

# ELS Newsletter

## 2025 ELS Convention

Its theme will be *“Bondage of the Will: ‘I Cannot by My Own Reason or Strength...”* Pastor David Jay Webber will be the essayist. 2025 will mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*, which he himself thought was one of the most significant of his compositions. Sinful mankind’s original sin prevents human beings from working out their own salvation, because they are completely incapable of bringing themselves to God. Therefore, there is no free will for humanity, as far as salvation is concerned. Luther: “[T]he human will is placed between the two like a beast of burden. If God rides it, it wills and goes where God wills ... If Satan rides it, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.” In America, which marks its inception with a celebration of independence and rejoices in the many freedoms we enjoy, the concept of “free will” seems to permeate much of our shared worldview. In addition, the predominant Christian religious flavor in our culture is grounded in American Evangelicalism which ordinarily teaches falsely that humans have a free will in spiritual matters. Confessional Lutheranism however understands Scripture rightly by acknowledging with Luther that our natural state as sinners is that our wills are bound to sin, death and hell. Only the miraculous working of the Spirit creating faith in Christ rescues us from such bondage which leads to eternal death. *The Bondage of the Will* is a seminal work that clearly distinguished the Lutheran Church from Rome and the other Reformers.

## Upcoming Events

July 22–23 – Board for Home Outreach  
July 25–28 – LYA Convention  
August 6 – Board for World Outreach  
August 12 – Board of Regents  
August 13 – Synod Review Committee  
August 14 – Board of Trustees



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Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato, Minnesota 56001  
[elsynod@blc.edu](mailto:elsynod@blc.edu)

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Dear Members and Friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod,

What should you expect to hear every time your pastor preaches a sermon?—the GOSPEL! Not just a lecture ABOUT the Gospel, but the very good news, e.g., “in Christ, you are forgiven all your sins,” “you are dressed in Jesus’ holiness through faith in Him,” etc. President Wilhelm Peterson would tell seminarians back in the ‘80s, “the Gospel is not just information, it is transportation.” God actually transports through the work of His Spirit forgiveness, life and salvation to sinners who hear it or read it.

Here is a quotation from a book I recently read especially written for pastors: *“This is the mission of the church: that souls purchased and won by the saving work of Christ may hear his voice, believe his words and so find life eternal in his name. Notice that is not hearing about Jesus that saves, but hearing Jesus. There is a big difference between the two.... The called servants of Christ are not advertising agents or salesmen, but spokesmen for Jesus. When you [pastors] open your mouth to speak the gospel you’ve been given to proclaim, people receive the words of Jesus. In a very real way, they hear Jesus himself.... Jesus sent me to proclaim: not merely information about Jesus, but Jesus himself, crucified and risen — Christ the power of God and wisdom of God.”*<sup>1</sup>

As Christians we are blessed by faith to hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness. If we are not being fed the pure Gospel proclamation we are not being satisfied spiritually, nor is anyone else who is listening to a Gospel-less sermon. While every pastor can have an off day in sermonizing, taking note of it and in private kindly asking the pastor about it, he will have the opportunity to correct you if you misheard, or he will humbly receive the critique and be more mindful in the future.

Glenn Obenberger

<sup>1</sup> *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart*, by Harold Senkbeil, Lexham Press, 2019, pp. 225-226. [Note: It is expected that God’s law is heard in every sermon as well.]

## 2024 Synod Convention

A crucifix was gifted and dedicated in memory of our late synod president, John A. Moldstad.



Rev. Craig Ferkenstad addressed the convention as he stepped down from 28 years of service as synod secretary (picture at right).



Pastor Kyle Madson became the newly elected synod secretary (pictured, left, with Vice President Michael Smith and President Glenn Obenberger)



Pastor James Braun (picture at right) gave the essay on "Walk Circumspectly in the World God So Loves." This timely presentation was well received and will make for an interesting study in our parishes. The electronic version will be made available soon.

Also of note: The convention passed a 2025 congregational giving budget of \$900,000 and voted to move to a July 1–June 30 fiscal year starting in 2026.

## Bethany's Education and Nursing Programs Receive Accreditation

Education is Bethany's second largest major, and the program was pleased to receive accreditation through June 30, 2030, from the State of Minnesota's accrediting board. The four-member accreditation team found all unit standards to be met and stated in their exit report, "The team wants to recognize the knowledge, commitment, and passion of the program leadership. Their collaboration within the unit, as well as across the college and community, is impressive." This accreditation reflects two years of work by the Education Department both in the writing of the accreditation report and in the coordination and participation in the site visit interviews. In addition to commending the knowledge and commitment of the department, the site visit team also acknowledged the impact the program is having on literacy education, both in the Bethany classrooms and in the community.

The Bethany Lutheran College Nursing Program prepares nurses to lead with compassion and competence while developing necessary clinical judgment skills. Bethany nursing graduates earn the bachelor of science in nursing degree. The program recently received continuing accreditation from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) at its meeting on April 16–18, 2024. The commission granted a ten-year accreditation status, extending to June 30, 2034. Ten years is the maximum accreditation period. Bethany's nursing program is focused on growing the next generation of nursing leaders. The curriculum features a hands-on approach to nursing education which prepares students to apply the nursing process with an interprofessional perspective in health care settings across the lifespan and continuum of care.

