

SPEAKING BOLD WORDS CAREFULLY TO A SOCIETY SENSITIVE TO WORDS

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ABSTRACT

Freedom of speech is the subject of intense discussion in our society and the world in general. There are many who may come to similar conclusions to where we will be led by Scripture, but we must recognize where they are coming from and how we maintain a special tension that holds up both freedom and restraint together at once. This thesis will demonstrate that while there is growing tension about the extent of freedom of speech in America, the Bible is clear that pastors must speak boldly and carefully as they do the work of the gospel.

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Introduction

Americans are members of a society that prides itself on freedom and enshrines freedom of speech and freedom of religion as its first and foremost freedoms. Americans hold our freedom dearly. This seems to lead Americans to not only put all of their writings and thoughts for all to see but to react quickly when they are attacked. However, in this age of division and bias Christians are also given opportunity to let their light shine as different from the world in not only what they say, but how they defend what they say. Lutheran pastors have the opportunity to think about their audience and its culture and mindset. They also have many opportunities to look over their words before they say them or they are recorded and discover how best to reach not only the people in front of them but the ones who will come across our words in the future. Therefore, the Lutheran pastor must not only know to whom he is speaking, but how to speak, what to speak and when to speak.

In order to build up the faith of others and to keep open the minds of unbelievers, Lutheran pastors will hold dear freedom of speech while limiting their own speech. To prove this statement I will be asking these three questions: Where is our culture when it comes to freedom of speech? What does Scripture say about speaking the gospel? What does this mean for Lutheran pastors?

I will accomplish this by looking at the current state of American culture, especially among the millennial generation; looking at what Scripture says about how we are to speak when we are spreading the gospel amongst those of the world; and finally why this is of special regard to Lutheran pastors in the ministry and the call of the pastor.

This paper will also demonstrate that this is a subject that needs to be understood and talked about in our circles. Freedom of speech is a subject of intense discussion in our society and the world in general. There are many who may come to similar conclusions as to where we will be led by Scripture, but we must recognize where they are coming from and how we maintain a special tension that holds up both freedom and restraint together at once.

Freedom of Speech in American Culture

You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others. There is a limit.¹

These were the words of Pope Francis in response to the attack on the office of Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015 in Paris. While they were not made by an American they capture an attitude that seems to be held by many Americans. If one replaced the word “faith” with others such as “security” or “safety” or whatever is held dear to the person who is saying the statement, this quote would be approved by many.

However, Americans also live in a society that values free speech and also ties it closely to our concept of freedom of religion. This can be shown by the first amendment:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.²

There are recently movements and changes in our society that weaken this point from a societal, if not governmental aspect. In a recent poll done by Pew Research Center, it was shown that while only 28% of Americans supported censoring offensive statements about minorities, 40% of people 18-34 agreed that this was alright.³

These numbers taken alongside some recent events on American college campuses suggest that there is a growing tension over free speech and a willingness to clamp down on speech that offends. The first of two events that show this is one that took place at the University of Missouri where a protest was started over some racist events such as racial slurs being thrown about and a swastika drawn with human feces.⁴ These events grew into a larger protest

¹ BBC Europe, “Paris attacks: Pope Francis says freedom of speech has limits,” BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30835625> (accessed on December 2, 2015).

² United States Government, “Bill of Rights,” http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html (accessed on December 2, 2015).

³ Jacob Poushter, “40% of Millennials OK with limiting speech offensive to minorities,” Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/20/40-of-millennials-ok-with-limiting-speech-offensive-to-minorities/> (accessed on December 2, 2015).

⁴For a full listing of events on the University of Missouri campus in the fall of 2015 go to <http://www.themaneater.com/special-sections/mu-fall-2015/>

movement with a list of demands that included the resignation of University of Missouri System President Tom Wolfe, increased awareness of minority issues, increased representation of blacks on the faculty, and increased funding for mental health services among other things.⁵ The events of the fall climaxed when the football team joined the protests and boycotted their next football game resulting in the resignation of the University of Missouri system president.⁶

The second event shows even more aggressively the willingness of younger people to clamp down on free speech that they find offensive. This event took place at Yale over an open letter sent by a faculty member addressing the restriction of offensive Halloween costumes.⁷ The text of the letter was not offensive in the most part and included statements like,

Even if we could agree on how to avoid offense – and I’ll note that no one around campus seems overly concerned about the offense taken by religiously conservative folks to skin-revealing costumes – I wonder, and I am not trying to be provocative: Is there no room anymore for a child or young person to be a little bit obnoxious... a little bit inappropriate or provocative or, yes, offensive? American universities were once a safe space not only for maturation but also for a certain regressive, or even transgressive, experience; increasingly, it seems, they have become places of censure and prohibition. And the censure and prohibition come from above, not from yourselves! Are we all okay with this transfer of power? Have we lost faith in young people’s capacity – in your capacity – to exercise self-censure, through social norming, and also in your capacity to ignore or reject things that trouble you? We tend to view this shift from individual to institutional agency as a tradeoff between libertarian vs. liberal values (“liberal” in the American, not European sense of the word).

⁵ “List of demands from Concerned Student 1950 group,” The Columbia Daily Tribune, http://www.columbiatribune.com/list-of-demands-from-concerned-student-group/pdf_345ad844-9f05-5479-9b64-e4b362b4e155.html (accessed on February 11, 2016).

⁶ Vanessa Rancano, “After the Mizzou Protests, Students Ask Themselves: Now What?” NPR: Code Switch, <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/11/23/457093441/after-the-mizzou-protests-students-ask-themselves-now-what> (accessed on December 2, 2015). This article by NPR gives a good recap of what happened and also expresses the questions that both white and black students have about bringing up sensitive, yet worthwhile, topics. For more information one can search University of Missouri protests.

⁷ Conor Friedersdorf, “The New Intolerance of Student Activism at Yale,” The Atlantic, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/the-new-intolerance-of-student-activism-at-yale/414810/> (accessed on December 2, 2015). This article gives a good rundown of what happened and some of the larger societal context, although from a conservative view. It also contains a video of the protests and confrontation between a professor and student.

Nicholas says, if you don't like a costume someone is wearing, look away, or tell them you are offended. Talk to each other. Free speech and the ability to tolerate offence are the hallmarks of a free and open society.⁸

Not exactly firebrand words. However, they led to an incident that will be discussed later and ultimately to the resignation of the writer of the letter from her position at Yale.

The first incident indicates how there can be conversation about hard topics and change, although there were missteps along the way such as restricting media from public protests.⁹ The second expresses the danger when society as a whole decides that it no longer wants to listen to opposing viewpoints but would rather feel safe in their own knowledge. This can be shown by the quote of one of the students from the video linked in the article above, "It is not about creating an intellectual space! It is not! Do you understand that? It's about creating a home here. You are not doing that!" This is a dangerous line of thought that is out there among a sizable minority of young Americans. In an article that came out in August of 2015 called "The Coddling of the American Mind" the authors come to this conclusion about other events that have been playing out on college campuses, "All of these actions teach a common lesson: smart people do, in fact, overreact to innocuous speech, make mountains out of molehills, and seek punishment for anyone whose words make anyone else feel uncomfortable."¹⁰

However, this confirmation bias (which feeling safe is really all about) is not only happening among our young people. It is common knowledge that so-called news channels such as Fox and MSNBC cater to either a conservative or liberal world view, but this divide goes even deeper than which news channels people decide to watch.

The year 2015 completed a change from old to new in the late night landscape of TV so *Entertainment Tonight* commissioned a poll to take a look at where each host was with their

⁸ Erika Christakis, "Email From Erika Christakis: "Dressing Yourself," email to Silliman College (Yale) Students on Halloween Costumes," Fire, <https://www.thefire.org/email-from-erika-christakis-dressing-yourself-email-to-silliman-college-yale-students-on-halloween-costumes/> (accessed January 2, 2016).

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRIRAyulN4o> If you wish to watch the event described you can go to this youtube link.

¹⁰ Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind," The Atlantic, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/> (accessed on January 3, 2016).

audiences. This poll shows that this divide in viewpoint even makes its presence felt in late night TV. One of the outcomes shows how important it is to reach a wider audience, if one is trying to reach the largest audience and doesn't have other goals in mind. Stephen Colbert, the newest of the three, debuted to strong audience numbers that put him firmly in second place. However, over the next few months he dropped viewership so that he was in a fight for second. A fight that he seems to be losing. One of the big reasons for this is that he does not have equal viewership but leans to one side. Jimmy Fallon, who is the number one host, has a viewership of 36% Democrat, 31% Republican, and 27% Independent. Jimmy Kimmel, who is fighting for the clear second place position with Colbert, has a viewership of 34% Democrat, 33% Republican, and 30% Independent. Colbert has a viewership of 47% Democrat, 17% Republican, and 31% Independent.¹¹ There could be various reasons in his comedy and other things involved but perusing his guest list as found on Wikipedia¹² the reader can see that his show has a seriously political bent, far more than is normal for current late night TV norms. This example shows how this confirmation bias has gone far past even politics in America but is now affecting even our entertainment choices.

Because of these events and attitudes flowing in America there have been several different responses. On the one hand, some colleges are limiting freedom of speech or setting up "safe speech zones" which limit where freedom of expression can be spoken. On the other hand, there are colleges like American University whose professors came out in favor of freedom of speech saying,

As limits, subtle or explicit, are increasingly placed on intellectual freedom in venues of public discourse, the academy is committed to the full expression of ideas. As laws and individual sensitivities may seek to restrict, label, warn, or exclude specific content, the academy must stand firm as a place that is open to diverse ideas and free expression. American University is committed to protecting and championing the right to freely communicate ideas—without censorship—and to study material as it is written, produced, or stated, even

¹¹ Matthew Belloni, "The Great Late-Night Poll: Where the Hosts Stand Now," The Hollywood Reporter, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/great-late-night-poll-hosts-840910?utm_source=twitter (accessed on December 2, 2015).

¹² Wikipedia. "List of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* episodes (2015)." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_The_Late_Show_with_Stephen_Colbert_episodes_%282015%29 (accessed on December 2, 2015).

material that some members of our community may find disturbing or that provokes uncomfortable feelings. This freedom is an integral part of learning... and an obligation from which we cannot shrink.¹³

There is no doubt a hot debate going on in our culture about the limits of freedom of speech on our college campuses but also throughout our political process. Scholars recognize that there is another way than just limiting expression through laws or allowing everything everywhere. In fact, Arizona State College of Law founded the National Institute for Civil Discourse. They state in a paper that was written at its founding that they “favor no new government-imposed regulations designed to enforce civility norms in any traditional or designated public forums.”¹⁴ Their goal however is that questions should be asked as our society has its political discourse where people disagree,

Liberalism-based objections to civility also beg an important, fundamentally empirical, although obviously also a normative question: When do the benefits of civility norms promote the liberal democratic goal of dismantling cruel practices, of disempowering cruel leaders, or other obstacles to an open society in which the dignity of all is maximized? When do verbal hand grenades that traffic in hyperbole, defamation, and ad hominem vitriol work more effectively in mobilizing political forces and crumbling obstacles to equality than do even-tempered, balanced, and fact-sensitive speeches? When do the uncivil means justify the liberal democratic ends? To what extent do our modern political-discourse mechanisms (e.g., political blogs, cable news, etc.) shift this balance in ways that may justify a collective response? How should we respond, if at all?

One thing is clear: Liberal democratic principles, like constitutional principles, are not inherently antithetical to a civil discourse ideal. They line up on both sides of this debate. Again, the difficult questions for the American people are how to balance the costs and benefits of political-discourse freedom within this political framework, and how to define what counts as a cost or a benefit.¹⁵

¹³Conor Friedersdorf, “A Faculty Unites to Champion Free Speech on Campus,” *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/a-faculty-unites-to-champion-free-speech-on-campus/406822/> (accessed on December 2, 2015).

¹⁴ Toni Massaro and Robin Stryker, “Freedom of Speech, Liberal Democracy, and Emerging Evidence on Civility and Effective Democratic Engagement,” April 2012, accessed at https://media.azpm.org/master/document/2012/7/27/pdf/az-legal-studies_civility-speech.pdf, 483.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 404.

This take on the tension between freedom of speech versus safety seems to be the most balanced. The questions need to be asked and the value of incivility for certain instances is admitted, but the general tone should be one that wants to drive the conversation forward at the expense of neither side.

In general, the United State is coming upon a time where the youngest generation of Americans is the most polarized of any alive when it comes to the right of society to regulate freedom of speech. However, Christians cannot let this drive the way we think, nor be too cautious in how we speak. A free society is good for everyone, especially Christians, as offensive speech can be redefined by each person or judge. Though it will be shown that a general conclusion based on Scripture can be reached, namely that one should speak so as to drive the conversation and opportunity for the gospel to be heard forward, Christians should not necessarily join society in any lessening of the freedom of speech. As citizens Christians should join in on the side of those who would protect the classical liberal ideal of free expression for all.

Speaking With Boldness

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Ro 1:16)¹⁶

This quote from Paul to the Romans illustrates the different view we have about the words that we speak than society and Pope Francis do. In the quote that this paper opens with Pope Francis was saying that we should limit what people can say about our faith, less they bring shame to it. Here Paul is makes the point that the gospel cannot be brought to shame. In fact, in Ephesians he says,

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (6:19,20)

Earlier in Ephesians, and as will be show later in this paper, Paul writes that we are God's people who have been brought from darkness to light. Therefore, even when we are in

¹⁶ All bible quotations are taken from NIV 1984, unless otherwise noted.

chains the bold light of the gospel cannot be dimmed, and we should not allow anything in this world to dim the message of the Gospel.

To that end one needs to know how and when they can speak boldly as they live in a world that seems to be sensitive to the words that are spoken and binds itself from freedom. It is only proper to go to the Scriptures for examples of when Jesus and others spoke boldly to others.

For the first example of Jesus showing boldness in how he speaks one can go John 6 and the bread of life discourse as a time when Jesus spoke “hard teachings” (Jn 6:60). He spoke boldly about who he was and what was going to come for him and those who believed and many left him and stopped being his disciples. What does this mean for the modern Lutheran pastor? Does it mean that he can just go into any setting and preach a hard teaching to the people? No, it doesn’t. Jesus knew his people and he knew what was in their hearts. In fact, John tells us that this is one of the times that Jesus used his divine power “for Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him” (Jn 6:64). This is one advantage that Jesus has over the Lutheran pastor. He knows the heart of his people in ways that a pastor can never know his flock.

Interestingly however, there are not many times that one reads bold words of Jesus speaking the gospel in public settings. Yes, there are his great sermons amongst the people that expound on the law and call for the repentance of the people but often times readers see Jesus one on one or at dinner settings where he is with a small group. These are the places where the boldness of Jesus for the salvation of sinners really comes out. If one were to turn two chapters back from the bread of life discourse they would find this conversation of Jesus and a woman:

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?”

¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

¹⁶ He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

¹⁷ “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (Jn 4:7-18)

This is an amazing conversation! The woman puts up a barrier and Jesus knocks it down. Jesus tells her about the living water and though she does not understand yet she asks for this living water. And Jesus points to her sin and hits her in the heart. The sin that was weighing down on her soul was brought to the light of day so that the woman may know that Jesus is a prophet. The preaching of the law at that moment is exactly what that woman needed. She needed to know her sins, that which the living water healed, and to know that Jesus was the Messiah who accomplished the healing. Jesus has the advantage because he knows the hearts of people.

This fact that Jesus knew his people can also be shown in Jesus’ encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman.

²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (Mt 15:22-28)

Here the woman did not need to be shown her sin. She knew her sin, but Jesus for the benefit of his disciples and the Church allowed this woman to show her faith. He was

bold in his preaching that his message was only for the Jews, going so far as to call her a dog. And what did she do? She accepted that label. The label of being a dog because she knew how important what Jesus had for her was. Jesus knew his people, the woman in front of him and his disciple then and now, so he boldly preached in a way that the woman could show her faith to all and demonstrate the power of the gospel.

These are not the only situations where we see boldness in the telling of the gospel. This similarity however is a boldness that starts with the law. The bible also gives examples where the boldness is in telling the truth of the gospel message in a time of crisis.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (Ac 16:25-34)

Paul and Silas were in prison after healing a slave girl and incurring the wrath of her masters who were making money off of her demon possession. But that did not stop them. They were in prison directly because of Jesus' name and they continued to sing praises to him. This opened the door to the hearing of the gospel in a time of crisis. The jailer was so afraid for his own life that he was willing to take his life and ease the burden on his family. He asked a question that may have had to do with physical salvation, or perhaps he remembered the joy that the disciples had even in their precarious position. Either way the disciples took the opportunity to preach a far greater salvation, the salvation of the soul. They were bold when the situation arose because they knew the thoughts of the man, understood the laws and customs of the time, and were there to preach the real ultimate solution.

Boldness and a telling of the law go hand in hand with the gospel. A bold question and statement even proceeds John 3:16 where Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus about having to be born again. The paragraph that contains John 3:16 starts with, “You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things?” (Jn 3:10). This same question can be said of the Lutheran pastor who does not keep with the instructions given to Timothy to,

Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim 4:12b,13, 15-16)

If one is diligent in his study he will be able to use God’s Word for teaching, correcting, rebuking and all other things which lead people from despair of their sins to a hearing of the gospel. If one is diligent in his study of the people to whom he is preaching, he will also be able to connect what he has to say to what his listeners know from their own natural knowledge of God. This is also what is demonstrated by the Scriptures when Paul addresses the people of Athens.

“Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.²⁸ “For in him we live and move and have our being.” As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.”

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill.³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with

justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” (Ac. 17:22-31)

This is a beautiful example of knowing a culture and boldly opening a door when an occasion is offered. Paul was able to speak like this because he knew the culture and beliefs of the men of Athens and because he knew the answer to the question that he saw them asking. He spoke in a careful way that was respectful of their beliefs before turning to the core of the gospel message, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the justice that is now ours before the judge of this world. Not all the Athenians accepted this argument, but some did. The door was open for Paul because of his bold use of the gospel and his sensitivity to the culture and people to whom he was preaching.

Boldness is living out what Christ tells us to do. Boldness is living in the world of sin and letting no man be lost on account of our words but to “warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” (1 Th 5:14) Boldness is having an answer prepared for everyone who asks of us. Boldness is knowing that we are to speak the gospel to the entire world, one person at a time. May the prayer of Paul at the end of Ephesians be our prayer as well: To be bold in proclaiming the law and gospel to all who need to hear it.

Speaking Carefully

The truth is that only in speaking boldly is one able to speak the bold message of the gospel in such a way that does not turn their audience away, but draws them closer to the Word of God. To speak carefully seems to be more difficult. The gospel is known. How to speak it to each person individually is the trick. To do that one must know not only themselves but the people to whom they are speaking. The evangelist also must be able to control themselves when they are confronted by people who will not hear them or are themselves not in control. This is seen clearly in two sections of Scripture that will now be looked at.

James 3:1-8

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and

are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. (Jas 3:1-12)

If pastors are going to understand why they need to limit their own speech looking at what James says is important. Here he even addresses teachers, or more specifically those who wish to be teachers, and says that teachers (including James) would be “judged more strictly” when it comes to their speech. Why is this? The teachers “constant use of the tongue means they can sin very easily, leading others astray at the same time.”¹⁷ Simply put, teachers have more opportunity to sin in this way. It is a fact that they communicate with people in almost everything that is done in ministry whether through the sermon, Bible class, counseling, etc. These words bring to mind these words of Jesus, “from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Lk 12:48). Pastors, especially those who have gone through the training that those of the WELS receive at the seminary, have been given much. They have been given responsibility of a flock of believers, they have been given responsibility over knowledge, and they have been given responsibility of speaking for the church. Much then is expected of Lutheran pastors and so these words of James and what follows should be at the forefront of the pastor's mind every day.

They must keep on guard because of what James says next, “we all stumble in many ways.” This is a truth that all know dearly. There is not a pastor, or really a Christian, alive who does not remember a time they wish they had said something differently to keep a person

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 150.

from losing their faith. Interestingly some people, going off of James addressing at least the first verse to teachers, want to say that the body kept in check here is the Church. The teacher or pastor who never errs because he is so thoughtful in his speech will have a church that never strays. That is a nice thought but Douglas Moo¹⁸ and Dan McCartney,¹⁹ authors of two leading commentaries on James, say that it is either improbable or not the case.

In the end all people, even the most watchful pastor, will stumble. Pastors have to accept and acknowledge this. James later goes on in his letter to talk about humility and how the church was beset by quarreling. Is this perhaps because the teachers were speaking improperly and not recognizing it? We must be on the guard for when do stumble because our small tongue, our small words, and even our small mistakes can have big effects.

The common rhyme “sticks and stones but words will never hurt you” is apt to be applied here. One knows instinctively that this statement is not true but that words have big effects and the words said matter. Mark Jeske, in the People’s Bible on James, says it this way, “Talk is not cheap. Words do wound. Words can build up or destroy a person’s self-confidence. Words can turn someone’s proud achievement into humiliation. Words can create or destroy relationships. Words can spread hate or love. Words can spread truth or plant lies. Words can cause suspicion or build trust.”²⁰ The words that pastors use can steer others either to misunderstanding, even hate of God, or to understand and love of God.

But there is another aspect to this. The words of one’s tongue doesn’t just steer the person we are talking to, the usage of the tongue also steers the speaker. The first two similes show us that the tongue steers our entire bodies, the course of our entire lives. “When the tongue is not restrained, small though it is, the rest of the body is likely to be uncontrolled and undisciplined also.”²¹ This is a compelling reason for pastors to limit their own ways of speaking. If they are uncontrolled and wild in their speech the way they interact with their own

¹⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹ Ibid., 182.

²⁰ Mark A. Jeske, *The People’s Bible: James Peter John Jude* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002), 33.

²¹ Moo, 153.

tongue will infect all that they do. Then in these examples for pastors the horse, the ship, and the forest that will be led astray or destroyed is the church that is shepherded.

The words that comes next then bring no comfort to the pastor, “No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas 3:8). The word translated restless here is the same as is translated unstable in James 1:8 to describe the double-minded man. James is also pointing back to Psalm 140:3, “They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips.” Here the reader is reminded that the evilness of the tongue is in being double-minded, which is expounded on, and in using it to foment hatred and war as the men in the Psalm are doing. It also brings to the mind of the hearer one who knows the Scriptures. The reference to the Psalm also brings to mind those very same enemies who will be the ones to tempt the pastor to sin in this way. It is one’s enemies against whom a person will most be tempted to throw curses at, along with admonishing them with the law. Richardson speaks wisely in his commentary when he says, “Even if they were under great stress, believers should resist the temptation to speak evil against fellows following the example of Job. Who said, “I have not allowed my mouth to sin by invoking a curse against [my enemy’s] life” (Job 31:30)”²²

The double speak that is brought up, and James saying that it is inconsistent with the Christian life of sanctification, combine to lead the pastor to see the wisdom in holding back his speech. Especially that of curses or crudeness when he is responding to others. One often hears today that authenticity is a key to millennials and many others in society. We have seen it in the presidential primary for 2016.²³ Trust is important and being authentic and consistent is what builds that trust. When pastors do not hold back their speech, when they do not carefully consider their words, then, as James said, “this should not be” (Jas 3:10). Christians, pastors are simply put, watchful. They are to watch and to consider. They are to speak truthfully and for the good of others. They are to offer the pure spring water of the law and the gospel that is not mixed with or made impure with one’s own sinful desires, desires of pride that says one never

²² Kurt A. Richardson, *The New American Commentary: James* (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 158.

²³ Chuck Todd, Mark Murray and Carrie Dann, “First Read: Nightmares come true for Clinton, GOP establishment,” MSNBC, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/first-read-nightmares-come-true-clinton-gop-establishment> (accessed on February 15, 2016).

misspeaks and desires of glory to beat and bring down the enemy by themselves. Pastors limit the way they speak because it is who God made them to be pastors.

This is the clear meaning of these words, and yet there were some commentators, who expounded on why Christians limit their speech. From a commentary which described one of its goals as addressing “theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to the contemporary Christian.”²⁴

The call to hold back speech has two sources. First, because speech has such power for good or evil, there is need for care to ensure that speech is faithful and true and not a misrepresentation to manipulate the hearer and that it is constructive and not destructive in its effect. Second, because of “desire” (*epithymia*), speech tends to be self-serving, and the tongue needs to be controlled/bridled (1:26)²⁵. Speech needs to arise from the reception of the implanted word (1:21)²⁶. Thus the call to be swift to hear turns the hearer from self-orientation to the other, to God and neighbor.²⁷

Here the first reason is not that it is who Christians are but that words are dangerous. The second reason puts too much focus on the law speaking strangely and in a way that could be misunderstood about a Christian’s new man and how proper speech flows from there.

The previous statement muddied more than clarified what James is saying, this quote helps bring one back to the truth. The truth that how a Christian, or pastor, speaks is about who they are as a Christian whose main goal is to speak the truth, the truth of the gospel, in love.

Words are also God’s means to rescue people from hell. A sermon, a Bible study, a catechism lesson, or an evangelism visit over coffee all look tame and ineffectual. But God’s power to save people, to create and sustain saving faith, rides with words. And so the believability of the church’s word—its people and teachers—will have an enormous impact on the believability of the church’s message.²⁸

²⁴ John Painter and David A. deSilva, *James and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), X.

²⁵ “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”

²⁶ “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

²⁷ Painter and deSilva, 126.

²⁸ Jeske, 34.

A pastor's reason for watching his words is because of his message. It is powerful and vital to save. The way one conducts himself can get in the way of the gospel when he speaks out of turn and with curses on his lips. People will see the duplicity, the rashness of thought and think that it has to do with the message conveyed and not with the imperfect teacher.

Ephesians 4:25-5:20

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them. ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 4:25-5:20)

One of the most well-known verses about how pastors are to speak is Ephesians 4:15.²⁹ The Wisconsin Synod has taken the phrase, speak the truth in love, and turned it into a series of books about reaching out to others. This section of Ephesians reaches back and takes it from the theoretical to the practical. Now Paul gives the consequences of being made into a new man and picks up on the theme of truth from the previous section.³⁰ Ephesians 4:25-32 spells out for us in detail why pastors speak in love and how to speak in love. This can be show by the following chart which shows how this section is set up in triads with a prohibition, encouragement, and reason for the action.

	Prohibition	Encouragement	Reason
4:25	Having put off falsehood	Speak truth with one another	For we are members of one another
4:26-27	If you are angry, do not sin	Do not let the sun go down on your anger	[or] you may give place to the devil
4:28	Let the thief no longer steal	Let him labor with his hands	So he might help anyone in need
4:29	Let no harmful word proceed from your mouths	But speak what is good for edification	To give grace to those who hear
4:30	And do not grieve the Holy Spirit	_____	In whom you were sealed
4:31-32	Let all bitterness, rage, etc., be taken away	And be good to one another, forgiving one another	God in Christ has forgiven you ³¹

One of the major themes of the Ephesians is the unity of all believers and here one can see how the way he speaks impacts that relationship. If the pastor lies, if he sins in anger, if he steals, if he speaks harmful words, if he grieves the Holy Spirit, if he is bitter, he will affect the unity of the Church as a whole and his own church in the process.

²⁹ “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

³⁰ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 336.

³¹ Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 540.

Unity and community are only parts of why the pastor speaks that way. If the reader were to leave it at that, where it is only about being part of a community and the unity of the church then the point is missed. Armin Panning says,

His [the Holy Spirit's] goal is to keep them safely in the Christian fold "for the day of redemption," that is, until judgment day. Christians who engage in unwholesome talk jeopardize not only their own faith; they also put the faith of others at risk. Rather than harm others by unwholesome talk, Christians are to speak "only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs."³²

And the pastor's needs are not community's, though he needs the community, as it is to be built up with faith in Jesus.

All those things which cause one to not care about one another are to be thrown out: "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (Eph 4:31). Look at these, are they not expressed with a man's mouth and tongue and body? A person cannot feel any of these emotions without expressing them in some way and they get in the way of what he is to do. The pastor is to love; "God does not want us to be callous or indifferent."³³ He wants pastors to be able to put off all of the old hatred and express with their words and body all the love which he has shown and binds all together with himself.

In the next verses notice how closely how one speaks is connected with the sins that are in his heart. All of the words for speech here are closely related to sexuality.

Each of the words use for sinful speech, *obscenity*, *foolish talk*, and *coarse joking*, appears on here in the New Testament. The first is best understood concretely in the present context as signifying disgraceful speech, and in the light of the preceding sexual sins is rendered *obscenity*. The second term means "foolish or silly talk". The third word in the triad was used in classical Greek in the good sense of "wittiness" or that sense of wit which was regarded as essential to good social converse. Even in early time, however, the term could have negative connotations, perhaps "buffoonery or some kind of inhumane or degrading jesting". P. W. van der Horst thinks that the context of Ephesians 5:4 suggests the meaning of *coarse joking* that has suggestive overtones and double entendres. All three terms refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in vulgar

³² Armin J. Panning, *The People's Bible: Galatians Ephesians* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 193.

³³ Irwin J. Habeck, *Ephesians: Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2012), 96.

conversation. This kind of language must be avoided as utterly inappropriate among those whom God has set apart as holy.³⁴

It is not just in sexual matters that a man needs to control the tongue, rather the “tongue is not to be used for spoiling God’s gifts but to thank and praise him for his goodness.”³⁵ Though the focus here is on stilling the tongue when it comes to the sixth commandment these words can apply to any way the tongue does not build up. When one takes away someone’s good name, or is greedy after material goods, or brings hate and bitterness and malice to his relationships, he is doing what should not be done because of who he is. Christians, pastors, are the bought and redeemed of God, those who are now in his light and no others. It is thanksgiving that comes out of their mouths. They are to look towards God and strive to imitate him in all aspects of their life, especially that of the tongue. Not just so that they do not harm the unity of believers, but also so that they are not led astray by the lies of their, or others, tongues.

Rather, living in the light of Christ and keeping one’s tongue and speech pure not only among other Christians but among all people is wise for the pastor. Then he will be able to take hold of every opportunity, not only to call to repentance and lift up one another but to let his light shine into the world and draw those in the darkness to the light of Christ. The pastor’s words fellow pastor’s, Christians, and to the world should be as if they are full of hymns and spiritual songs. His words emanate from that which fills him. If he is filled with the Spirit, he will speak as if he is filled with the Spirit. He will speak with thanksgiving and joy in Jesus and lift the world with the words that come out of his mouth.

Further Thoughts for Lutheran Pastors

American society is one that seems to be trending in a direction of not respecting freedom of speech when it causes discomfort for people. The Bible tells Lutheran pastors that they are to speak boldly and sensitively to their flock. What does that mean for the Lutheran pastor who has a message that when preached often causes much discomfort to the hearer? It means that the Lutheran pastor has to understand those to whom he is writing. The importance of speaking clearly and with authority is becoming greater for the work of preaching the gospel

³⁴ O’Brien, 360.

³⁵ Panning, 195.

in our society. As more and more people have no understanding of even the most common and basic biblical stories the pastor must work all the more to relate the Word of God to the listener who is hearing it for the first time. To do that the pastor must be a student of the culture and life of those he is teaching, comforting, and evangelizing. He must be able to know and understand the heart of his listener so that he can ask the penetrating questions, know how to speak for the benefit of those around him, and be able to address the true worry in the time of crisis.

The pastor who is working today does so in a time when there are great tools at his hand. Tools that can let the gospel reach the eyes and ears of people not just down the street or in his town or state but the eyes and ears of people half way around the world. How then do they know which culture to study and which people to understand the problems of? How do they know who to speak boldly to with sensitively chosen words? As Lutheran pastors we have the call. Our Lutheran confessions in the *Tractate* state,

Wherever the church exists, there also is the right to administer the gospel. Therefore, it is necessary for the church to retain the right to call, choose, and ordain ministers.

Where the true church is, there must also be the right of choosing and ordaining ministers, just as in an emergency even a layperson grants absolution and becomes the minister or pastor of another. So Augustine tells the story of two Christians in a boat, one of whom baptized the other (a catechumen) and then the latter, having been baptized, absolved the former. Pertinent here are the words of Christ that assert that the keys were given to the church, not just to particular persons: “For where two or three are gathered in my name...” [Matt. 18:20].³⁶

Our call tells the pastor who he is to serve: the church that has called him to serve them. This is shown by the information that is given by the cover letter received with the call, as follows:

1. The primary areas we are asking our new pastor to fill are. . .
2. The primary needs of our congregation are . . .
3. Provide information about your team ministry (multi-pastor or pastor/faculty), if applicable.
4. Provide information about your worship schedule.
5. Provide information about your membership demographics.
6. Provide information about your community.
7. Provide information about your worship.

³⁶ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000), 341.

8. Provide information about your school, if applicable.
9. Provide information about your enrollment and tuition policy for called workers, if applicable.
10. Provide information about any capital projects.
11. Provide information about your area Lutheran High School, if applicable.
12. Provide information about your area.
13. Information about additional salary and benefits, including parsonage provision, housing allowances, and insurance coverage.³⁷

The focus of most of this information is the church and the community that it lives in. These statements do not cover the entirety of any ministry but it comes to mind that they are there because they are a priority to the congregation. John Brug says,

The most important distinction is comprehensive oversight. There is to be a ministry of oversight in every congregation whether it is by one pastor or by a pastoral team. Because of the training and qualification necessary to carry out this responsibility of oversight, Thomas Nass suggests four areas of work that under normal circumstances should be carried out by pastors. These are the four functions: (1) formal preaching in public worship services, (2) general doctrinal and spiritual oversight of congregations, (3) administration of the sacraments, and (4) leading worship.³⁸

At the same time the *Tractate* states,

In 1 Corinthians 3[:4-8,21-22] Paul regards all ministers as equals and teaches that the church is superior to its ministers...which is to say, neither Peter nor the other ministers may assume lordship or preeminence over the church or burden the church with traditions or allow the authority of any person to count for more than the word.³⁹

The pastor has a position of leadership to lead a congregation according to its need and situation. He does not just come in and make changes without good reason, nor does he pursue new projects without council from his church.

One of the reasons the pastor does not start new projects without the counsel of his church is that they take up time. The four duties that were mentioned above take up much time

³⁷ See Appendix

³⁸John Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee, WI, Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 116.

³⁹ Kolb and Wengert, 331.

already and any new venture should be evaluated as to whether it is worth it. Irwin Habeck in an essay given on the divine call said this,

“But then there is the matter of priorities. Functions that have been specifically assigned will receive priority over matters which may be desirable, but which would undercut the time needed for full and adequate performance of assigned duties. A classic example is furnished by the attitude of the apostles in the mother church at Jerusalem. At first they could attend to welfare work among the widows of the congregation without cutting short the time needed to their prime work. But as the congregation grew and the number of widows increased, they called a halt and advised the church to elect people to take care of this charity, saying: “It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. ... We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Ac 6:2,4). Among brethren the cogency of such argumentation is recognized, and other solutions to the problem of supplying additional needs will be sought and found.”⁴⁰

This is where the call connects to how pastors speak to their community on the internet, especially when it comes to blogs or posting sermons online. The pastor must ask if this is one of the duties assigned to him by the congregation. If it is he must choose whether it is a wise use of his time. Is the using the internet by means of a blog or posting online a good way to create meaningful relationships with people so that they hear the bold message of the gospel applied to their lives? This is an area of further study, but a question that must also be answered by each individual. The time necessary for this task would be great however. The man who does this must be willing to study many different cultures so that his message applies not only to the people in the place where he serves, but also so that it is not misunderstood by those who are from a different place.

The oversight of the ministry of his own community is the place for the pastor. It is not his duty nor responsibility to understand the intricacies of communities outside those he is called to serve. If then he does write something that will be seen by others, he should run it by other called workers who are serving in communities and cultures different to him so that what he has written does not offend unknowingly and needlessly. This runs again into the time and priority issue. Is it right to take time away from that one person’s ministry for the sake of the other pastor’s own? This once again is a question that needs to be answered by the individual.

⁴⁰ Irwin Habeck, “The Divine Call” (essay delivered at St. John’s, Newburg, WI, January 21, 1974), accessed at <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/2063/HabeckDivine.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

There is also the question of what is being done on the Synodical level. The pastor would be wise to find out if what he has in mind is already being done by someone whose has been called by the Synod or their own church to do a ministry that is similar to the one being planned.

Writing a sermon and recording it is different from writing a blog post and putting it online. However, the pastor who does this still needs to ask questions. Sermons are written in a certain time and for a specific group of people. Yes, there is always the gospel and evangelism purpose in the sermon. No, the sermon and its specific applications aren't always appropriate for those outside the church to hear and be able to understand. The pastor who does this must know his purpose and purposely spend extra time on crafting the words of his sermon so that they cannot be misunderstood. The weakness of someone watching a sermon online is that they have no recourse to question the pastor and the pastor has no way to clarify misunderstandings.

Posting sermons online is a powerful tool for those who cannot make it to church. But we must ask if there are ways that we can keep it to that purpose. It is not there as a substitute for driving to church when one doesn't feel like getting out of bed, or a justification of not coming to church at all. An interesting project to look into is a study of the ways that individual churches and perhaps the WELS could provide this service in the best way possible and enumerate the different purposes and uses of posting sermons online.

In the end one of the most important thoughts of the pastor will be, "How am I best able to reach my community with my bold message applied sensitively to their lives?" This question will drive our study of our local community and cultures, will drive us to understand the language we use, and will drive us to build relationships that give us the opportunity to use it. How this goes about is a question for the pastor and the church that he is serving.

Conclusion

Freedom of speech is a hot button topic in America today. With the confluence of a more sensitive society and increasing divisiveness amongst people added to the terror attacks that have become the norm there is much discussion to be had. There seem to be many people in society, though still a minority, who would have us give up protection of free speech. We cannot help but cringe away from that as the first amendment is important to maintaining our

freedom of religion. At the same time there are clear passages in the Bible which discuss how we are to control our tongue and not let our speech be free.

That must always be the basis for when we speak amongst ourselves as pastors. It is easy to get caught up in a society which has shows such as *Family Guy* or *The Bachelor* or even *Dancing With the Stars* where sexuality is always just around the corner or in your face. It is easy to get caught up in a society where the politicians and actors and business people are speaking in crude and uncivilized manner to all people. It is easy to get caught up in our own importance and so react against freedom of speech for our own pride and reputation as Christians. However, we must stick only to what the bible says. Our main goal is preaching the gospel boldly to all men. The only way that we can be all things to all men is if we are patient with all men. We must speak the truth boldly, firmly, and with love for souls that have been bought with Christ's blood.

To do that we have to speak face to face. We have to know the people we are talking to and we have to keep in mind that Christ is the one who gives us the power to control our tongue. Winning souls is the game that we are playing and to do that we have to be able to speak eloquently and patiently with the Spirit filling our hearts and leading our speech to be God pleasing at all times.

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Appendix
Sample Call Cover Letter

Candidate Hans Schmidt
123 Luther Lane
Mequon, Wisconsin 53094

January 1, 2001

Dear Candidate Schmidt:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth!

On *date of voters' meeting*, the voters of *Name of Church* Lutheran Church of *city and state of church*, having invoked the Holy Spirit, extended to you a divine call in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to serve us as *[associate]* pastor.

The position we are calling you to fill is the position being vacated by our Pastor Wilhelm Schulz, who recently accepted a call to serve the saints in Anytown, State.

The primary areas we are asking our new pastor to fill are. . .

The primary needs of our congregation are . . .

Provide information about your team ministry (multi-pastor or pastor/faculty), if applicable.

One of the important qualities of those in a team ministry is the ability to respect and cherish the other members of the team. Our pastoral team represents a variety of talents and gifts in particular areas, and we are able to complement one another's abilities in a way that serves the whole. All of our pastors share a love for the people we serve. All are passionate in the desire to encourage a deeper walk with the Lord Jesus and a deeper understanding of his grace.

Provide information about your worship schedule. Name of congregation serves about *number* souls and *number* communicants. Our weekly worship services see about *number* in attendance on an average Sunday. We have two Sunday worship services, at 8:00 and 10:30 a.m., and one Monday evening worship service at 6:30 p.m. Family Bible hour at 9:15 on Sunday mornings includes two Bible studies for adults, a youth Bible study group, and Sunday school.

Provide information about your membership demographics. Our congregation serves all ages. We serve families, couples and singles. We minister to a significant number of retirees and several winter visitors. A cross-section of the congregation reveals some ethnic diversity, including Hispanics, African-Americans, and Native Americans, but the majority of the congregation is Caucasian. Our congregation is only 2-1/2 miles from *State University*, and our location affords a tremendous opportunity for a dynamic campus ministry.

Provide information about your community.

Provide information about your worship. Our worship services might be characterized as offering “liturgical variety.” We strive to use the best of the old and the new within a solidly liturgical context that offers both variety and stability from week to week. We are blessed to have a strong complement of musicians, including organists, other instrumentalists, and vocalists. Worship service themes, preaching schedules, special music and other special elements are scheduled several months in advance, so that ample time is available for planning and preparation.

Provide information about your school, if applicable. *Name of congregation* is blessed with a healthy elementary school. *Principal's name* is our [full-time] principal. He shares the vision of excellence in the Christian education we offer to our youth. Our present enrollment, including preschool, is in the high 160s. About 50% of the enrollment is member children (about 80% of our children attend the elementary school). The other 50% are from other area congregations – mostly sister WELS congregations. Where student families are either mission prospects or members of a church not of our fellowship, we expect that they will participate in an eight-week Bible Basics course to familiarize them with core issues of doctrine. (We encourage mission prospects to continue with a follow-on, seven-week course to prepare for communicant membership.)

Provide information about your enrollment and tuition policy for called workers, if applicable. Children of called workers to *Name of congregation* pay the registration fee to enroll their children in the elementary school, but it is the practice of the congregation to exempt them from paying tuition.

Provide information about any capital projects. The congregation is in the process of developing plans to construct a six-classroom addition, at a projected cost of \$1.3 million. We recently completed a preliminary site plan review with the city, and we are at the opening stages of developing a complete building and capital fund-raising proposal.

Provide information about your area Lutheran High School, if applicable. *Name of congregation* supports our Lutheran high school just 11 miles down the road. A majority of our elementary school graduates continue at the school. Several of the high school faculty members are also members of our congregation.

Provide information about your area. Our metropolitan area offers a high quality of life. All of the basic necessities are readily available here, but the area offers so much more. *Our state* is a beautiful state, with abundant opportunities for recreation, especially if you enjoy hiking, cycling, camping, or just year-round outdoor living. Blue, sunny daytime skies and clear nights are a reality most of the year. In the winter we regularly enjoy daytime highs in the 70s, and it infrequently drops just below freezing at night. When the summertime temperatures occasionally touch 118°F, we say, “But it’s a dry heat – and that’s why we have air conditioning, anyway!”

Information about additional salary and benefits, including parsonage provision, housing

allowances, and insurance coverage. *Name of congregation* will provide you with a housing allowance derived from the HUD fair market rental value for a three-bedroom home in this area (this amount is included in the salary figure on the call document). The housing market in the area presently favors buyers, so purchasing a nice home at a very reasonable price should not be a problem. The congregation provides major medical benefits with a \$1,000 family deductible plan.

There are many other aspects to this call that we can't cover here, so I invite you to contact any of us for answers to your questions – or just for conversation. We'll enjoy getting to know you as you deliberate this call from the Lord, and whether you accept or decline this call, we'll enjoy the opportunity to strengthen the bond of faith and fellowship that exists between us as Christians and between our congregations.

Wishing you blessings in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Congregation president or associate pastor signing the document
Phone number of signatory

Contact information:

Provide names and phone numbers of congregation leaders

Pastor Lead Pastor, 123-555-1212

Pastor Associate Pastor, 123-555-1234

Mr. School Principal, Principal, 123-555-5678

Mr. Congregation President, Congregation president, 123-555-2345

Mr. Elders Chairman, Board of Elders chairman, 123-555-9876