

November 1, 2009 A.D.

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District President Engelbrecht
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Pastor Glende
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RE: [St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church](#); Appleton, WI

Dear St. Peter Church Council and WELS Pastors:

I am writing to you because I am concerned about what has been happening at my congregation, St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church in Appleton, WI, and have been unable to resolve my doctrinal disputes with Pastor Glende.

Please let me introduce myself. I was baptized at St. Peter, and have been a life-long member. I graduated from St. Peter's Grade School, Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Wisconsin Lutheran College, and Valparaiso University School of Law. For the last decade, I have worked primarily for the State of Wisconsin as a contracted attorney on various types of cases. Seven generations of my family have attended St. Peter. However, over the last few years I have become increasingly alarmed at the disappearance of the true gospel from our public teaching and preaching.

St. Peter's Mission Statement says that "*Our mission is to love God, love our neighbor, and share God's love with the whole world.*" This statement is the epitome of our theology, but it lacks a clear gospel message, and this is our overall problem. However, the key to understanding this lack of clear gospel is our sermons. (This letter is roughly divided into four sections: sermons, creeds/confessions & statements, songs, and conclusion).

"Relevant" Sermons vs. the Pure Gospel

One of the foundational teachings of Christianity is that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Is this message proclaimed in our sermons? Very rarely. Instead, we hear about

how to live successful lives with Jesus as our motivation. These types of sermons are called "relevant" because they give practical tips for living that are supposed to be relevant to modern life.

The problem with "relevant" sermons is they often don't deal with sin, and their proffered solution is what we do (for example, six steps)¹ instead of the cross of Christ. Jesus is mentioned in our sermons, but his cross is rarely mentioned. Faith is mentioned, but always in the context of a heaping dose of the law and what we do. Basically, our sermons encourage us to fulfill our mission statement.

When I met with Pastor to say that our sermons do not have enough gospel, Pastor Glende gave me the same justification for all the changes we have made here at St. Peter: this will attract the unchurched. As I was leaving Pastor Glende's office, he reiterated to me that he will not stop preaching "relevant" sermons because they are needed to stop the church from dying, and he will not preside over the death of St. Peter congregation. However, Christian pastors are not called to be "practical" and "relevant," but rather they are called to preach the gospel.

The Apostle Paul did not "become all things to all men" for the sake of church growth or attracting those who think the gospel is boring. No. He became "all things to all men . . . for the sake of the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). Likewise, Paul also says, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Plagiarism

Because I do not believe that our sermons are Lutheran, I began to wonder where these sermons were coming from. Eventually, it became clear that Pastor Glende has been plagiarizing his sermons from a heretical organization called LifeChurch.tv.

For example, compare this sermon delivered on January 25, 2009 at St. Peter:

<http://www.stpetercares.com/home/2440/2440/audio/2009-01-25%20sermon.mp3>,

with a sermon delivered a year earlier at LifeChurch.tv:

http://podcast.lifechurch.tv/YDHWIT_Wk3_Message-IPOD.mp4.²

The titles of both sermons are: "You Don't Have What It Takes: You Can't Handle It All." Please

¹ August 9, 2009 A.D. Pastor Glende sermon at St. Peter.
<http://www.stpetercares.com/home/2440/2440/audio/MZ000017.MP3>

² The LifeChurch.tv sermon can also be viewed at:
<http://www.lifechurch.tv/message-archive/watch/ydhwit/3>.

see also [Pastor Glende's bulletin insert and sermon outline](#).³ It is an exact copy of the LifeChurch.tv notes. Pastor Glende copied all the Scripture readings from LifeChurch.tv, and delivered the LifeChurch.tv outline almost verbatim word-for-word in his sermon and on St. Peter's big screen TV. Here are some examples of various sayings from the sermon:⁴

Craig Groeschel: "Any of you ever go to the grocery store, and you get your deals, and then you walk up to the line, and you analyze which line is going to be the fastest, and then you get in line and you race." (0).

Pastor Glende: "Go to the grocery store, and as you're done, you go down the aisles, you got your cart full of the things that you need, and you realized I can't go in the express lane, so I have to figure out which lane is going to take the least amount of time. Right? And so you're scanning to your left and to your right, and you're cutting people off because you want to jump in front of them" (12).

Craig Groeschel: "A good family meal for you might be finding a three day old Big Mac under your car seat and sharing it with your kids on the way to soccer practice." (4).

Pastor Glende: "Or was last time you had a family meal when you drove through the McDonald's drive through and ate the food in the car because your kids had to get to practice." (15).

Craig Groeschel: "We would probably have a break down, except for we just don't have time." (4).

Pastor Glende: "If you had time, how many of you would have a break down?" (15).

Craig Groeschel: "Studies show that about one-half of you . . . about 50% of you only come to church one time a month or less." (5).

Pastor Glende: "One out of every two Christians who call themselves regular attenders of church go once a month." (16).

Craig Groeschel: "How many of you would honestly say that you are at least occasionally overwhelmed, you often feel stress, you feel like there is not enough time in the day to get everything done, you feel like there is simply too much to do? How many of you would say that's you? Leave your hands up. Leave 'em

³ <http://vdma.wordpress.com/files/2009/04/sermon-bulletin.pdf>

⁴ The numbers in parenthesis indicate the minutes in the recordings. Pastor Glende's sermon starts at 12 minutes into the recording. Also, Glende's version is 10-15 minutes shorter than Groeschel's.

up, and look around." (6).

Pastor Glende: "How many of you are overwhelmed in your life with way too many things on your plate to accomplish? Raise your hand. How many of you? How many of you have so much going on? Keep those hands up. Now open your eyes and look around." (17).

Craig Groeschel: "Some of you here today, you need to have a 'Come to Jesus Meeting.'" (8).

Pastor Glende: "It's a time for a come to Jesus meeting." (17). "I dare you and encourage you to have that 'Come to Jesus Meeting' as you leave here this week." (27).

Craig Groeschel: "Many of you are going to shake this message. By later on this week, you are going to shake it, you won't even remember what it is, and you're going be back to your insane lifestyle. It won't affect you. But a few of you will be different after a come to Jesus meeting. . . 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened . . ." (8)

Pastor Glende: "You might leave here, and say, 'Pastor, that was the greatest sermon ever, you know, I'm out of touch, and I'm out of sorts, and I can't handle it all.' And you're going to go back, and . . . later tonight, you're going to be out of touch and out of sorts, and you're not going to do a thing about it. And that can't be the way you leave here today. Come to Jesus. . . 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened . . ." (18).

Craig Groeschel: "What people consider normal today is not good." (13). "I don't worry when we look weird. I worry when our family starts to look normal." (20).

Pastor Glende: "It's ok to look weird." (19). "The world's view of normal is not God's view. So I'm encouraging you today to look weird." (20).

Craig Groeschel: "I was taking all their furniture downstairs from one room. . . The third piece, on the way down by myself, my back just caved, and this big piece of furniture was stuck on the stairs . . . Why? Because I'm an idiot." (13).

Pastor Glende: "That's why men try moving pieces of furniture on their own in their house without asking their wife for help. Because . . . they want to think they can do everything." (21).

Craig Groeschel: "Instead of adding to your 'to do' list, you need a new list, and I call it the 'to don't' list. And these are some things that we are going to not do.

What do you need to add to your 'to don't' list?" (22).

Pastor Glende: "What are you going to move to your 'to don't' list? How many of you have 'to do' lists? I have one that never goes away. It's about time you started another list along side it called the 'to don't' list." (24).

Craig Groeschel: "What radical change do you need to make?" (26).

Pastor Glende: "What radical change in your life are you going to make?" (25).

Craig Groeschel: "You may say to me, 'Craig, I don't need to make a radical change.' No, you do... And if some small change, if some minor tweak would have worked, you would have done that years ago." (26).

Pastor Glende: "If you are constantly stressed and overwhelmed, it is time to make a radical change. If a small adjustment would have worked, you would have done it a long time ago. What significant change do you need to make?"⁵ "Our God says, this needs to be a radical change, it's something that has to change" (26).

Craig Groeschel: "My soul finds rest in God alone, not in a vacation" (23).

Pastor Glende: "My soul finds rest in God alone, it's not found in a vacation" (26).

Craig Groeschel: "God I'll let you save me, but . . . I've got these burdens, and I'm going to carry it myself because I can handle it all. (25).

Pastor Glende: "God you're my savior . . . but everything else I'm going to keep to myself because I can handle it." (26).

Furthermore, here are some examples of the plagiarized outline from the same sermon. Plagiarizing the outline has even worse spiritual consequences for us laymen because instead of just copying jokes, information, and sayings, copying the outline copies the theology:

Craig Groeschel: "We are so busy, that we are totally out of it." (3).

Pastor Glende: "You're so busy, that you're out of it." (14).

⁵ Pastor Glende's bulletin insert and sermon outline:
<http://vdma.wordpress.com/files/2009/04/sermon-bulletin.pdf>

Craig Groeschel: "If you're taking notes, first of all, many of us are so busy that we're out of shape physically." (3).

Pastor Glende: "There's notes inside your bulletin if you want to follow along and fill in the blank. . . You're out of shape physically." (14).

Craig Groeschel: "You might say, 'Well, I don't really have time to exercise, and I can't really eat right'" (3).

Pastor Glende: "How many of you take time to exercise? . . . We don't eat right." (14).

Craig Groeschel: "We are out of sorts emotionally. . . We are so overwhelmed, that emotionally we are just completely a mess." (4).

Pastor Glende: "We are out of sorts emotionally. . . You are overwhelmed, and you feel like you are going crazy . . ." (15).

Craig Groeschel: "We are out of touch relationally. There are people that we love, but we just don't have anything left for them." (4).

Pastor Glende: "Out of touch relationally. How many of you have family members who you love [but] . . . you are too busy?" (15).

Craig Groeschel: "Many of you are so busy that you are out of order spiritually."

Pastor Glende: "Finally, we are out of order spiritually."

Craig Groeschel: "Do you really think that God's intention for us is to be consistently overwhelmed, overburdened, and stressed out. Something is wrong. . . You need to have a come to Jesus meeting." (7).

Pastor Glende: "Our God says, 'This is not the way life should be. . . I did not intend your life to be one where you are out of touch . . . or out of order spiritually . . . It's time for a come to Jesus meeting.'" (16).

Craig Groeschel: "Some things need to be shared." (12).

Pastor Glende: "Some things need to be shared." (20).

Craig Groeschel: "Some things need to be stopped." (15).

Pastor Glende: "Some things need to be stopped." (22).

Craig Groeschel: "How would you fill in this blank? 'If only I had more time, I would _____.' If only I had more time, I would spend time with my children. . . If only I had more time, I would serve in the church." (17).

Pastor Glende: "If you only had more time, what one thing would you do? Would you spend more time with your kids? . . . Would you look for ways to use the spiritual gifts God has blessed you with at church?" (23).

Craig Groeschel: "Everything needs to be surrendered unto our Lord God." (23).

Pastor Glende: "all things in the end need to be surrendered to him." (26).

These quotes are not comprehensive of all the plagiarism, but are provided here only for example purposes. Another obvious example from the same sermon would be Pastor Glende's copying of Groeschel's chosen Scripture passages and Groeschel's interpretations of those passages.

Except for the fact that Pastor Glende's sermon is 10 to 15 minutes shorter, these sermons are virtually identical. The outline is identical, the message is identical, the theology is identical, and even many of the words are the same.

This is not the only sermon that Pastor Glende has plagiarized from LifeChurch.tv. A quick perusal of other sermon series found at LifeChurch.tv reveals the use of identical graphics and sermon titles and themes regarding these recent sermon series at St. Peter:⁶

- a. *You Don't Have What it Takes* — 4 weeks
- b. *Christmas is For-Giving* — 3 weeks
- c. *Fearless* — 5 weeks
- d. *So You're Dead . . . Now What* — 4 weeks
- e. *Remember* — 3 weeks
- f. *Prayer* — 3 weeks
- g. *True(ish)* — 4 weeks

According to plagiarism.org:

"plagiarism is the use of another's original words or ideas as though they were your own. Any time you borrow from an original source and do not give proper

⁶ An archive containing many LifeChurch.tv sermons can be found here:
<http://www.lifechurch.tv/message-archive/search>

credit, you have committed plagiarism . . ." ([Plagiarism FAQs](#)).⁷

Plagiarism usually involves two parts: First, there is a copyright theft from the original author. Second, there is a fraud as the plagiarist passes off the other's work as his own. However, plagiarism does not necessarily involve copyright theft. For example, if a student purchases a term paper and hands it in as his own; that is obviously not a theft, however it is still a fraud. Copyright theft and plagiarism are not the same crime. Copyright theft is a violation against the author, while plagiarism is essentially a fraud perpetrated against the audience.

In the case of the purchased term paper, it is of no significance to the professor that the student has the original author's permission to plagiarize. A man who sells term papers cannot authorize students to deceive professors. Likewise, a man who gives away sermons cannot authorize other pastors to deceive their congregations.⁸

Just as a journalist is hired by a news organization to write news reports, and is expected to write his own news reports;⁹ so also Pastor Glende has been called by our congregation to write pure gospel sermons, and is expected to write his own sermons. Does the seminary accept plagiarized sermons from its students? If not, then why should a congregation?

The standard penalty for plagiarism in school is a failing grade and/or expulsion from school. Plagiarism in the pulpit is infinitely more serious than just academic plagiarism because people's eternal lives are at stake.

It is unfair to our congregation and dishonest to not identify the source of these sermons. It is a betrayal of our trust. It is deceiving our congregation. It is deceiving everyone listening on the internet who had faith that the outlines for these sermons were authored by a Lutheran pastor. It is sin and lying and deceit in the very "pulpit" of God, which is the symbol of God's word and the power of truth.

Here is a link to a WELS video that teaches children that it is wrong to plagiarize:

⁷ Plagiarism.org also provides many helpful examples of different types of plagiarism such as "The Potluck," "The Poor Disguise," and "The Labor of Laziness." ([Types of Plagiarism](#)). I would note that as with any profession, knowledge common to that profession does not need to be cited. For example, a pastor would not need to cite his Greek dictionary when defining Greek terms in a sermon. However, a pastor would not be allowed to copy Greek definitions from another pastor's sermon. He needs to do his own work with his own dictionary.

⁸ Craig Groeschel allows other pastors to use his heretical sermons surreptitiously, but on his blog says that citing one's sources is the best policy because it "honors the pastor or church who came up with the idea," "demonstrates humility and security," "exposes a church to other great leaders and teachers," and "removes any doubt of copying." ("[Plagiarizing Pastors](#)" by Craig Groeschel; July 21, 2008).

⁹ In a 2003 high profile incident, Jayson Blair resigned from the *New York Times* after allegations of plagiarism.

<http://vimeo.com/3885097>

Even worse is the fact that these sermons are spiritual poison. What is worse? Is it worse to plagiarize jokes about races at grocery stores and Big Macs and moving furniture and making time for nervous break downs? Or is it worse to plagiarize the outline of a sermon that teaches that Jesus came to help us get in shape physically, achieve emotional stability, heal family relationships, and have enough time for prayer and spiritual devotions? What is worse?

Does the previously cited example of a plagiarized sermon deliver the true law and gospel? No. Did Jesus come to help us with our time management? Or did he come to forgive sins?

LifeChurch.tv and the Evangelical Covenant Church

"LifeChurch.tv is part of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC)."¹⁰ The WELS Q&A web site says that the Evangelical Covenant Church

"identifies itself with Lutheran Pietism. It does not, however, call itself or claim to be 'Lutheran.' It says that justification is by faith, but adds pious living and mission commitment to its understanding of what faith is."¹¹

This definition of the ECC's theology sounds exactly like the mission/vision theology at St. Peter. Genuine Lutherans believe that we are justified through faith alone. How does adding "pious living and mission commitment to" the "understanding of what faith is" change how we are justified? It undermines the gospel and the doctrine of justification.

The WELS is not in pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Covenant Church. So why are we hearing ECC and/or LifeChurch.tv sermons from our "pulpit"?

LifeChurch.tv does not even properly confess the Triune God (three *persons* in one God), instead they affirm that God exists in "three personalities."¹² *At best*, this is an unclear confession of the Trinity.

LifeChurch.tv is affiliated with the ECC. The Evangelical Covenant Church "affirms" the ecumenical creeds, particularly the Apostles' and Nicene, but does not require adherence to them. Instead, the ECC emphasizes "the sovereignty of the Word of God over all creedal interpretations," and views itself as "an interdependent body of believers that recognizes but

¹⁰ <http://www.lifechurch.tv/believe>

¹¹ http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?1518&cuTopic_topicID=47&cuItem_itemID=12697

¹² <http://www.lifechurch.tv/believe>

transcends [their] theological differences."¹³

In other words, the ECC is guilty of the heresy that allows truth and lies to stand together as equal. However, the Athanasian Creed states that the Christian

"faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another. . . whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved."

If the ECC does not even properly confess the Ecumenical Creeds, creeds that all Christians hold in common, then how can we even dream to preach their sermons in our pulpits? How can they teach us if LifeChurch.tv refuses even to clearly confess the Triune God? How can they teach us if they are not willing to clearly confess who God is?

The foundational theology of the Evangelical Covenant Church is "Pietism,"¹⁴ and one characteristic of "Pietism" is unclear creeds. The WELS Q&A website distinguishes between "true Christian piety and the spirit called Pietism" thusly:

True piety is the condition of reverence and devotion that comes from faith in Jesus. Everything we do as a church is aimed at promoting true Christian piety.

Pietism [on the other hand] was a religious movement that began in the 17th century in reaction to what was perceived as spiritual deadness in the state church in Germany. The pietists often asked good questions about the problems that church was facing, but they came up with faulty answers. As a spirit, Pietism directs a person's attention to himself and his own experience rather than to the objective truths of God's Word.

Secondly, Pietism placed the emphasis in Christianity on sanctification (what the Christian is to do) and regeneration (rebirth) rather than on redemption (what our Savior has done to atone for our sins) and justification (God's declaring us not guilty or forgiven for Jesus' sake). Pietism became man-centered rather than God-centered.

Pietism often confuses law and gospel and becomes legalistic by attempting to use the law to motivate and produce the Christian life rather than proclaiming God's

¹³ *Covenant Affirmations Booklet*, pages 1-2,
<http://www.covchurch.org/attachments/covenantaffirmationsbooklet.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Covenant Affirmations Booklet*,
<http://www.covchurch.org/attachments/covenantaffirmationsbooklet.pdf>.

full and free forgiveness to sinners. Only the gospel can change hearts and produce God-pleasing good works.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the ECC proudly declares in its *Covenant Affirmations Booklet*, that the "Covenant Church continues to be shaped by Pietism, a renewal movement that . . . extended throughout northern Europe and enriched the lives of many through its emphasis on the new life in Christ."¹⁶

The WELS calls Pietism a false spirit, but the ECC in its "affirmations" calls it a "renewal movement" that "enriched the lives of many." The *Covenant Affirmations* are a celebration of Pietism and its history.¹⁷ But by putting the emphasis in the wrong area, Pietism subverts the true heart of Christian doctrine: justification. Justification is the doctrine upon which a church stands or falls, and on this most important doctrine, the WELS and the ECC are diametrically opposed.

According to Professor John Brenner, "*Few things have proven to be as destructive to confessional Lutheranism as Pietism.* Our own Wisconsin Synod has roots which reach back into German Lutheran Pietism. Much of American Lutheranism has been dominated by this spirit historically, and the spirit of Pietism is alive and well in America today."¹⁸ From its very inception, the WELS has struggled against the false spirit of Pietism.¹⁹ Therefore, Pietism could

¹⁵ WELS Q&A website, http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?1518&cuTopic_topicID=20&cuItem_itemID=8888

¹⁶ *Covenant Affirmations Booklet*, pages 5-6, <http://www.covchurch.org/attachments/covenantaffirmationsbooklet.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Covenant Affirmations Booklet*. It is very telling that the ECC's "Central Covenant Affirmations" say much about the Holy Spirit and sanctification and what we do in Christ, but say virtually nothing about what Jesus did for us on the cross which is the crux of our justification (and thus our sanctification). ([Covenant Affirmations Booklet](#), page 7).

¹⁸ Professor John Brenner, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Emphasis added. <http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?2617&collectionID=1139&contentID=35165&shortcutID=14689>

¹⁹ WELS President Schroeder on the radio program *Issues, Etc.*,TM May 27, 2009 A.D., and [President Schroeder's report](#) to the WELS 2009 Synodical Convention. President Schroeder stated in his report to the Convention:

"It might surprise some here today that the Wisconsin Synod has not always been a solidly confessional Lutheran synod. There is no doubt that the early fathers of our synod were filled with a fervent zeal for mission work, but not all of them were fully committed to Lutheran doctrine and practice. They were sent to America by mission societies in Germany in which the distinction between Lutheran and Reformed teachings was blurred at best and virtually non-existent at worst. Their roots in pietism also resulted in a lack of commitment to sound Lutheran theology. True to those roots, they preferred to emphasize the importance of subjective feelings over the objective truth of God's Word, sanctified living over justification, and the power of prayer over the efficacy of the means of grace. They emphasized the priesthood of all believers to the point where they

(continued...)

be viewed as our Achilles Heel (our worst vulnerability).

Therefore, because of Lutheranism's historical susceptibility to Pietism, the Evangelical Covenant Church's historical success in exploiting this particular weakness among Lutherans,²⁰ and the post-modern mind-set which is hostile to confessional Christianity, the ECC is uniquely situated to strike strong heretical blows against Lutherans and confessional Lutheran synods like the WELS. This makes it even more unfortunate that their sermons are being delivered covertly in a WELS congregation.

How many laymen are prepared to recognize and identify the false spirit of Pietism? Our pastors are supposed to protect us from this, not surreptitiously expose us to it.

One of the plagiarized "Christmas is For Giving" sermons (2008) was about how we forgive others. The entire service was about how we forgive others. At the end of the service, Pastor Glende announced that if we wanted to hear about how God forgives us, then we should come back next week to hear that message. After the service, a woman was weeping in our annex because she felt she could not meet God's standard to forgive others. (She and her family had been grievously wronged). Members of my family and other members of our congregation comforted her and assured her that God forgives us even when we find it difficult to forgive others.

¹⁹(...continued)

downplayed the importance of the public ministry. John Muehlhaeuser, the first president of what would become the Wisconsin Synod, gave evidence of this doctrinal laxity when he said, "I am in a position to offer every child of God and servant of Christ the hand of fellowship over the denominational fence." Curiously, the first draft of the synod's constitution pledged the synod to the Lutheran Confessions, but within weeks those words were crossed out and replaced with a pledge to a generic "pure Bible Christianity."

"By God's grace that orientation soon changed. In 1861 John Bading was elected as the second president of the synod. In contrast to Muehlhaeuser, Bading regarded the Lutheran Confessions as a proclamation of God's truth for every age and was committed to sound Lutheran doctrine and practice. In his first address as president, he encouraged the young synod to sacrifice "blood, life, and limb and suffer all rather than depart one hair's breadth from the truth we have learned." In the years that followed, we are grateful that through his leadership and through the beneficial influence of the Missouri Synod, God transformed our synod into one that was truly committed to the doctrines of Scripture and to the Lutheran Confessions.

"Striving to remain faithful to the Scriptures—and to maintain our confessional identity—does not involve a single battle fought and won. It is an ongoing struggle for the church militant. When the battle ends on one front today, Satan opens another front tomorrow. That's why each generation needs to recognize this struggle as its own and engage in it zealously. Each generation, including ours, needs to resist the temptation to be led astray by false teachings, both blatant and subtle. Each generation, including ours, needs to be vigilant in resisting both doctrinal indifference and smugness. When orthodoxy is assumed or taken for granted, it is likely soon to be lost."

²⁰ The ECC came out of the Lutheran Church of Sweden, and rejected genuine Lutheranism at its inception.

All I could think was, "Why can't we hear the gospel every Sunday? Why couldn't she hear the good news for her today?" This particular sermon and service did have actual good law: we do need to forgive others, but after the service I wondered if this weeping woman was the only person so affected. It does not matter if LifeChurch.tv and Craig Groeschel think it is clever to divide forgiveness into categories. What matters is how these messages impact our lives.²¹ Groeschel and LifeChurch.tv are heretics, and their ultimate impact on our lives could lead to eternal death.

Unfortunately, the influence of LifeChurch.tv's pietistic theology appears to have become pervasive at St. Peter.

Mission Statement

For example, please consider our congregation's mission statement:

Our mission is to Love God, Love one another, and share God's love with the whole world.

When Pastor Glende became our lead pastor last Fall, we began to recite this mission statement at the beginning of all our services. Sometimes we recite it at the end of our services and in the middle of our services. We even had a sermon with the sermon texts being the three parts of our mission statement.²² We have a large banner proclaiming this mission statement in our annex,²³ and it is almost always prominently displayed on our large TV even during congregational forums. It is even featured on puzzles and games that we give out. Our Mission Statement has become more prominent than any other creed or statement of belief here at St. Peter.

However, our Mission Statement is devoid of the Gospel message. It is pure law. Please consider what Jesus says in Mark 12:28-31:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²¹ Did she come back and hear the good news the next week? I don't know. The next week's late service was the Sunday School Christmas program.

²² The sermon that used our mission statement as a sermon text was delivered in October 2008 as one of the four services celebrating our congregation's 140 year anniversary.

It is not wrong to preach law, gospel, law (sanctification). Law and gospel preaching with a heavy emphasis on the law is not wrong. However, preaching the law as if it were the gospel is wrong. The law is not the gospel. Telling us we need to love and obey God is not the gospel.

²³ <http://vdma.wordpress.com/files/2009/04/mission-statement.jpg>

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” [Mark 12:28-31].

Love is a command. Love is the fulfillment of the law. Love is good. The Law is good. But if our mission is to love God, love one another, and to fulfill God's command to share His love with the world; then our mission is to fulfill the law.

We should proclaim the Law. We should obey the law. We should love God and our neighbor. These things are *necessary*. But while Christians want to fulfill the Law and do strive to fulfill the Law; we still sin, and do not perfectly love God, ourselves, or the world. John says, "This is love for God: to obey his commands." (1 John 5:3). If we do not obey God's commands, we show that we are sinners and do not love God.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. [1 John 1:8-10].

We are sinners, but Christ fulfilled the Law for us. Our mission should be to proclaim this truth. The truth is that we have not loved God or our neighbor and we do not love God or our neighbor as we are required. *We have failed our mission*. But nonetheless, Christ has done all these things in the flesh on our behalf. That is the beautiful gospel message. That is the only message that can truly change lives. We need this message.

Our Mission Statement has become the centerpiece of our public confession and a symbol of our practice and theology in sermons, songs, and order of service. However, it is all law. It is revealing that our primary public confession begins, not with Christ's mission or Christ's accomplishment, but rather it says, "Our mission is . . ." It is centered on us, not God.

Vision Statement

Our Mission Statement comes directly from our Vision Statement.²⁴ Our Vision Statement was ratified by the voters in January 2008. In preparation for this ratification vote, I typed up 3½ pages of notes because I believed that the proposed vision was in the wrong direction. The last

²⁴ [St. Peter Vision Statement](http://vdma.wordpress.com/files/2009/08/st-peter-vision-statement.pdf). <http://vdma.wordpress.com/files/2009/08/st-peter-vision-statement.pdf>

sentence of my outline states: "Our vision needs to look up at God's promises for us, and not at our deeds for God."

Our Vision Statement emphasizes what we do instead of what God does or has done. Our Vision Statement says much about TV's and sound systems, and our earthly plans, but says nothing about God's vision or the means of grace which are God's gifts to us.²⁵ During this voters' meeting, I made numerous proposals modifying the Vision Statement to focus on the means of grace specifically on the Lord's Supper and teaching Lutheran doctrine as contained in the *Book of Concord*.

These proposals were all opposed on the grounds that we do them already, and they do not need to be a part of our "Vision."

When the congregation voted on the Vision Statement without any amendments, our church president did not allow any time to vote "no." He recognized the "yes" votes, and moved on to the next agenda item before I or anyone could say "nay." I was sitting near the front, and during the next agenda item said clearly, "Nay. Nay." I do not know if anyone else was intending to vote "no," (probably or possibly no one else was going to vote no), but the no vote was not counted or even recognized. (I include this information here because I want the reader to note that for years I have been unable to muster any support for what I believe is the correct Lutheran theology and proper Lutheran practices).

Now, instead of measuring our success by our faithfulness to God's word, we measure our success by our Vision Statement. True doctrine is something we take for granted. By taking the true doctrine for granted, our congregation's confession of the truth is no longer clear, and has become *at best* muddled.

Strange Creeds

One mark of the Evangelical Covenant Church and Pietism is the blurring of clear truth and the denial of the authority of the Church's clear historic creeds and confessions.

On Reformation Sunday, 2008, our congregation stood and read aloud publically a strange creed

²⁵ *Ibid.* [St. Peter Vision Statement](#).

The minutes from our June 25, 2007 voters' meeting state that we "will be conducting our first Vision Team meeting on Tuesday, June 26 ... We have asked Rev. Paul Kelm to help us organize our team and to give us direction. He has worked with our synod's Parish Assistance team for many years." Pastor Kelm used to be pastor of St. Mark's DePere. St. Mark's DePere (a WELS congregation) is currently listed as a member of the Willow Creek Association (WCA), a loose affiliation of churches whose statements of faith are not in accord with the Lutheran Confessions. (Willow Creek Find a Church page: http://www.willowcreek.com/wca_info/find_a_church/ProfileDetail.asp?MP=983182%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20945).

called "The Heart of Worship Creed" as it flashed on our big screen TV:²⁶

We believe that in Christian worship God comes to us through the Gospel in word and songs, and in the sacraments. We believe that worship is also praising and thanking God for his great mercy.

We know and are thankful that he sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross to save us from our sins. We believe that our worship is all about Jesus, realizing his love and great sacrifice for us. In true worship we focus on what Jesus has done for us, not on our own actions and efforts. We show our gratefulness for the sacrifice of our Savior with our heart of worship, bringing before him more than just words from our lips.

To achieve a true heart of worship, we believe that we need to approach our Heavenly Father in sincerity. In worship we come before our God with all of our heart, with the desire to grow in our faith, realizing that we can do none of this without:

His great love for us
The sacrifice of his Son, Jesus
And his Holy Spirit within us. Amen.²⁷

We also have changed the wording of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. For example, we have regularly stated that the Holy Spirit is a power within us instead of the Lord and Giver of Life. This makes me uncomfortable for a number of reasons. First, I do not like being asked to stand up and make a solemn formal public declaration of belief in something I have never seen before and am not sure that I actually believe. Do I really believe that in order to achieve a true heart of worship I "need to approach our Heavenly Father in sincerity"? At best this is too muddled to be a solemn declaration. Solemn declarations and creeds should be clear, not muddled. At worst, this sounds like in order for us to approach God, we need to be right in our hearts instead of Jesus being right and us trusting in Jesus' righteousness.

Second, what does it mean that the Holy Spirit is a power within us? How can I stand up and solemnly confess something I do not understand. The Holy Spirit is a *Person*, not faith. When I asked if the preface to the Small Catechism allows us to change the wording of the creeds, Pastor

²⁶ There was no opportunity to review this creed before the service, and I do not know who wrote this creed.

²⁷ Service notes from our Reformation Sunday, 2008 service:
<http://vdma.wordpress.com/files/2009/06/service-notes-reformation-sunday.pdf>
The above order of service combined with the dreadful gospel-less sermon that preached, not God's word, but rather Pastor Glende's opinions, was a low point at St. Peter.

Glende responded that it does because services like our Thanksgiving service are assemblies of "learned and intelligent men" where the pastor may exhibit his skill.²⁸

Pastor Glende says that when we read the Catechism, we need to "remember the catechism's purpose and cultural context," what we say in a creed is adiaphora as long as it's Biblical, and that the "reference to the Holy Spirit is one that is used at our Seminary by our professors to describe the Holy Spirit."²⁹

²⁸ Luther says in the Small Catechism that "when you preach in the presence of learned and intelligent men, you may show your skill... But with the young people stick to one fixed, permanent form and manner." However, Pastor Glende is wrong to assert that a Thanksgiving service full of children and visitors is an assembly of "learned and intelligent men" mentioned by Luther.

²⁹ December 1, 2008 e-mail from Pastor Glende:

I would encourage you to re-read those opening paragraphs of the catechism preface closely and also remember the catechism's purpose and cultural context (to teach the young people the simple and essentials of the faith - Bible Basics 101). The Catechism was to be used for the instruction of the young. Thus he said in paragraph 7, "young people must be taught by uniform and simple texts". In the Catechism Rick - I use the Apostles' Creed as our teaching basis for instruction on who God is and what he has done - for this very reason (it is a simple and clear summary of the Triune God). However, if you look closely at paragraph 9, Luther acknowledges there in that same preface, "when you preach in the presence of the learned and intelligent men, you may exhibit your skill, and may present these parts in as varied and intricate ways...as you are able. But with the young people stick to one permanent manner and teach them..."

As for creeds, it is wise for us to remember what they are - they are confessions/statements of faith. Whatever creed we choose to use is a free choice as long as it is Biblical. Sometimes speaking the same creed regularly is a positive thing but for others the repetition doesn't benefit their life of faith and doesn't allow them to express their faith in a Biblical correct way that is different. I received 8 years of training to know what is true and lines up with the Bible. The reference to the Holy Spirit is one that is used at our Seminary by our professors to describe the Holy Spirit. Our church has called me to have worship that offers a variety of both traditional and blended (what we do in late service). Again this goes back to our conversation, about adiaphora, that when things are neither commanded or forbidden we are free to do what we feel is best for the people of God. Again, this is why we offer variety in worship so those who like the traditional worship liturgy and creeds can speak them and at the same time offer something different.

Furthermore, I am very uncomfortable stating that our creeds are adiaphora. As Lutherans, we have unanimously agreed that certain clear creeds and confessions are Biblical. As for these other strange creeds, such as the "Heart of Worship Creed," there is something clearly inadequate with its wording because instead of confessing what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have done for us, it confesses what we need to do to approach God.

Pastor Glende is wrong to assert that what we say in a creed "is a free choice as long as it's Biblical."³⁰ A creed is a solemn public confession, and it is an abuse of power (an exercise in popery) to expect grown men to stand and publicly confess something they've never agreed to or even seen before. Our confessions/creeds "should not be based on private writings, but on the kinds of books that have been composed, approved, and received in the name of the churches that pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion." (*Formula of Concord*; Comprehensive Summary, Foundation, Rule and Norm, 2). Our public confessions/creeds must be received and approved of by the Christian Church.

St. Peter has adopted creeds and practices that give an unclear confession of faith, which is contrary to Lutheran doctrine. The purpose of writing a creed is to clearly confess the faith and to fight the corruption of heresy, but when we write unclear creeds simply for the sake of variety, we are not fighting heresy, rather we are allowing heresy to get a foot in the door. Do we need sincerity to "achieve a true heart of worship"? Are creeds and confessions really just adiaphora?

The Lutheran Confessions – Round Two (Voters' Meeting December 1, 2008)

The Lutheran Confessions insistence on the clear pure truth is the antithesis of LifeChurch.tv's and the Evangelical Covenant Church's pietistic denial of creedal/confessional Christianity.

The same day that Pastor Glende asserted to me that creeds and confessions were adiaphora as long as they are Biblical, we had a voters' meeting at St. Peter. After reading Pastor Glende's e-mail, that afternoon I decided to prepare two amendments to our new pastor's job description for our call meeting later that night.

Because of my increasing concern that we have been abandoning the true Gospel for a false "gospel" of love/law, I had already decided to start trying to promote the Lutheran Confessions. (Prior to this for many years, I had struggled with the concepts of free will and decision theology, and had gotten into numerous debates in law school with Roman Catholic and Calvinist students and professors. When I finally discovered the Lutheran Confessions and that every WELS pastor swore to uphold them, I believed that they were a beautiful treasure that would help us to effectively share the gospel, and should be shared with my fellow laymen).

³⁰ *Ibid.* (December 1, 2008 e-mail from Pastor Glende).

At our voters' meeting on December 1, 2008, I moved to amend the "*other duties*" section of our new pastor's job description to include these phrases:

7. Educate the laity about the meaning of the traditional liturgy and Lutheran symbolism.
8. Increase awareness of and educate the laity regarding the Lutheran Confessions.³¹

Pastor Glende was very opposed to this amendment, and led the opposition. Pastor Ash was also opposed. This resulted in an extended debate that centered on the Lutheran Confessions. The main argument against the motion was that the amendment was too specific and therefore inappropriate to include as part of our job description when calling a pastor.

Pastor Glende's other arguments against the motion were that it would take too much time away from the new pastor's other duties; laymen do not want to learn about the doctrines in the Confessions; if we add this amendment, the new pastor will actually expect to teach the Confessions; the *Book of Concord* is thick and complicated; and learning about the Confessions is more appropriate for seminary. Another layman argued that the Confessions themselves were too specific, and the Bible was enough. No pastor spoke against this argument, and I had to counter that the Confessions are a summary of our doctrine, and they are not too specific. And the amendment is not too specific because it is not too specific to expect a Lutheran pastor to teach Lutheran doctrine.

Even with these explanations, Pastor Glende was adamant that it was completely inappropriate to add the phrase "raise awareness of and educate the laity regarding the Lutheran Confessions" to the new pastor's "other duties" job description.

I felt that maybe I had given up on the Lutheran Confessions too easily earlier in the year when we ratified our Vision Statement, so this time I pressed the point clearly and firmly to the end: I said that the Confessions teach us what it means to be genuinely Lutheran and Christian, and I argued that it was important that we work specifically to increase awareness and educate the laity as to what the Lutheran Confessions are and what they say. Furthermore, I had been a life-long

³¹ The new pastor is supposed to focus on ministry to the laity and outreach, and preach only once per month. Pastor Glende is supposed to focus on preaching. The original unamended "other duties" for the new pastor were:

1. Evangelism,
2. Spiritual advisor for Youth Programs,
3. Spiritual advisor for Bible Discovery,
4. Spiritual advisor for Women's Ministries,
5. Organize and Supervise Small Group Ministries,
6. Finance Committee—responsible to see that budgeting is done for your ministries.

member of our congregation, but had not even heard of the Confessions until the previous year.³²

Due to strong pastoral and called worker opposition, the motion failed for lack of a second. However, this time Mr. Denny did count my "no" when the unamended version came to a vote.

In a December 4, 2008 e-mail Pastor Glende stated that we discussed the matter for 30 minutes.³³ How does a WELS pastor argue against increasing awareness of and educating the laity regarding the Lutheran Confessions for 30 minutes? Pastor Glende could have concisely argued against this motion on purely procedural grounds. Unfortunately, this was not the approach he used to speak against the amendment at our voters' meeting. Instead, he made arguments along the lines that this duty would take too much time away from the new pastor's other duties. Simply put, his arguments were not what one would have expected from a confessional Lutheran pastor.

The fact remains, that other than allowing me to give away free copies of the *Book of Concord* to our confirmands, all concrete proposals to increase awareness of and educate the laity regarding the Lutheran Confessions have met persistent and firm pastoral opposition.

The Lutheran Confessions (Round Three)

In the days after this voters' meeting, Pastor Glende told me that it was inappropriate to try to discuss the Confessions at church, and if I wanted to discuss the Confessions, then I should do so

³² I first learned of the Lutheran Confessions and their significance in February 2007 while researching information on the internet. After discovering that all WELS pastors swear to uphold the teachings contained within the Confessions, I thought they could be a useful tool to help promote the Gospel.

³³ In a December 4, 2008 e-mail re: "blog," Pastor Glende wrote:

The statement "There was very vigorous opposition to this motion from our called workers, and the opposition focused on the Lutheran Confessions" does not express the true content of our opposition nor the fact that many others were opposed to the additions. Remember that there was opposition to the addition of your motion, but not the confessions!

That same portion of your statement does not also reflect the 30 minutes of conversation or the true reasons for our leaving it off the call responsibilities. That is not fair in light of brotherly love and our congregation's people to share only your thoughts because it does not reflect the will of the other 20+ people there who didn't want to add the amendments.

As the pastor on your blog said in response, (as did we) these are parts of a pastor's job description that are assumed and expected. You don't see in the job description, "Use the Catechism in the instruction of the young," or "Use the Bible to educate our members in good Christian stewardship." It is expected and what is the assumed in a call that the pastor will adhere to and use the confessions in his teaching and preaching

over the internet with Freddy Finkelstein.³⁴ Pastor Ash also instructed me that "the Confessions are valuable in so much as they reflect the teachings of the Word of God," and that we do not have to teach the Confessions, teaching about the Bible is good enough. Here is Pastor Ash's instruction to me in context:

Finally, the Confessions are valuable in so much as they reflect the teachings of the Word of God. However, our first and foremost instruction from the Lord is to teach on the basis of God's Word. That is exactly what we are doing in our sermons and Bible Classes. The Confessions have their place in our Lutheran Church. However, they do not replace God's Word. When you teach God's Word...you are teaching the doctrines discussed in the Confessions without having to directly teach about the Confessions. Like I said in my earlier email...I doubt any call list includes the specific amendments you wished to be added to the call document. However, when the new pastor is installed he will be asked to adhere to the Confessions as was the case with Pastor Ski. So, in the installation service...there is a charge to the new pastor to accept the Confessions and uphold them in his ministry. Thus, I don't believe that it is important to include an amendment like yours on the call form. I am not trying to bug you about all this. I just want to remind you that when you put things in writing....you need to be very clear and precise. [All ellipses were in the original].³⁵

However, many people claim the Bible teaches salvation by faith and works, and not through faith alone. We have the Lutheran Confessions to show how we are different from those Christians. Even the *Qur'an* and the *Book of Mormon*, are "valuable *in so much as* they reflect the teachings of the Word of God." Every heretical church in the world claims to follow the Bible, but the Confessions tell us what the Bible really says, or at least what Lutherans agree that the Bible says. Therefore, I spoke with Pastor Glende. He said Pastor Ash was wrong, but then accused me of trying to replace the Bible with the Confessions and that I was trying to equate the Confessions with the word of God.

Pastor Ash eventually replied to me with quotations from his installation and said:

In response to you I talked about the confessions "reflecting the truth of Scripture." I should have been more careful in my statement.

The quote from my installation reveals that I am in agreement with the importance

³⁴ Freddy Finkelstein is a WELS blogger. His blog is [The Finkelsteinery](#). I don't know Freddy Finkelstein or even whether that is a real name or an alias.

³⁵ December 4, 2008 e-mail from Pastor Ash to Pastor Glende and me.

of the Confessions in orthodox Lutheranism.³⁶

This statement partially reflects our problem. There is not enough care taken to preach and teach correct doctrine. Pastor Ash is correct: It is careless to make written statements that are opposed to correct Lutheran doctrine, while simultaneously stating "that when you put things in writing....you need to be very clear and precise."

The average layman would not have recognized the problem—*albeit unintended*—in Pastor Ash's statement, and would have figured the *Book of Concord* was no more important than any other book. That is why pastors need to be very careful to always clearly preach and teach the correct doctrine. They are supposed to be our shepherds.

Decision Theology & Song Lyrics

One aspect of Pietism is a lack of clear teaching. A lack of clear truth is a striking aspect of the contemporary songs we sing.

In the 1990's, I struggled with the concept of decision theology. Decision theology can be comforting because it gives us a false assurance of salvation. It says that we are in control, we make the decisions, we make the choices. God wants all men to be saved, so all we have to do is choose to believe and decide to be on the winning team. However with decision theology, our assurance is not in the cross of Christ. Decision theology is a false promise that God leaves this up to us and our decisional works righteousness. Decision theology is man centered rather than God centered.

As I was coming to a firm belief about this issue,³⁷ we sang a song at St. Peter that contained outrageously blatant decision theology in the refrain and lyrics. Before this, I never really paid attention to the lyrics of songs, but about half way through my own enthusiastic rendition of this song, I realized the lyrics were wrong, and there was just no way around it. I slowly stopped singing, and started to wonder what was going on. No one else stopped singing. After the service, I talked to Pastor Ash, and he agreed that the lyrics were unacceptable, and said we would not sing them again. A week or two later, we sang that same song again. I spoke with Pastor Ash again, and he again agreed that the song would never be sung again. I never heard it again.³⁸

This episode triggered discussions within our family as to whether or not decision theology was

³⁶ January 28, 2009 e-mail from Pastor Ash to Pastor Glende and me.

³⁷ 10 or 12 years ago.

³⁸ I also never witnessed any explanation to the congregation about the falsity of this song.

correct. No one had really considered the matter, and no one was sure that decision theology was wrong. After years of discussion, my other family members eventually concluded that decision theology is wrong.

During the time we struggled to understand this issue, I did not realize that decision theology was necessarily contrary to Lutheran doctrine. I thought we followed the Scriptures alone, and that interpretation of Scripture was still basically up for grabs. Over time, through conversation and e-mail, I related to Pastor Glende our family struggles with this issue. When I finally discovered the *Book of Concord*, I wondered and was disappointed in how such a treasure could have eluded me all those years.

At The CORE's grand opening on April 19, 2009, we sang "The Voice of Truth." Here are the refrain and bridge from "The Voice of Truth" by Casting Crowns:

But the voice of truth tells me a different story
The voice of truth says, "Do not be afraid!"
The voice of truth says, "This is for My glory"
Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth.

I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth.

This does not agree with our Catechism which states:

I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church in the one true faith. In the Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.³⁹

The official WELS translation of the same section of the Catechism states that we cannot by our "own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ . . . or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has . . . kept [us] in the true faith . . ."⁴⁰

After the service, I contacted Pastor Glende with concerns about the appropriate theological content of those lyrics. Pastor Glende responded to my concerns by saying that

³⁹ Luther's explanation of the third article in The Small Catechism.

⁴⁰ <http://www.wels.net/cgi-bin/site.pl?2617&collectionID=711&contentID=4333&shortcutID=2076>

there were 5 area WELS pastors there, none of whom commented negatively about that song lyric ... I would think they might be better judges of the song lyrics than you, and about what is appropriate in a church that has the objective to reach out in a different setting. We don't choose to come to Jesus, and that song was not a song about coming to faith. In light of our faith we make choices, we choose to listen and believe God's Word over the world's advice. That is what the song is about, the life of faith, not coming to faith.⁴¹

Pastor Glende's defense of those false lyrics may partly explain why he preaches "relevant" sermons from LifeChurch.tv. If coming to faith is a work of the Spirit, but continuing to believe is a work of our thinking and choosing, then Christians do not need the Gospel. What Christians then need are moral encouragements to make the right choices, and that is what we get.

However, the Small Catechism says that we cannot by our "own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ . . . *or* come to Him." The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, *and keeps* us in the one true faith. (Emphasis added). God's true Gospel Word is not mere information from our past, but rather it is a spiritual nourishment that we need every day.

If ever there was a time to get one's doctrine right, a pastor should get his doctrine right when a parishioner questions the doctrine. However, Pastor Glende's statement that, "In light of our faith . . . we choose to . . . believe God's Word . . ." and that choosing to believe "is about, the life of faith, not coming to faith" simply cannot be reconciled to Lutheran doctrine.

Furthermore, as usual Pastor Glende does not cite the Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions to support his doctrinal stance, but rather cites the fact that five area WELS pastors said nothing negative. However, five pastors saying nothing is not an endorsement. Further, it would not matter if five thousand pastors say those lyrics are correct. The word of man counts for nothing in the face of the word of God. We don't vote on the truth. God's word is truth. Therefore, Pastor Glende should be citing God's word, not the education and silence of five pastors.

Another example of Pietistic song lyrics at St. Peter is our extremely heavy use of the song "Ready Lord," especially our use of its first verse as a regular part of our order of service. This verse contains the lyric:

"Oh show me Lord, just show me Lord, the service you will need."

This song appears in a WELS produced song book, *Let All the People Praise You*. But can anyone explain why an almighty God *needs* anything?

⁴¹ April 23, 2009 e-mail from Pastor Glende.

Overall Doctrine and Summary of Issues

There are ongoing issues with false and unclear teaching at St. Peter. For example, on August 9, 2009, we were encouraged to drink coffee in the sanctuary during the communion service, and the title of the sermon was "The Second Chance Café: Zechariah."⁴² The sermon dealt with doubt by giving us six steps to follow. According to Pastor Glende,⁴³ the "first step" is to admit our doubts. Here are the six steps:

1. Admit your doubts
2. Ask for insight
3. Check your emotions
4. Trust the truth
5. Accept the unexplainable
6. Celebrate God's faithfulness

What does Jesus do in all that? Is Jesus proclaimed here as Christ or as mere Helper? If the problem is not sin and the solution is not Jesus Christ crucified, but rather the problem is doubt (which according to the sermon is not a sin) and the solution is six steps; then what are we doing?

Instead of Christ washing us with water and the word (Ephesians 5:25-27, John 13:8); we get six steps. Do these six steps come from God's Word? Are they to be found in the Scriptures? Or did they also come from LifeChurch.tv?

We cannot continue like this for so many years without irreparable damage being done to our souls. We need to start making changes and educating ourselves to the point where everyone in the congregation carefully and accurately judges every word according to the Word of God. (Acts 17:11). Even more important, we need shepherds who are committed to proclaiming the truth clearly and purely.

We need to return to the Theology of the Cross. Everything we do—from our sermons to our liturgy—must focus on the cross and be centered on Christ. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus began "with Moses and all the Prophets," and explained to his disciples "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning *himself*." (Emphasis added. Luke 24:27).

⁴² This was the last service I attended at St. Peter before asking Pastor Glende about the plagiarism issue. In response, Pastor Glende wrote to me and the leadership of St. Peter that he was "offended - to say the least," and refused to answer the question in e-mail. Then three days later he questioned my educational level, and wrote that whether or not he plagiarized could not be answered "with a simple yes or no response."

⁴³ This assumes that Pastor Glende actually wrote the sermon.
<http://www.stpetercares.com/home/2440/2440/audio/MZ000017.MP3>

Our sermons need to be about Christ and the fact that he is trustworthy and deserving of our faith. Our sermons need to proclaim the grace of God alone thereby inspiring faith in Christ alone. A sermon that merely exhorts us to have courage, or manage our time well, or gives us six steps to overcome fear or doubt, is a sermon that has failed to present the Gospel. We do need to be brave, that is a legal command of God. That is Law. But better than bravery for those who are terrified of God's justice is faith. Faith in Christ. That is Gospel.

The Gospel is a stumbling block and foolishness to the world. (1 Corinthians 1:23). Unbelievers do not like the Gospel. But if we continue to obscure the Gospel in order to attract unbelievers to church, then no one will believe anyway. For how can they believe if they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14). People may not want to hear the Gospel, but we need to preach the Gospel "in season and out of season." (2 Timothy 4:1-3). It is not our job to grow the Church, it is our job to be faithful to everything Christ instructed us. (Matthew 28:18-20).

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. . . so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. [1 Corinthians 2:1-5].

In summary, these are among my concerns about St. Peter, some of which are cited previously and others are first cited in this list:

- a. A Mission Statement that is all law and no gospel
- b. A Vision Statement devoid of the word of God
- c. Songs with no doctrine and false doctrine
- d. Creeds with questionable doctrine
- e. Sermons copied in whole and in part from false teachers
- f. Gospel-less sermons
- g. Plagiarism/fraud
- h. Pastors who attend heretical pastors' conferences⁴⁴
- i. Pastors who lead an organization, Church and Change, that invites heretics to speak to other WELS pastors⁴⁵
- j. The use and pastoral defense of raffles to raise money

⁴⁴ Pastor Glende attended DRIVE '09 a "leadership conference" hosted by Baptist Andy Staley. Baptists often teach decision theology. (Craig Groeschel and Baptist Staley are working compatriots). Here is a link with video highlights from the conference: <http://www.driveconference.com/highlights.php>. St. Peter congregation was informed in the bulletin simply that Pastor Glende was at a "pastors' conference."

⁴⁵ Church and Change has had Leonard Sweet speak at a previous conference, and Baptist Ed Stetzer listed himself as a speaker for the upcoming November 2009 Church and Change conference. ("[A Little Love for the Lutherans](#)" by Ed Stetzer). Interestingly, the Church and Change 2009 conference is entitled "Regaining the Momentum," while Craig Groeschel and Andy Staley are also hosting a conference in November entitled "Momentum." (<http://www.catalystoneday.com/>).

- k. Inserting descriptions and activities into the one name of God, and omitting the Trinitarian invocation altogether
- l. Adamant and persistent pastoral opposition to any concrete proposal for raising awareness of or educating the laity regarding the Lutheran Confessions

For years, I have been witnessing to Roman Catholics about the importance of the doctrine of salvation *by grace alone through faith alone*. However, the continuing failure and refusal to preach the pure gospel at St. Peter has not only been embarrassing, it may have also led to the hardening of hearts. It is hard to admit, but there is at least as much Gospel and forgiveness of sins offered by Rome in the Sacramental Liturgy as St. Peter congregation offers in our "celebration-worship-performance-outreach" services that fail to serve the Gospel Word or the Gospel Supper.

We are put to shame. When the Roman Catholic liturgy has at least as much gospel as a Lutheran church's "celebration service," then we have to seriously question why we bother to have a Lutheran church. God does not forbid others to preach and serve the gospel in Word and Sacrament. If we will not, then He will send others.

Impasse at St. Peter Congregation

Pastor Glende has said many times that I should not question him or his decisions because he was "trained to be a pastor, was assigned and trained by our synod, and called by St. Peter to serve as it's pastor."⁴⁶ He often asks such questions as, "Rick - answer me this - did you take 8 years of schooling to be a pastor?"⁴⁷ Pastor Glende has instructed me during numerous conversations that I need to trust him because he is St. Peter's called pastor. However, this is not Lutheran doctrine. The "only rule and standard according to which all teachings, *together with all teachers*, should be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament . . ." (Emphasis added. *Formula of Concord, Epitome*, The Summary Content, Rule, and Norm).

The proper way to exercise authority in a Lutheran congregation is not by claiming a right to rule based on education or vocation or even by majority vote, but rather by appealing to the Word of God. (Matthew 20:25-28). Hopefully, I have cited the word of God adequately and properly in making this case. If I have erred anywhere I will gladly accept rebuke and correction, *but only if that rebuke and correction is based on the word of God*, and not upon years of education.

Even though we have not been able to resolve our doctrinal differences, Pastor Glende has told me that if I raise certain issues again, I will face church discipline. However, I am bound by my

⁴⁶ August 15, 2009 e-mail copied to Pastor Christenson, Pastor Szep, Tom Denney, Dave Dahlke, and Pastor Skorzewski in response to a question about plagiarism.

⁴⁷ August 15, 2009 e-mail copied to Pastor Christenson, Pastor Szep, Tom Denney, Dave Dahlke, and Pastor Skorzewski in response to a question about plagiarism.

conscience and must speak. "The Final Report and Recommendations" of the Ad Hoc Commission (April 2009) to the synod in convention states that the responsibility "to maintain the truth and avoid error belongs to every Christian." (Line 175). It also states that "individual Christians in the congregations who have charged [their pastors] with their tasks should hold them accountable for faithfulness to God's truth and for excellence in their work." (Lines 308-309).⁴⁸

Our mission and vision statements agree with Evangelical Covenant Church theology. The songs we sing and the creeds we say agree with ECC theology. Our sermons agree with ECC theology and/or are actual ECC sermons. Our pastors attend conferences held by Baptist and ECC pastors. What is an uneducated WELS layman supposed to think?

Call for Help & Protection

I am basically alone here at St. Peter.

Pastor Glende regularly calls into question my educational level and cites my status as a layman, and this has ended many discussions. Furthermore, he has told Circuit Pastor Suhr that he is no longer allowed to be his Circuit Pastor. Pastor Glende has also threatened that if I ever question him on some of these issues, I will face church discipline. Pastor Glende follows up on his threats.

Pastor Schroeder, Pastor Engelbrecht, and Pastor Suhr, if you believe this letter is good reason for me to be disciplined, then please explain from the Scriptures because I am willing to be ruled by the Word of God. However, if you believe this letter is not a good reason for me to be disciplined, then I am asking for your help and protection.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration. Your attention to these matters is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Frederick "Rick" Techlin Jr.
x22sun-church@yahoo.com

⁴⁸ The Final Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission, April 2009.
http://beta.wels.net/sites/wels/files/Final%20Report%20and%20Recommendations%20of%20the%20Ad%20Hoc%20Commission_1.pdf

"The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, is never present where lies are told. There is actually more unity of the church present where Christians of differing confession honorably determine that they do not have the same understanding of the Gospel than where the painful fact of confessional splintering is hidden behind a pious lie."

– Hermann Sasse, "Union and Confession"

cc: Jonathan Techlin (brother)
Michael Techlin (brother)
Fred Sr. & Patricia Techlin (parents)