

# The Small Catechism by Martin Luther For Head and Heart

Bishop's Lenten Visitations, 2017

Florida-Bahamas Synod

Presented by Pastor Wally Meyer

Indebted to Timothy J. Wengert, Martin Luther's Catechisms,  
Fortress Press, 2009.

# For Head and Heart



Note graduation  
gowns and stoles

# Luther Post-Confirmation Class

Luther's Preface to the Large Catechism:

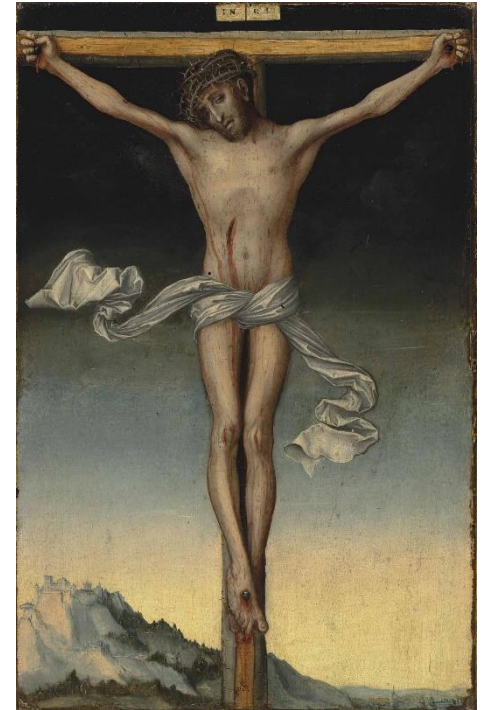
"I must still read and study the catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and a pupil of the catechism, and I do it gladly."



# Shared Worship from Shared Theology

Joint Declaration on the doctrine of justification by faith:

15. In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: **By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.**





# Why Write a Catechism (or two)?

- The Saxon Visitation of 1527-28  
(Remarks from 1528 preface to the Small Catechism)

Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers...They do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments. As a result they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom.



# What was wrong with the older catechisms?

- The old order, Creed, Commandments, then Prayer, emphasized “musts”. Wengert, p. 6: “Here is what you must believe; now that you believe, here’s what you must do; now that you feel guilty, here are the right words to pray.” This order drove people to penance, the center of medieval faith.
- Luther’s order followed a medical model. The Commandments tell us our sickness. The Creed tells us the medicine. The Lord’s Prayer, like the pharmacist, brings us the medicine. This order moved “from law to gospel to prayer for help.” (Wengert, p. 21)



# What else made the new Catechisms better?

- Luther's Catechisms were pastoral and books of faith, namely, Luther's faith. Notice the pronouns:

We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists.

I believe that Jesus Christ... is my Lord. He has redeemed me...

I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord...

He is truly our Father and we are truly his children...





# Anything else about the new catechisms?

- Luther accompanied his words with pictures, biblical woodcuts.



Lucas Cranach Illustrations



# The Small Catechism and Your Ministry

- Think of one of your favorite Catechism students (or teachers), whether Middle School or adult. Was that person your favorite because of matters of the head, the heart, or something else?
- If you have taught Catechism to middle schoolers or adults, how has your teaching changed over the years and why? (If you are not a teacher, how could instruction be strengthened?)
- What is the funniest thing that ever happened in your confirmation ministry?



# The Nine Commandments

- The Decalogue has nine commandments preceded by one word of grace, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt...” (See Lutheran Study Bible, page 154.)
- Luther passed on the opportunity to recover the original numbering and instead centered all the commandments around the first. “We are to fear and love God so that...”
- Instead of reducing the commandments to a series of moral imperatives, Luther looked to the heart. Keeping his medical image, the sinful actions were the symptoms, lack of faith was the disease.



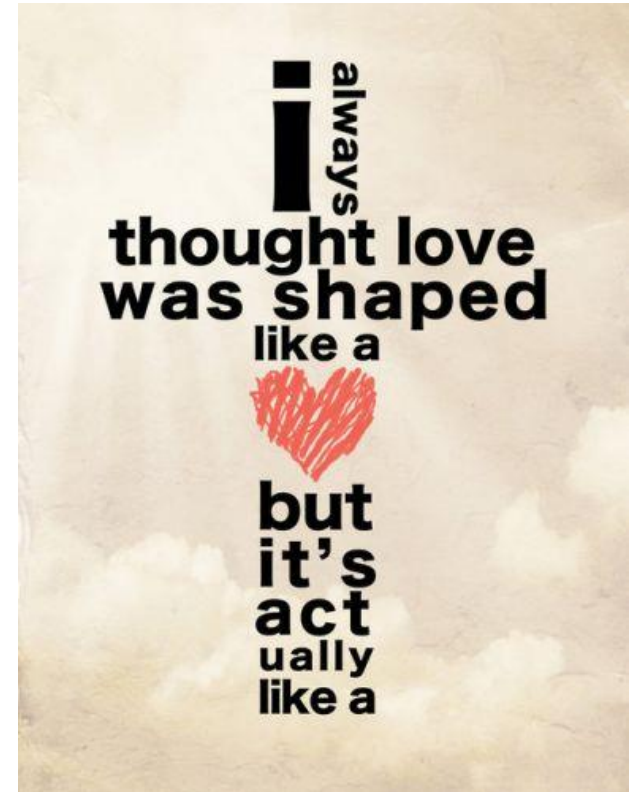
# The Commandments: Mirror and Stethoscope

- The stethoscope (which can detect fear and love through accelerated heartbeat) was not invented till 300 years after the Reformation, so Luther settled for the mirror as an image for the Law and its function of revealing sin.



# The Nine Commandments - continued

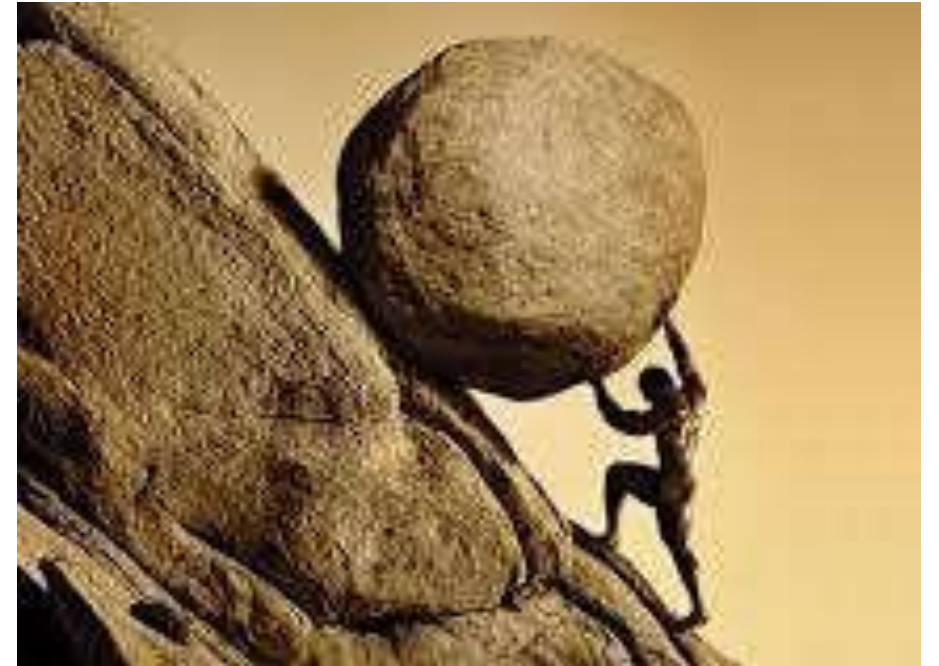
- Having gone to the heart of sin, Luther was free to dismiss certain aspects of some commandments as not applicable to our day (mostly in the Large Catechism) while he expanded the meaning of others. He also said the First Word of the Decalogue was irrelevant since his people were never slaves.
- The First Commandment forbade all kinds of gods beyond those carved out of wood or stone. The Second Commandment forbids abuse of God's name in court, but Luther targeted the same abuse elsewhere. The Third Commandment went beyond providing a day off to respecting God's Word and preaching. The Fourth Commandment called for honor not just to parents but to civic and religious leaders.





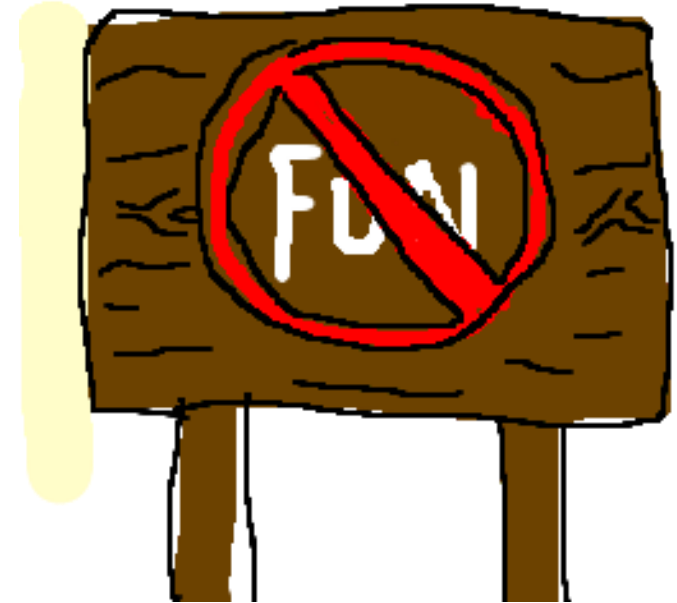
# The Nine Commandments - continued

- Most of Luther's explanations include a positive requirement introduced with "but instead," in German "sondern", in Spanish "sino" rather than "pero." All imply an opposite.
- "An 'ought' never implies a 'can.'" Wengert, p. 40
- "Whatever else we do with the Ten Commandments, we can do nothing worse than to ignore their main function: to put the old creature in us to death by showing our sin and driving us to the one place where there is help – the gospel." Wengert, p. 40



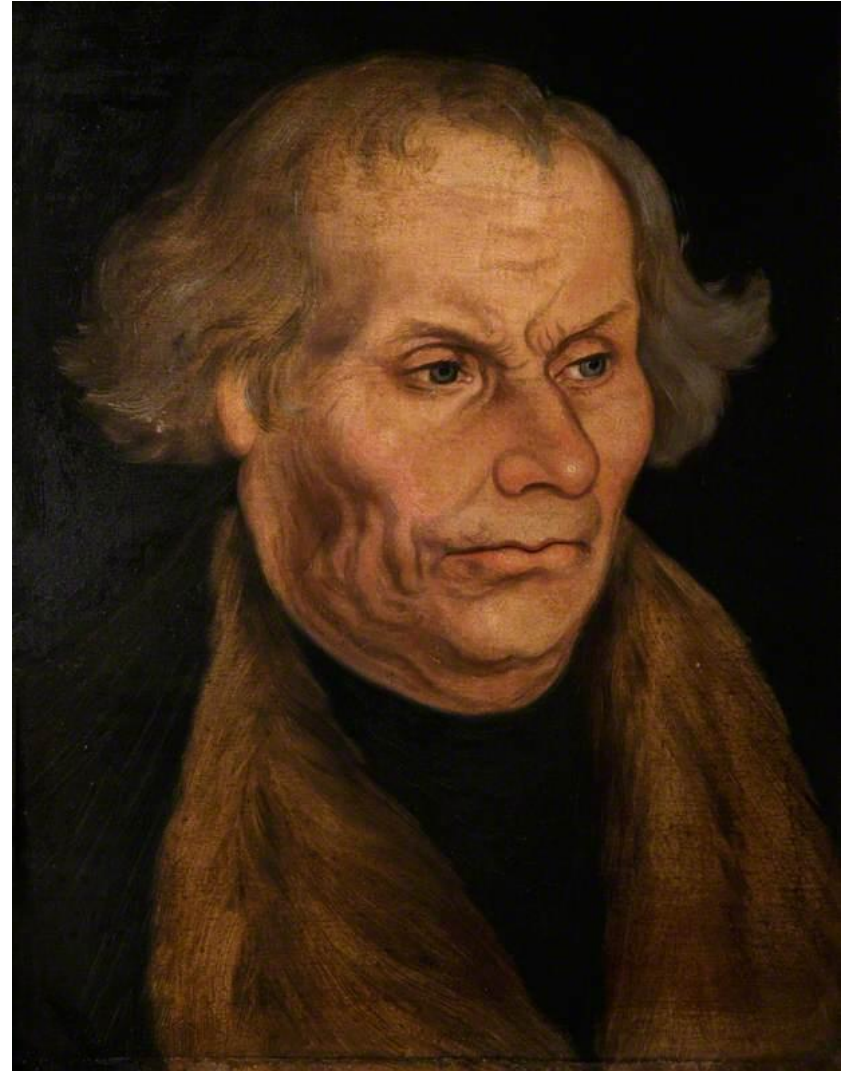
# Commandments and Your Ministry

- Besides the mirror (or stethoscope) representing the theological use of the law, Luther wrote of the curb for the political/civil use of the law which restrains sinners. What image might people today use to show their understanding of the function of the Commandments?
- What is your reaction when you receive a dreaded diagnosis from the doctor? How do you react when you read the Commandments?



# The Apostles' Creed – God Created Me

- A string of first person singular pronouns makes the article autobiographical. Wengert likens it to a child saying, “You know what I got for my birthday?” p. 54
- Look at the picture and guess why Luther thought of God the Father as judge.
- Luther did at last come to the phrase, “All this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!”
- “Pure” leaves no room for works.



# The Apostles' Creed - Ransom

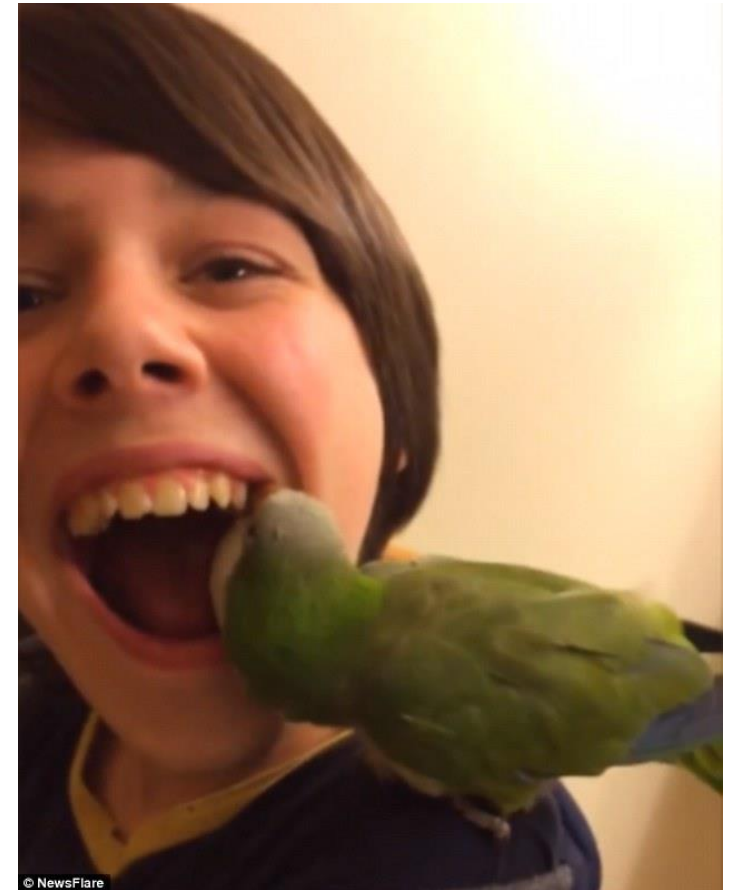
- Kidnapping and ransom were part of life. Everyone assumed it happened to Luther in 1521. The “Lord” was expected to protect and, when necessary, ransom the subjects.
- “He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”
- Since Christ redeemed us, he is our Lord.





# The Apostles' Creed – Making Us Holy

- Luther said that Andreas Karlstadt acted as if he had swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all by favoring internal experience over God's external Word.
- Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed begins, "I believe that... I cannot believe."
- In Mark 9:24 the father cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"
- "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Romans 7:19
- "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:3
- Saul, on the Damascus road, had no intention of believing in Christ. Acts 9



# The Apostles' Creed – Making Us Holy - continued

- The Holy Spirit calls through the gospel (Word and Sacrament) and thereby puts an end to our works. Wengert, p. 62
- Baptism is the Creed's watery version. p. 63
- The Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins.”
- It all happens in Church.



# The Apostles' Creed and Your Ministry

- What if evangelism were like a child bursting forth, “Do you know what I got for my birthday?”
- If kidnapping and ransom are less a part of our daily lives today than in Luther’s, is there a more relevant image or experience that can illustrate redemption?
- Do people, outside the church but inside too, really believe that they cannot by their own understanding or strength believe?





# The Lord's Prayer and Our Needs

- Luther's use of "Father language" evolved through the 1520's reflecting his own move from son to father. Wengert, p 87
- Petitions 1-3: God's name is holy in itself. God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer. God's good and gracious will comes about without our prayer. i.e. Works are not involved in achieving this.
- Luther's medical model continues, prayer giving the address to deliver the medicine.

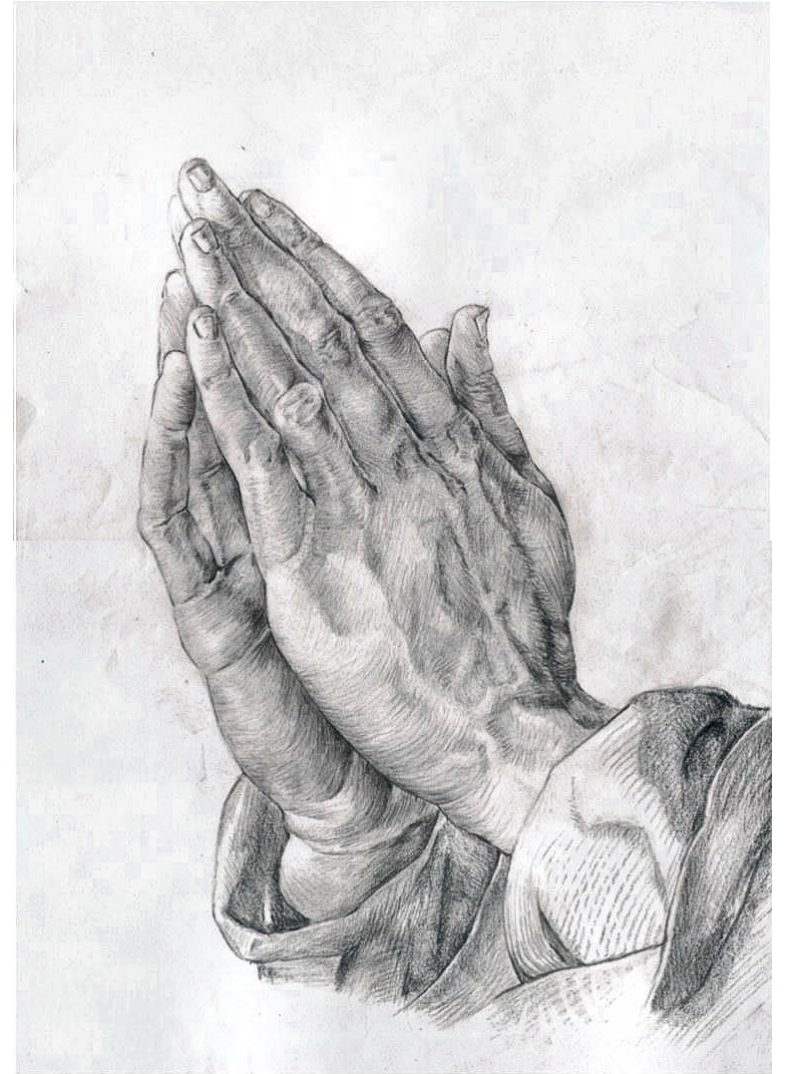


- 4<sup>th</sup> petition: The needs are supplied without our prayer, but we pray to recognize the Giver.



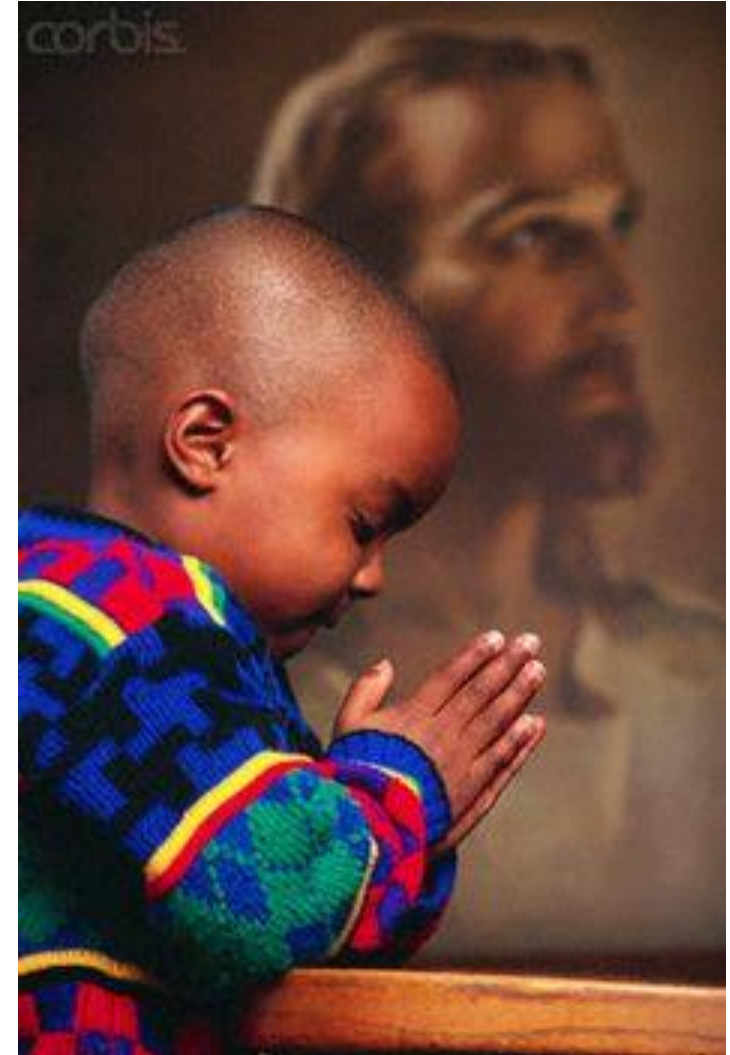
# The Lord's Prayer and Our Needs - continued

- 5<sup>th</sup> petition: We hear Luther's teaching of "at the same time sinner and saint" in the words: "that our heavenly Father would not regard our sins nor deny these petitions on their account, for we are worthy of nothing for which we ask."
- 6<sup>th</sup> petition: Chief sins listed are false belief and despair, 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment offenses. God offers comfort to those so attacked.
- 7<sup>th</sup> petition: Luther, under the Emperor's ban, experienced "all kinds of evil."



# The Lord's Prayer and Your Ministry

- What is the most memorable prayer you ever heard from a child?
- How do you think God felt about this prayer?
- A confirmation curriculum used to ask the question: “Who changes when we pray – God or us?”



# The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

- Luther defended infant Baptism as central to justification by faith alone.
- How can water do such great things? “The word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water” does such great things. This is parallel to the incarnation, God in flesh and God in water.
- Baptism makes us priests before God, undoing and redefining the medieval notion of vocation only for monastics.



- Our daily drowning gave rise to the third Lutheran sacrament, Confession.



# Holy Baptism and Your Ministry

- What is your most memorable Baptism story?
- How have you handled parents who forget their vows they make at their child's Baptism?
- For those who are pastors, have you heard private confession?





# The Sacrament of Holy Communion

- To papists who made the sacrament a sacrifice effective by mere performance (without faith), Luther said, “Given FOR YOU.” The words “for you” are repeated nine times in this section of the Small Catechism.
- To Zwingli and others who said the Mass pulled people away from the spiritual and into flesh and matter, Luther said, “This is my body.”
- Worthiness requires not fasting or other works but “truly believing hearts.”



# Holy Communion and Your Ministry

- How have you answered people who oppose a weekly celebration of the Eucharist?
- How do you prepare and encourage others to prepare to receive the Sacrament?
- How do you deal with those who absent themselves from the Eucharist for long periods of time (inactive members)?



# The Morning and Evening Prayers

- The presence of these prayers in the Small Catechism demonstrated that faith was lived out in the home and daily life, not in the monastery.
- The day began with joy: “Go to your work joyfully,” and ended in a similar mood, “go to sleep quickly and cheerfully.”
- Both prayers conclude, “Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me.” In addition the devil is mentioned in the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and Holy Baptism.





# Lutherans take themselves lightly by grace

