel anxious about all the political conversation surrounding the pandemic. It makes you mad that you come to church and you see people wearing masks, pews blocked off, and hand sanitizer stations. You feel like the church is buying into the craziness of the world. You are mad at the pastor for catering to one or two people instead of looking out for what the majority wants. If things do not change, you are not coming back to church.*

Session 3 – Sharing Scripture

How does active listening prepare an individual to provide further spiritual care?

- *Active listening helps produce an accurate diagnosis of what is troubling an individual. Only through active listening will an individual properly understand the root of what is troubling their conversation partners soul.*

After diagnosing the spiritual needs of your conversation partner what are the tools needed to provide proper spiritual care?

- The means of grace
 - *God's Word*
 - *Holy Communion*
 - *Baptism*
- Divine Service
 - *God's means of grace are found in worship.*
 - *It is important for those who provide spiritual care to be in worship to receive God's gifts so that they are strengthened in their faith and enabled to strengthen others in their faith.*
 - *It is also important to encourage those who are spiritually distressed to be in worship to receive God's gifts.*

Who does the work of spiritual care?

- *God has given His people great gifts; empathy, winsomeness, wisdom, relational skills, and much more. Individuals use these gifts when offering care.*
- *However, the true source of treatment for troubled souls is always God alone! He provides true care through the means of His Word and Sacrament.*

If God does the works, what do we do?

- Mediator
 - *The Holy Spirit chooses not to work directly in the lives of people. Rather, He has chosen to work mediately. The Holy Spirit uses people to bring His Word to troubled souls.*
- Unique Word for unique situations
 - *It is important for individuals who provide spiritual care to bring the right Word of God for troubled souls. After properly diagnosis the spiritual concern, an individual will bring a unique word of God for their conversation partners unique situation.*

Transitions from active listening to sharing scripture

- "Can I share a devotion with you?"
- "One of my favorite verses in the Bible is _____."
- That reminds me of what God says in *Book of the Bible*.
- I have found this verse _____ to be comforting to me in times of trouble.
- I don't know why these things are happening to you. But I do know what God has promised. In *Book of the Bible*, He says...

Spiritual care means sharing both God's comforting words of the Gospel and His _____.

- *Spiritual care is not only meant for those who seek comfort*

- *Spiritual care is also for those whose souls are troubled by unrepentant sin. Providing spiritual care may mean the difficult work of proclaiming God's Law and calling people to repentance.*
- *Sharing God's Law will not always make the one offering spiritual care very popular. Sin always rebels against God's Law. Yet, those who wish to offer true spiritual care will be willing to be unpopular for the sake of bringing a lost sheep back to Christ.*

Spiritual care is not just the pastor's responsibility. Who shares in the responsibility of caring for brothers and sisters in Christ?

- The Early Church selected lay leaders to assist in providing care for the members of the congregation.
 - Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ 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. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)
- By virtue of our baptism, every Christian is called to care for the needs of others.
 - If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory...¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17)

Practice Sharing Scripture

- Find a partner and take turns actively listening and then share God's Word to provide the means of spiritual care.
- Use the Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet as a guide to find the right Word of God to share.
- Pastor will give each partner a different scenario to share.
- Time: 20 minutes (10 minutes for each partner)

Partner 1 Scenario

It has been over one year since you have been to church. When the Covid19 pandemic began you worshiped online for health concerns. Now a year later, you go to work, Walmart, out to eat at restaurants, yet you still are not coming back to church. You find worshiping online to be easy. You like watching in your pajamas and drinking your coffee. After all God's Word is God's Word so it should not matter if you are in-person or worshiping online.

This most recent Sunday, the pastor encouraged the members of the congregation to worship in person. He even suggested that online worship is a 2nd choice to being in person. You are mad at your pastor, so you decide to call your elder to tell him that your pastor is wrong, and you do not see a need to gather in person ever again. If the pastor insists on saying such foolish things you will transfer to a new church.

Partner 2 Scenario

It has been three months since your spouse died. You were so thankful to pastor and to all the members of the congregation for their support when she died. However, three months later you feel so alone, and the grief hurts so bad. You need help. You are not sure where to turn.

Session 4 – Offering Prayer

Why is prayer an important part of spiritual care?

- *Because God is the source of all spiritual care. Therefore, we bring before His throne of grace and mercy all things that trouble our souls and the souls of others knowing that He promises to hear us and answer us.*

Which prayers are best?

- Spontaneous Prayers
- Prayers from the Bible
- Written Prayers
- Prayers from Memory
- *All prayers are good and beneficial for God's people! God has given us the freedom to pray in a multitude of ways.*

Collect Prayer Structure

- An address to God
- The rationale
- The main petition
- The desired result
- The Conclusion

Example of a Collect Prayer

Psalm 46:1 *God is our refuge and Strength a very present help in times of Trouble*

Heavenly Father
(An Address to God)

You promise to be present in times of trouble
(The rationale)

Be with your servant Gloria as she awaits upcoming medical tests
(The main petition)

So that she might be still and trust that you are in control.
(the desire outcome)

In Jesus name. Amen.
(Conclusion)

Practice offering prayer

Exercise 1

- Find a partner and take turns actively listening, share God's Word, and offering prayer.
- Use the Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet as a guide to find the right Word of God to share.
- After sharing Scripture, ask your conversation partner if you can pray for them. Lead a prayer using the collect form.
- Pastor will give each partner a different scenario to share.

- Time: 20 minutes (10 minutes for each partner)

Partner 1 Scenario

- *You just received good news that you are expecting your first grandchild this fall. This is especially good news because your children have been trying to get pregnant for 4 years and have not been able to.*

Partner 2 Scenario

- *You messed up. You lied to your wife and got caught. You two have been fighting for over a week. She does not think she can trust you again. You feel terrible. You don't know how to make it right.*

Session 5: Providing Follow Up

Why is caring for others something we do *together*?

- *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. – 2 Corinthians 1:3-5*
- *As the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) God gives each of us different gifts and abilities. When caring for others each of us are blessed with different skills as we offer care.*

What is the importance of confidentiality in spiritual care?

- *Confidentiality builds trust between the care giver and the care receiver.*

What should you do if you feel the pastor should be aware of the spiritual needs of the individual you are offering care to?

- *Ask the individual if you may share with the pastor. If the individual does not want you to share, encourage them to go and share with the pastor.*

Do you need to share all the details of your conversations with your conversation partner with the pastor?

- *No, only those details that are necessary for the pastor to know so he can offer prayers or support for the individuals.*

What types of details should you not share with the pastor?

- *Information the individual asks you not to share.*
- *“The Weeds” – little details that are not the main point. For instance, every vulgar word, opinion, or thought shared.*

What details should you share with the pastor?

- *“Big picture” – main points of what the individual is needing care for.*
- *A need for the pastor to reconcile with the individual.*

What details must you share with the pastor even if the individual you are speaking with does not want the pastor to know?

- *Suicidal thoughts*
- *Desire to hurt others*
- *Abuse*

How does following up with the pastor benefit the individual you are caring for?

- *As the body of Christ, we care for individuals together. When following up with the pastor the elder ensures that someone else is praying for the individual. It also allows more people to brainstorm with the Holy Spirit on how to best offer care.*

How does following up with the pastor benefit the elder offering care?

- *The pastor may know information from previous conversations that the elder is unaware of. The pastor may also be able to offer insight or guidance as the elder continues to offer spiritual care.*

Providing Follow Up Exercise

- *Take out your “Spiritual Care Report” sheet. Follow along as pastor shares how to fill it out.*

APPENDIX FOUR

Lay Elder Seminar: Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet

Sharing Scripture Cheat Sheet

Pastor Schultz's Favorite Resources

- *Psalm 121* – God is always watching over us.
 - *Psalm 46* – God is a very present help in trouble.
 - *Psalm 23* – God is our Good Shepherd who cares for us.
 - *Romans 8:38-39* – Nothing can separate us from God's love in Jesus.
 - *2 Corinthians 4:16-18* – Earthly afflictions are preparing us for an eternal glory.
 - *John 10:27-30* – Nothing can snatch us away from Jesus, not even death!
 - *Psalm 32* – God gives forgiveness.
 - *Ephesians 4:32* – Imitate Christ.
 - *Psalm 100* – Rejoice that God is good!
-

Contentment

- The secret to contentment is found in Christ.
 - *Philippians 4:11-13*
- Worldly possessions can be harmful.
 - *1 Timothy 6:10*
- God with us is enough.
 - *Hebrews 13:5*

Comfort

- God is the source of all comfort.
 - *2 Corinthians 1:3-4*
- Nothing Can separate us from God's Love.
 - *Romans 8:38-39*
- God is a very present help in times of trouble.
 - *Psalm 46*

Death and Resurrection

- The Good Shepherd is with us even in death.
 - *Psalm 23*
- Jesus is the way to eternal life.
 - *John 14:1-6*
- We grieve with hope.
 - *1 Thessalonians 4:13-17*
- God will raise us up on the Last Day.
 - *John 6:27-40*
- In life, in death, we are the Lords.
 - *Romans 14:7-9*

- Victory in Christ Jesus.
 - *1 Corinthians 15:51-57*

Feeling Alone

- God is watching over you.
 - *Psalm 121*
- Nothing can separate you from God's love.
 - *Romans 8:38-39*
- God is always with you.
 - *Matthew 28:20*
- No need to fear, God is with you.
 - *Isaiah 41:10*

Healing needs

- Do not lose heart. Our sufferings prepare us for an eternal glory.
 - *2 Corinthians 4:16-18*
- God's grace is sufficient for us.
 - *2 Corinthians 12:8-9*
- God quickly brings joy to His people who suffer.
 - *Psalm 30:1-5*

Importance of Gathering for Worship

- Worship is commanded by God.
 - *3rd commandment*
- Do not neglect to gather together.
 - *Hebrews 10:25*
- The Church is the body of Christ.
 - *1 Corinthians 12*
- Worship is where God gives His gifts to His people.
 - *Romans 10:17* – faith comes from hearing the Word of God
 - *Matthew 26:28* – Holy Communion gives the forgiveness of sins
 - *Romans 6:3-4* – Baptism connects us to the death and resurrection of Jesus

Overcoming sin

- The devil seeks to attack and destroy.
 - *1 Peter 5:8-9*
- Say no to ungodly practices.
 - *Titus 2:11-12*
- Sin makes us objects of God's wrath but by His grace he has saved us.
 - *Ephesians 2:1-10*
- Armor of God.
 - *Ephesians 6:10-20*
- Servants of righteousness.
 - *Romans 6:15-18*
- New life in Christ.
 - *Colossians 3:1-17*
 - *Ephesians 4:17ff*
 - *Galatians 5:19-26*

Reconciliation

- Forgive as God in Christ forgave you.
 - *Ephesians 4:32*
 - *Colossians 3:12-17*
- Jesus encourages us to forgive often.
 - *Matthew 18:21-22*
- The unforgiving servant demonstrates the need to forgive.
 - *Matthew 18:23-35*

Rejoice

- Rejoice that God is good
 - *Psalms 100*
- Sing to the Lord a new song!
 - *Psalms 96*

Seeking Forgiveness

- God promises to forgive.
 - *1 John 1:9*
 - *Psalms 130:3-4*
 - *1 John 2:1*
- God removes our sins as far as the East is from the West.
 - *Psalms 103:8-12*
- God forgives those who turn to Him.
 - *Psalms 32:1-5*
- Forgiveness is given only by God's mercy and grace.
 - *Psalms 51*
 - *Ephesians 2:8-9*
 - *Jonah 3:10*

APPENDIX FIVE

Lay Elder Seminar: Collect Prayer

Heavenly Father
(An Address to God)

You promise to be present in times of trouble
(The rationale)

Be with your servant Gloria as she awaits upcoming medical tests
(The main petition)

So that she might be still and trust that you are in control.
(the desire outcome)

In Jesus name. Amen.
(Conclusion)

APPENDIX SIX

Spiritual Care Report

Spiritual Care Report

Date: _____

Elder's Name: _____

Individual/Household you cared for:

Type of Conversation (*Circle one*):

In-person Phone Text Email

Information/concerns that the pastor should know:

Is a follow up conversation needed? (*Circle one*): Yes or No

If yes, who will follow up? (*Circle one*): Elder or Pastor

Updated contact information for the individual:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

APPENDIX SEVEN

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a member of the Board of Elders and describe your experience on the Board of Elders
2. Why is spiritual care needed at St. Paul Lutheran Church?
3. What is your experience in the past of providing spiritual care to the members of the congregation?
4. How do you intend to practice active listening in your spiritual care visits?
5. How do you intend to share scripture in caring for the spiritual needs of those you visit?
6. How do you intend to pray for those you visit?
7. How will you practice confidentiality when caring for those you visit?
8. Why is it important to follow up with the pastor after providing spiritual care to those you visit?
9. How has the seminar influenced your service as an elder, especially in the task of member visitation?

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