



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

July 15, 2021

Dear Brothers in Office,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep!

During these summer days, I pray you can find a bit of respite and renewal in the joy of the Creator's seasonal splendor. Whether by a lake, in a park, or simply on a walk in the sun, my hope is that you take a few moments for rest and relaxation of your body. Likewise, for your own soul, that it would be rejuvenated and your joy would be renewed through Christ's Word of grace.

Even so, I realize finding joy these last months of ministry has likely been difficult. Coming out of the COVID-19 restrictions and balancing the demands of your members is invariably draining. I know many of you have been weary and worn. You've done your level best to navigate the divisions in your congregations. On average, I've found it's usually one-third who desire strict adherence to all governmental safety precautions, one-third who want the government to get their nose out of the church's business, and then one-third who want you to get the other two-thirds to stop fighting. Throw in all the other chaos of ministering to a fallen people with all their sins and heartaches, as well as your own, and joy can seem rather distant.

However, in Harold Senkbeil's book *The Care of Souls*, he reminds us that generations of German Lutheran pastors spoke frequently about *Freudigkeit im Amt*, "joy in office." It was their understanding that the work of soul care brought joy despite the burdens of the office. When you discover God's love is in motion through the pastoral care you bring, there is joy even in the midst of sorrow.

I am reminded of this as I continue serving as the associate pastor at Trinity, Farmington. Our beloved senior pastor recently took a Call out of state, complete with many tear-filled goodbyes. As such, I am now wrapped all the more into the lives of my congregation and community, even as I remain wrapped in the life of the District. It's a great reminder to me of the importance of what you're doing each and every day in Christ's name and stead.

Recently, while conducting a graveside committal service, amid all the obvious sorrow, I was simultaneously overwhelmed by the utter joy of the office. It was a complicated situation—believers and unbelievers were present. Estranged family members and members with alternative lifestyles were all gathered, and I had the joy of sharing with them the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting that comes through the love of Jesus Christ. I did so there formally and publicly, and then again

informally and individually at the meal afterward. The tremendous privilege of loving others in the name of Jesus is a joy.

Dear brothers, never forget this: Your ministry is God's love in motion. When you love Jesus, you tend and feed His sheep, despite their warts and blemishes. Jesus loves His flock through you as you faithfully bring them to Him—and His gifts of grace to them. As Senkbeil reminds us, from start to finish, ministry is a ministry of love in action. Always remember you are a sheepdog under the Great Shepherd's direction.

Therefore, your continuing delight is to do Christ's will, just as His delight was to do His Father's will. Jesus found joy in doing His Father's will because it was love in action. Think of it: God the Father so loved the world so that He gave His only Son the lost to save (LSB 571). For Jesus, the Father's love meant excruciating agony in body and soul, culminating in brutal suffering and death. Yet Scripture teaches that it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and is now seated at the right of the Father in glory (Hebrews 12:2).

The Father's love brought our Lord pain and death. Yet both were a joy for Jesus because He confidently knew He was doing the Father's loving will. As Senkbeil writes, "First the cross and then the crown; that's how it is in God's economy. And that's the way it will work for you" (280). In other words, your joy in ministry will come as you see God's love in action through you, even in the difficult and burdensome places of ministry.

Dear brothers, the joy of Christ and the office you bear in His name fill you to overflowing as you serve Him and His flock.

Your pastor and brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford