

# Spiritual Renewal Handbook



## How Can I Be More Spiritual?

Bethlehem Lutheran Church  
Capital Campaign

***The purpose of this pamphlet***

*We are embarking on a campaign to raise funds to pay down our debt. God pleasing stewardship growth is based on spiritual renewal and so the campaign is starting out with a call for spiritual growth. Spiritual renewal is based on increased use of God's word and sacraments. Each member is asked to read this pamphlet and begin to pray and think about personal spiritual renewal.*

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## **How can I be more spiritual?**

That is a question that many are asking both within and outside of the church. There is a boom in spirituality these days.

I'll never forget a fellow I met on the golf course a few years back. We had already finished nine holes and were standing on the tenth tee box. He turned to me and asked me what I did. I hesitated telling him because during our first two hours of golf, he had been cursing up a blue streak. He was using combinations of curse words and foul language that I had never heard before. He finally coaxed it out of me and when I told him I was a Lutheran minister his response was "That's great, I'm spiritual too." We chatted a little more about it and it became clear to me that his was a generic spirituality that was severed from the cross of Christ from which true spirituality flows. True spirituality is based on confessions and forgiveness of sins and the cross is from where that comes. Let me explain.

### **The Basic Story of Christianity: Our Sin and God's Forgiveness**

Christianity is a religion of the confession of and the forgiveness of sins. Here is the basic story of sin and forgiveness.

The true God, the Triune God, is holy and he created mankind in the image of His holiness. But then mankind sinned and God cut himself off from mankind because he cannot stand the presence of sin.

But his love for us moved him to devise the greatest plan of salvation ever conceived. God needed to account for sin with a price that was worthy. In his wisdom he sent his only begotten Son into human flesh and asked him to shed his blood in death on a cross to pay for our sins. You or I cannot die to pay for our sins because our sacrifice is tainted by those very sins. But when the Son of God dies for those sins, he is offering a perfect, sinless sacrifice that pays for all sin.

The fellow I met on the golf course thought that spirituality was all about focusing on other worldly things like angels, and acts of kindness, positive thinking and things like that. He did not

think of spirituality in terms of sin and forgiveness which is why he could take God's name in vain and use all sorts of "potty" language and yet still consider himself "spiritual." True spirituality is not located in other worldly thoughts but is located in the cross of Jesus Christ. St. Paul says "we preach Christ crucified" (I Corinthians 1:23) because that is where forgiveness is to be found. And because we are forgiven, we are set free to live holy and moral lives, free from things like foul language and other sins.



Because Christianity is about the forgiveness of sins, our piety and spirituality should be built around the places where God offers the forgiveness of sins.

## God has Attached the Forgiveness of the Cross to Three Means

When we search the Bible we find out that there are three means by which God forgives sins: 1) the word preached and spoken in Holy Absolution, 2) Holy Baptism and 3) Holy Communion.

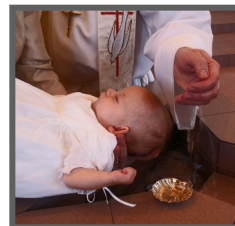
Consider these Bible passages:

### The Word

*Luke 24:46 - and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and **that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.***

### Baptism

*Acts 2:38 - And Peter said to them, "**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins...***



### The Lord's Supper

*Matthew 26:27-28 - And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is **poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.***

So the forgiveness that comes from the cross doesn't just stay on the cross. God distributes it in Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution (preaching, teaching, confession and absolution) and Holy Communion. These are the distribution centers of God's forgiveness. So if you want to increase true Christian spirituality, if you want to mature in the faith, you increase your time at the distribution center.

## **I Become more Spiritual when I Increase the Use of These Three Means**

Paul says in Romans 10:17 "faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ." Therefore, to increase our faith, to be more spiritual, we need to get more of the word into our lives.

We normally only think of the word preached but Luther teaches us that baptism and the Lord's Supper are the word for the eyes! The word that increases faith then, comes in three forms: 1) spoken, 2) connected to water, and 3) in, with and under bread and wine.

The *Spiritual Renewal Handbook* included in this mailing provides a way for you to see opportunities to get more of the means of grace into your life. The handbook also encourages more frequent use of the Lord's Supper and a remembrance of baptism by using Luther's morning and evening prayers.

## **Getting the Means of Grace into your Life**

### Holy Absolution

To get more of this means of grace into your life and to increase your spirituality, consider some of the things on the *Spiritual Renewal Pledge Sheet*. Commit to paying more attention to the sermon. You might even want to start taking notes. You can consider attending a Bible class or increasing your daily devotions.

We usually think of the administration of the word as equivalent to preaching but it also includes the absolution that the pastor speaks at the beginning of each service. When you are



particularly troubled about a sin don't forget there is a marvelous resource available to you called *Individual Confession and Absolution* with the pastor. It is on page 310 of the hymnal. It is entirely confidential and those who have received it from the pastor testify that it frees the soul.

### Holy Baptism

We too often think of baptism as a past event with little present impact. I work with a pastor who is constantly reminding us all of our baptism. We sometimes call him "Pastor Baptism." When you see him in the morning and ask him how he is doing he usually replies "Still baptized!" Paul reminds us in Romans 6 that as many of us as have been baptized have been baptized with Christ into his death and therefore raised with him to new life. Remembering our baptism is a great way to increase our spirituality because it assures us of our freedom from sin.

In the last mailing in you received a prayer tent with Luther's morning and evening prayers on them. They are a daily reminder of our baptism because Luther recommends that we make the sign of the cross and recite the invocation at the beginning and end of each day when we pray these prayers. Place the tent on your nightstand or in your cubicle at work and pray those prayers each morning and evening and you will have a wonderful reminder of your baptism.

### Holy Communion

The simplest way to get more of the visible word of Holy Communion into your life is to make it a priority to attend the Supper more often.

Another exercise to increase your spirituality would be to read Martin Luther's questions before receiving the sacrament. They are included in the hymnal on pages 306-307. They will keep you from taking the sacrament for granted and will help you to focus on the main purpose of the sacrament which of course is to forgive sins and which is the means to becoming more spiritual.



## **The Means of Grace and the Capital Campaign**

It may seem odd to begin a capital campaign with an emphasis on spiritual renewal but I hope you are beginning to see that all true stewardship growth is based on spiritual growth. God loves

a cheerful giver. To free ourselves up from our strangle hold on the things of this world so that we can support the kingdom of God, we need to grow and mature spiritually. We have several weeks left in this campaign. Hopefully this booklet helped inspire you to get God's Gospel deeper into your life and habits.

## ***Set Free to Build God's Family***

*Since we know that "the Gospel cannot be bound (2 Tim 2:9), this campaign is about freeing us to more effectively do our mission of building the family of God. It frees up resources for us to serve and love well. It gets us all pulling together in the same direction. It proves that we can go through the hard times and take the next steps into the future.*

*We have all been led by God to be at Bethlehem. He has arranged us, the parts of His body, just as He wants (1 Cor. 12), and the body is still developing. At this Bethlehem, there is more room in the inn!*

*This campaign will enable the Bethlehem faith family to continue to "do what God is blessing" – to serve and connect more with our community, with our members, and with our God!*

