

Will the Real Church Please Stand Up? - A Summary

The Quest – Summary

1. It is important to realize that the vast majority of people who attend religious services, regardless of their religion, do so for personal validation. They want to gain the feeling from their attendance that they have personal worth before their god, before their neighbors, and most importantly before themselves. Satan encourages Christian churches to respond to this need by tailoring their preaching and practices to engender such feelings among their attendees. Yet personal validation is the wrong reason to attend religious services because all of us are totally depraved before God. We need his grace to cover our sins, not validation of ourselves as sinners.
2. It would be imprudent for the Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard to directly say that there are practices in our Lutheran congregations that undermine our gospel ministry because they direct people's attention away from what Christ has done for us to things that make us feel good about ourselves and about what we "do for God." Instead, he projects these problems to other churches, generic churches so that we do not get hung up on denominations and church bodies. Certainly, there are churches in many communities that are very much like what Rev. Richard describes, but the issues he calls to our attention can and do also arise in our churches when people take their eyes off what Jesus directed us to do in the great Commission and instead look to how we, rather than He, can build our congregations.
3. In the Lutheran church we are concerned about both doctrine and practice. The Scriptures gives us the correct doctrine, and believing it is what saves us. The Bible gives us much less detail about how to conduct worship and church business. Doctrine should guide our church practices. If it doesn't, then our practices can corrupt our doctrine because Satan is always trying to undermine adherence to the truth.
4. The ultimate goal of The Quest was not saving their souls but giving people a good customer experience every Sunday so that they would keep coming back and would desire to improve their experience by becoming more involved. Therefore, The Quest framed its "worship" service in the format of professional theater entertainment. Lutheran churches do that too when the form of the worship emphasizes what we do instead of setting our hearts and minds on what God has done for us.
5. The Quest's approach to outreach was not focused on evangelism, but on stealing the members of other Christian congregations. This practice, in which one congregation designs its programs to be superior to those of other congregations for the purpose of luring away the members of other congregations, is called "sheep-stealing." It is playing the devil's game by emphasizing that the good feeling of personal validation is stronger in one's own congregation than in other people's congregations. This approach must be contrasted to "sheep-rescuing," which occurs when one helps members of churches that teach false doctrine which is dangerous to their souls to recognize the dangers and flee such churches for churches that teach sound, soul-saving doctrine. We are in the business of saving souls rather than enlarging our congregations by any means fair or foul.

6. Few congregations have the resources to provide excellent member services to a wide spectrum of people. They must therefore direct their outreach efforts to those who would be best served by the resources they have available. Using worldly allurements to attract new members, however, tends to shove the essential work of the Holy Spirit into the background. Because people usually stay with an organization for the same reason they came to the organization originally, if that reason is not to receive the forgiveness of sins, the people will remain only as long as they need the worldly benefits offered.
7. Separating children from parents to enhance the parents' worship experience was generally felt to undermine the long-term health of the church by failing to train the children in the importance of attending worship.
8. The religious service at The Quest could hardly be termed a "worship service" because there was no real worship. While it gave the attendees a positive emotional experience, that experience was devoid of the message of sin and grace. The use of the Bible was tied to earthly considerations. The Quest aimed at giving a good customer experience without concern whether any long-term spiritual blessings were provided.

Parkside – Summary

1. All of us would like to have somewhere on this planet, preferably nearby, where we could run and be safe from all the trouble that surrounds us. The only people who would be allowed to be there would be those with whom we were compatible, and we would only do those things that were pleasant for us. Our favorite foods would have no calories so that we could eat as much of them as we pleased. But God has said to us, “Heaven will have to wait until I call you, and you will like it much better than anything you can devise. Meanwhile, I have work for you to do in that unpleasant world that surrounds you.” God does not want us to live in a “monastery.”
2. Parents have a balancing act to perform in raising their children. They need to provide a safe place for them where they can be nurtured, but they also must expose them to the real world so that they will be able to survive when they need to make their way in the real world. It involves a lot of thought and effort. A congregation can help train the children of its members, but it also must not shield them to such an extent as to leave them unprepared for life.
3. It is essential that children be ingrained with the understanding that the church is the place where they will hear and learn God’s Word, where they will receive the forgiveness of sins, and where they will pray to God and praise Him. While opportunities might sometimes be available to do things with other church members that are not inherently religious, these things are not the proper role of the church. Participating in them does not build faith. The church should not encourage these activities as part of its mission but rather permit the use of its facilities for its members to engage in them, provided that such activities are never given priority over things which are part of the church’s mission.
4. In the Great Commission, Jesus instructed the church to teach everything that He had commanded to His disciples. St. Paul urged Christians to put on the “whole armor of God.” In Psalm 1, believers were told to “meditate on His instruction day and night.” Congregations should be showing the way by providing frequent opportunities for their members to study God Word and by regularly urging their members to have a substantive training and study program in their home. Congregations get few results in spiritual growth among their members because they ask for little effort from their members. If members show up for worship services, or even social activities, it is assumed that their faith is healthy, and the pastor dare not pry into the nature of their faith. This is a development in the Lutheran church in America in recent times. A hundred years ago pastors were not shy about asking members about the particulars of their faith.
5. Coffee, donuts, and friendly discussion can contribute to the community feeling at a church even if they do not directly enhance peoples’ faith. Unfortunately, such social fellowship can also become the ultimate reason that people attend the church. When socializing is encouraged at the entrance of the church before worship and even facilitated by coffee and food, the worship service can become nothing more to some members than a necessary interruption in the fellowship, which resumes immediately after the service. The need for a congregation to emphasize that members should enter the sanctuary and prepare themselves for the service soon after arriving is essential to prevent people from losing their focus on Christ and His work.

6. The role of greeters will continue to be a discussion topic as we consider the various churches because the natures of the churches are very different. Perhaps one approach is not good for all situations, but studying how the various churches approach greeting visitors can be educational.
7. The physical plant of a congregation not only determines what a congregation can do, but it also shows the world what a congregation thinks is important. The money follows the heart. Congregations invest in what they think will further their ministry. Parkside clearly valued activity space rather than personnel to teach the biblical message. This showed that its members were more interested in an earthly paradise than in a heavenly one.
8. The worship at both The Quest and Parkside was passive. Everything happened in front of the members of the congregation, who were only expected to sit and watch it. In some respects, the situation was like people watching a movie or television. Asking nothing from the worshippers implies their faith is not very important because they are not even asked to express it in the friendly confines of a worship sanctuary. There are times when the presentation being given is so profound that the audience needs to sit in silence and listen attentively to absorb it, but this is not the regular situation at a weekly worship service.

Mercy Hill – Summary

1. Mercy Hill was a typical mainline church in the interior of a city which was experiencing population turnover. Redevelopment changed the character of its neighborhood. While some of its longtime and therefore older members continued to attend, the church would have been in danger of dying due to its small parking lot that made it difficult for more distant members to attend. It therefore reached out into the neighborhood to find new members. What it found was poor people in need of help and young people who were interested in the cause of social justice. Mercy Hill was therefore captured over some time period by the community surrounding the church. The mission of the church changed to match the physical needs of the community, which seemed more pressing, instead of the spiritual needs. The social gospel of rescuing the poor from their physical poverty replaced the Christian gospel of rescuing souls from their spiritual depravity.
2. Although Mercy Hill had changed the focus of its message, it had kept the trappings of Christianity. It had a churchly building with stained-glass windows, chancel furniture, oak pews, and banners. It had Scripture-reading. It had somewhat recognizable hymns. It had a pastor, albeit female, in a robe who led the service. Someone who did not hear the message would likely consider it a Christian church. Like perhaps many churches that no longer preach the saving message, Mercy Hill had the aura of Christianity about it.
3. The church was a completely works-righteousness organization. Its members were to be the “hands and feet” of God. The program was all about them working at helping the poor rather than the grace of God to lost sinners. It fell short of everything that might be considered Christianity. Unlike the Salvation Army, which is also a group dedicated to helping the poor, there was no mention that it tied the preaching of the law and the proclamation of the gospel to its charitable work. It was a community-oriented organization whose religious veneer gave its members the feeling that they would be viewed favorably by God for doing His work. It could also relieve feelings of guilt they might have for being better off.
4. It is necessary for people to recognize the different roles played by the church, the state, the family, and the community. There is overlap among them, particularly in responsibility for raising children. Nevertheless, Christians must be careful not to allow either the mission of the church or the responsibilities of the family to be impaired by failures in the state or the community. The church cannot rescue the community from its own failures or those of the state. The family cannot surrender its responsibility to the church, state, or the community. Christians can and should cooperate with others for the good of their society, but “love in action” cannot replace “God’s grace in action” in their lives.
5. Christians are propelled by Christ’s command to love our fellowmen to help their neighbors and their neighborhood without making their actions be seen as the purpose of the visible church. This means that Christians should give what they have and do not use to other who need it. Hoarding leads to boasting and does not serve others as Jesus calls upon us to do. We should also regularly contribute to charitable work through donations of either money or time. Contrary to the image of wealthy Americans, things do not need to be new or shiny to serve a practical purpose. Finally, Christians should contribute aid, as they can, in times of general disasters.

6. The role of Bill, an informal greeter, showed the importance of enthusiastic members in bringing new members into the organization. The best recruiters for an organization are motivated members who exhibit the real joy of being in the organization. This did not work on Ben and Jessica because they were too dissimilar to the rest of the members of Mercy Hill.
7. Mercy Hill was a one-dimensional church. Opportunities for either adults or children to grow in their faith did not seem part of the program at Mercy Hill. There did not appear to be a Sunday school. Children would be indoctrinated in the Mercy Hill doctrine of helping others through apprenticeship in the service programs. It was the be-all and end-all of the church.
8. Mercy Hill worked off the Francis of Assisi mantra, “Always preach the gospel; use words if you have to.” Other mantras are “deeds not creeds” and “What Would Jesus Do?” These are catchy phrases, but they remove the flexibility of the Christian to respond to real world situations. Creeds confess our beliefs, which drive our actions. We have a different mission than Jesus did; He came to save the world. The gospel is words, God’s words supported by the Holy Spirit, and we need to speak them.

First Church of Midway

1. The Campbells' experience at the First Church of Midway was so disturbing to them that none of them wanted to go back. At the previous churches that they had visited, they felt that there was something at the church that was calling them to come back and that the church was really interested in their becoming part of the congregation. Each of the other churches had its own approach for drawing them in. While the approaches were not particularly Christian in nature, they nevertheless were intended to encourage membership. This was not the case with the First Church, which seemed more interested in seeing if they were the right type of people to join the congregation, and if so, where in the church's social hierarchy they should be placed.
2. In fairness to the First Church, it appeared to conduct a worship service in the tradition of mainline protestant churches. When people arrived, they were given bulletins and ushered into the church. No distractions of beverages or noisy people were mentioned. Announcements of activities were in the bulletin, and there is no indication they were also given at the beginning of the worship service. The worship service was well done by professionals. Hymnals were used in the service, and people left the sanctuary in an orderly manner. This format of the worship service is used by many theologically sound churches. The substance of the service was not noted, which indicates that the Campbells did not consider it important to their ultimate decision to eliminate the First Church from further consideration.
3. The first anomaly they encountered was the giving wall. While Jesus said when you donate, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," (Matthew 6:3) the people at the First Church wanted everyone to know how much they donated. Large donations were not only listed, but they were emphasized by plaques. What made this particularly shameful is that everything we have comes from the LORD, who has given to each of us what He has decided we need. It all belongs to Him, and it is improper for us to claim credit for giving back to Him what is His.
4. Recognition was not only given on the giving wall. A hymnal included the name of the person responsible for donating it. So did the fellowship hall and perhaps other things in the church that the Campbells did not see. People were eager to discuss their contributions at the post-service fellowship. But why? Placing the names of people on objects replaces the glory of God with the importance of the people. How does this affect the poor person in the congregation who can never be recognized for their sacrificial giving to their LORD or the visitors who realize that they will never be able to do as others in the congregation can do. Being given recognition for their large contributions can lead people to structure their contributions to increase the recognition they get. What happens when something becomes worn and should be discarded, but the object bears a member's name? Can a church become cluttered with deteriorating objects that members donated and therefore cannot now be junked? If something was given to the LORD, who should care who gave it?
5. It is sad when people come to a church service for personal validation; however, many church goers attend for precisely this reason. It is even sadder when people come to church for social validation. Every believer has the same value before the LORD, no matter what his or her value is before the people of the community, whether that community is the church community or society in general. Heaven is not awarded based on a popularity poll or the number of friends one has on Facebook. It does not matter whether one's name is in Who's Who in America, or whether one is barely recognized

by one's dog. What is important is that one is known by one's God.

6. The matter of where the church members parked was a non-issue, even if church members did park in the parking lot of a government building. When the owners of parking spaces do not need to use those spaces at a particular time, it is only good stewardship of scarce resources to allow others to use them. The fact that one or more members of the church had a connection with the institution whose space was used was not relevant.
7. The First Church of Midway was certainly a place with serious issues, but the Campbells allowed themselves to play the game of personal importance, too. They were happy when socially important people were giving them attention. They quickly decided they liked it, and they were hurt when it was withdrawn. They did not explore to see if there was a Sunday school (perhaps not because it was summer) or whether there were less status-conscious people with whom they could interact. They didn't even notice whether there was anything of relevance in the service. Their judging of the congregation started as they drove up and may have prevented them from seeing anything that might have changed their minds about the congregation. Hasty judgment can at times be costly.

Cornerstone Community Church – Summary

1. When we started this course, I noted that most people go to church for personal validation. They want to believe that they have value as a person. At The Quest that validation came through a professional performance with an upbeat message that told them they had come to the right church. If they came back the next week, things would get even better. At Parkside there was an atmosphere of safety and community that gave people a warm and fuzzy feeling. At Mercy Hill one could soothe one's conscience by helping the less fortunate in the community and even parade up to the front of the church to do it. At The First Church and at Cornerstone Community, however, people were not just handed validation, but they had to earn it through a competitive process. The society of The First Church required material success that could be tangibly shown. At Cornerstone Community it was essential to show one's commitment to personal improvement. None of the approaches of these churches brought people into contact with the saving message of the Bible, even though each of the churches had Bible readings.
2. The underlying problem explored by this book is *opinio legis*, which drives us to want to keep a set of rules to prove that we have inherent worth before our fellowmen and, by extension, before God. The problem with this approach is that man sees only the exterior behavior and judges by what it sees. People do not see the motivation behind the exterior display and perhaps do not even care because people like to see results. God, however, looks first at the heart to see what motivates a person's actions and judges the actions accordingly. Favor before men does not guarantee favor before God.
3. Moralism is a personal approach to life which drives people to keep rules for their own sake. They view keeping the rules as a way that they can generate merit and see themselves as not just worthy, but as superior because they can keep the rules. Others will admire them, and their hearts will rejoice over their achievements. This does not lead to saving faith in Jesus.
4. Being competitive is part of the human existence, sometimes for good and often for evil. The danger of competitiveness is that it focuses people on human effort instead of on God. They look more to themselves for their accomplishments and less to God and to their fellowmen. This can be a great problem in the church when people adopt a "holier than thou" attitude toward those whom they do not feel are doing enough to improve their lives. Moralists want to be seen as the "movers and shakers." There is an old saying that "It is amazing how much work gets done when no one worries about who will get credit for it." In other words, the more time spent on the task and the less time spent on posturing benefits everyone.
5. The worship at Cornerstone Community was clearly self-centered worship, not Christ-centered worship. For the pastor it was an opportunity for propagating his ideas of how people might improve themselves and for promoting his books. For the members of the congregation, it was

their chance to bone up on key points to make in discussions with other members. While it had the form of a church, it did not have the purpose of a Christian church. The people may have felt edified and validated, but they were not saved. The lack of repentance and prayer were a strong indication that people were staying at arms' length from God.

6. While it takes effort to understand everything the Scriptures teach, there is nothing hidden about them. They are available in many translations in many languages. One cannot spend too much time studying them. Cornerstone Community was pushing special (that is, secret) knowledge which only the "in" people had. The source of that special knowledge was the pastor. While faithful pastors preach the Scriptures which can be accessed by all, the pastor of Cornerstone Community preached his own wisdom which could be gotten only directly or indirectly from him.
7. While the Bible is boundless in its wisdom, and one can never learn enough from it, self-improvement approaches can only go so far. One should soon reach the point where one is willing to face life without the crutch of self-help books and sermons. But the leadership of Cornerstone Community manipulated people's expectations so that they never reached the goal of personal independence they sought but always needed a new book to buy or a new course to take to continue making progress. Like the members of The Quest, they were on an endless search for something they could never find.

Peace Bible Church – Summary

1. Peace Bible Church, like Parkside Community Church, recognized the tremendous challenge that the outside world represents to the faith of Christians. Like Parkside, Peace turned to its own efforts instead of its God to address the challenge. The Bible is quite clear that the Christian needs to put on the whole armor of God to withstand the forces of Satan, both the demons and their agents in the physical world (Ephesians 6:10-18). While Parkside put up a defensive barrier to protect its members from the world, Peace went on the offensive in the political realm to try to conquer their opponents with legislation. A serious concern is that many Lutheran churches do neither but instead allow their members to face the forces of evil under-armed because they give them inadequate training in the Scriptures.
2. The dream of building a better society has long tantalized the human mind. Politicians and television commercials make it seem to be within our grasp if we can only accomplish X or buy Y. However, God has stated that there will always be wars and rumors of wars. People cannot live in harmony because they are greedy. They do not trust people who have different cultural values and even their neighbors who have the same cultural values. Cain's killing of Abel shows how little provocation is needed for the vilest of crimes, much less common dishonesty.
3. The church's involvement in politics is not limited to particular types of churches. Mainline Christian churches abandoned sound biblical teachings so they could appeal to those with a social conscience. They bought into a Humanistic view of society. Evangelical churches became politically active to promote "family values" and restrict the political liberties of those they considered threats to their families. For both sides, misrepresenting what the Bible teaches has become rampant to gain adherents for their causes.
4. Political involvement does severe damage to the image of the church and the church's ability to carry out the mission that Christ assigned to it. Those members of a church who do not agree with its political stance will, over time, stop attending, stop contributing, and finally leave. Many mainline churches suffered large membership losses during the 1960's and 1970's. People who do join churches with a well-known political position do so for political reasons. The churches accept them because of a common political ideology rather than because of doctrinal agreement. While such churches may still claim to be Christian, the Christ they promote cannot deliver from death, hell, and the power of the devil.
5. The church must be ever vigilant of not giving a false impression to the community and prospective members of its real mission. Lutheran churches have Bible-based teachings on subjects such as abortion, the practice of homosexuality, and divorce. These teachings naturally raise the suspicion that our churches are in a political alliance with others that hold similar views and want to impose their views on others through legislation. Legislation cannot

save souls. Even if we could compel others to behave in the way we might wish, if people's hearts have not been changed to recognize what behavior is sinful before God, to repent of their sins, and to accept the salvation offered through Jesus Christ, their modelling God-pleasing behavior will do no good. We cannot moralize people into heaven. The Law as a curb is insufficient; people must use the Law as a mirror.

6. Peace also raised the question of what the proper role of the laity is in the worship service. While the congregation responded to what was said or sung in the chancel, which is better than we saw at most of the other churches, was there substance to the words they said and sang or were they merely canned phrases that required little or no thought? It is easy for pastors to deceive themselves that they are reaching the laity when they are merely eliciting an echo. Lay people came up to the front to offer prayers at Peace, but this is a questionable practice because it distracts from the theme of the service. Without a specific call establishing their responsibilities, people should not be appearing in the chancel except to receive the sacrament.
7. The Campbells found the amount of political advertising distracting from the purpose of the worship service. This is an inherent danger with anything in a worship service – it can distract a worshipper from the intended message of the service. Yet, the theme of the service is not mandated by the Scriptures. If a person's mind gets snared by something in the sermon, a reading, a hymn, etc. and is led to a deeper contemplation of a spiritual truth, this is more important than rigorously giving equal weight to everything that happens in the service. On the other hand, if the cause of your distraction is your mulling over a recipe for rhubarb pie or your concern over the health of the Packer's kicker, then your distraction is not God-pleasing.

Trinity Church – Summary

1. Denominations provide four important support items for member congregations. First, they supply a ready source of trained church workers who hold a specific set of beliefs. Second, they provide a wide range of support materials, such as hymnals, Sunday school materials, bulletins, etc., often through a denomination-owned or affiliated publishing house. Third, they carry out mission work in distant places in the name of their member congregations. Fourth, they provide places to which congregations can transfer their members who move that share the same doctrines and practices as their current congregation. As a condition of membership, denominations, to one degree or another, demand loyalty in three areas: 1) doctrines taught, 2) church organizational practices, and 3) financial support for denominational activities.
2. Although they often deny it, dominations tend to have their own set of idiosyncrasies in the way they conduct church business and operate their congregations. These idiosyncrasies are usually grounded in the history of a denomination and become so ingrained that the denomination cannot imagine changing them, even if they have outlived their usefulness or become liabilities to the church's mission.
3. Congregations that choose not to be affiliated with a denomination have more freedom in the operation of their own affairs and avoid denominational financial obligations. On the other hand, they must seek people to staff their professional positions, such as that of pastor or music director, without outside help. These congregations often have a "pulpit committee" that seeks qualified individuals and hires them using a contract rather than calling them. Various colleges and seminaries without denominational affiliation train candidates for the ministry for congregations without affiliations, and independent congregations select candidates from these types of institutions.
4. Most congregations, whether they are part of a denomination or not, are standalone (i.e., single campus) entities. They have one physical location. In recent years, multi-campus congregations have formed, often with a larger congregation becoming an anchor church for one or more smaller congregations. Congregations can also be part of a bishopric, where a bishop or administrative pastor controls the assignments of the professional staff and the resources of the bishopric among its component congregations.
5. While denominations generally do not own the physical property of their member congregations, except perhaps for new missions, congregations can be effectively captured by their denominations. If a congregation is located near a major denominational facility or if several of its leaders have important positions within the denominational organization, denominational activities may dominate the activities of the congregation. It may become a testing ground for denominational programs or may have its professional staff called away to work on denominational programs. This can put the members of the congregation at risk of spiritual abandonment unless the denomination compensates the congregation by providing it with extra pastors or teachers to tend to the spiritual needs of its members. The first responsibility of a congregation must always be to its members and then to Christ's Great Commission, not to outside activities.
6. While denominations are extremely useful to the church at large, they also come with some liabilities. In small denominations, nepotism can be a negative force. When there is a significant interrelationship

among members of the clergy, a denomination can become like an extended family in which bad uncles and rebellious brats are tolerated to prevent rending the organization, even when that undermines the denomination's doctrinal integrity. In larger denominations, church politics can become a troubling issue. Competition for leadership positions and prize pastorates can stir the ecclesiastical pot, raising suspicions and fostering hunts for heretics.

7. The Campbells' encounter with the denomination's past-presidents' pictures raises the issue of whether pictures of past national church leaders should be on the walls of a church building. It is hard to see how this makes sense for a local congregation. Some churches do have pictures of past pastors and/or past confirmation classes. This can serve as a valuable role in reminding the members and visitors of the congregation's history. A much more valuable spiritual resource might be to place pictures of major Lutheran theologians on the walls in the church with a short description of their role in church history.
8. The greeting activity in a congregation is always a challenge. An effective greeter must have a good knowledge of the members of the congregation so as not to confuse members with non-members. When greeting non-members, the greeter needs to learn information about the non-members without appearing nosy. The most important piece of information is whether the non-member is local, and therefore a possible future member, or just a transient who lives elsewhere. The greeter must decide when and if to introduce the visitor to the pastor or other church leader.

Immanuel Summary

1. We have finally reached what is clearly a Lutheran church. What are the indications? First, old blue hymnals with the communion liturgy beginning on page 15 are a telltale indication that Immanuel is using The Lutheran Hymnal. Secondly, there are the confession of sins and the absolution, the wording of which are from that hymnal. Likewise, so was the rest of the order of service, called the “common service.” The sermon contained both strong law and strong gospel. The congregation practiced “close communion.” That Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard would choose such a church as a true church should come as no surprise, as he is a pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.
2. As has been true of all the churches throughout the book, Immanuel is an extreme example of the type of church that it represents. While numerous confessional Lutheran churches are rural, most are not. Moreover, rural churches do not necessarily have all or any of the negative characteristics that Immanuel does. In fact, because many rural churches were physically built by their members, descendants of the builders often have pride in maintaining the church.
3. What is unfortunately true is that many rural congregations make little effort to spread the Gospel message to others. Immanuel had no signs on more heavily travelled roads directing people to the church. The sign in front of the church needed repair. The gravestones needed resetting. The smell of “old building” was unappealing. The coffee was not fit for consumption by guests. The only people who showed interest in the Campbells were a couple that was already known to Jessica. There is no indication that the Campbells talked to the pastor. Because of the lack of directional signs, the lack of maintenance of the building, and the lack of friendliness by the congregational members, Immanuel appears to be a congregation in decline. Very few people are likely to visit, and few visitors are likely to return.
4. The presentation of the message of sin and grace was key to the reason for the existence of Immanuel. Moreover, it was done well. Of great importance was the sermon which identified real sins that existed in the congregation. Even in nominally faithful congregations, during the last century in America sermons have been shortened and dumbed down. Everyone is more comfortable in a church if the pastor merely preaches “about the Law” and “about the Gospel” rather than preaching the Law and the Gospel. Telling people that this is a sinful world and that Jesus came to forgive sins is ethereal. One can agree with it, even appreciate it, without applying it to oneself. That is why it is important to remind people of their total depravity, of their real sins that they would like to ignore, and of the necessity of applying the work of Christ to themselves personally.
5. A point was made about an old hymn being used. There are three important issues to consider in this regard. First, older hymns have withstood the test of time. They have often been refined over time to change wording that would be confusing today. And such changes can be made because the hymns were written out of love for the LORD rather than for profit, as are most hymns today. Second, older Lutheran hymns emphasize clear, correct doctrines, and therefore they bolster people’s understanding and remembrance of these doctrines. Finally, the church has existed throughout the ages. Singing older hymns allows one to worship with faithful Christians of previous ages. Even if the language has changed, the doctrines expressed haven’t.

6. Immanuel had a crucifix rather than an empty cross in the chancel. There are arguments for and against using a crucifix. For some, the crucifix keeps in front of members the suffering that Jesus had to endure for their sins. They want to be reminded of it often. For others, the empty cross shows that Jesus has already won the victory over sin, death, and the devil, i.e., objective justification. The danger in the use of the crucifix is that it is associated with the Roman Catholic teaching that people's redemption is not yet complete but must be continued by our suffering and by bloodless sacrifices of Christ.
7. While we have all been turned off by what we have seen in the previous churches, we should not rush to judgment on all their church members. Several churches may have more substantive sermons some weeks than the Campbells experienced. They might have good Bible classes and Sunday schools. But they also might not. Their problems may squeeze Jesus out of their teachings even though they regularly read the Bible on Sunday morning.
8. Now that we have reached the end of the course, it would be well to go back through the book and the class notes to see if any of the problem behaviors we have seen exist in your congregation. Do not make excuses for the behaviors but discuss them with the church leadership, re-examine what you are doing, and refine it or discontinue it, as appropriate. Satan is always saying, "A little of that can't be harmful, and it even might do some good." Paul wrote, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Don't let yourself be deceived.