

2017 Best Practices Workshops

Topics and Topic Descriptions

Session 1

A. Liturgy Is Not Dead

Don't buy the hype that we need to toss out the Liturgy or strip our churches bare of liturgical accouterments because "modern" people want something different. The Liturgy is not dead, though our celebration of it may be. Liturgical worship is rich, passionate and truly transcendent; however the ways in which we celebrate the liturgy may seem otherwise. Instead of throwing away something beautiful, let's embrace the rich themes, symbols, and images of the liturgy as it provides an experiential framework and for an entire year of events, activities, and joy-filled worship.

Join Rev. Justin Vetrano for a discussion on ways in which the Liturgy continues to be celebrated with great joy amongst the people of this "modern" age. Discuss practical ways in which our passion for celebrating can point people to receive the means of God's grace through Word and Sacrament, with reverence and joy.

Rev. Justin Vetrano, Founding Pastor, The Life Lutheran Church, Old Westbury, NY

B. Personal Relational Evangelism: THE WHY AND A HOW.

How often do you find yourself engaging non-Christians with your faith? More and more this is becoming a struggle for churches. What if instead of just asking non-Christians to come to us, we had our members purposefully going out to them? If you find yourself saying, "Sounds great, but my people won't do that," then you should come hear how this is really a lot simpler and more attainable than you thought. Come hear our story of simple steps that have led to impactful conversations and more people having those conversations.

Rev. Joshua Krepel, Associate Pastor, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Delmar, NY.

C. Organizing A Prayer Ministry

It is a wonderful asset to your ministry to have a group of people that gather for the sole purpose of prayer. It is also very helpful to have trained people available to pray for individuals after your worship services. This workshop will look at how one congregation helped its members become more involved in prayer. You will learn some practical applications and guidelines that will help you organize an effective Prayer Ministry. There will also be an opportunity to hear how God has developed the prayer life of your own congregations.

Rev. Steve Roth, Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Laurelton, NY

D. Congregational Mission of Sharing the love of Christ in a Parish School and Preschool

Having worked with Christian Schools for almost 25 years, Pastor Hartwell will explore his observations and insights into the challenges and successes in helping congregations and schools to partner in their common mission of sharing Christ. A special look at the 10 best practices and 10 mission killers will be reviewed and explored.

Rev. Dr. Robert Hartwell, Village Lutheran Church, Bronxville, NY

Session 2

E. "Engaging the World One Neighborhood at a Time"

St. Peter's Lutheran activates in its neighborhood as leaders are trained to participate in community service and on various community boards. Additionally, leaders are trained to provide community outreach service in the areas of immigration, homework assistance, music lessons, food stamps, job opportunities and counseling. The church hosts civic leaders and community groups in its parish hall at every opportunity, witnessing to Christ in prayer and in concrete activities to better the neighborhood. In this way St. Peter's has found many ways to be the arms and legs and hands and feet of Christ, always while bringing the Good News.

Rev. Dr. David H. Benke, Pastor, St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, NY

F. Spiritual Disciplines in the Life of a Pastor

In that portion of the Sermon on the Mount which served as the Gospel for Ash Wednesday, Jesus talked about three "spiritual disciplines:" prayer, fasting, and alms-giving (works of mercy). There are many others, of course. While these tools are used by all of God's people, they take on an especially important role in the life of those who are called and ordained servants of the Word. In this session we will consider a wide range of spiritual practices, from asceticism to worship. We will explore how they provide purpose, passion, and power for the challenging task of ministry.

Rev. Robert A. Boehler, Pastor, St. Mark's Lutheran Church & School, Yonkers, NY

G. "Cooperative Catechesis: Parents and Pastors Working Together to Teach Children the Faith"

You might be surprised to learn that the way we do catechesis today is not "the way we've always done it." Through biblical and historical review, participants will explore the changes that have taken place in how the church has passed down the tenants of the faith to new generations. In this breakout, participants will be given a model by which pastors and parents work cooperatively to teach the faith to children that focuses on life-long learning.

Rev. Dr. Phil Booe, Christ Lutheran Church, Hebron, CT

H. Seasons of Discovery

Seasons of Discovery is a two year process of strengthening and/or revitalizing congregations. It is an all-encompassing process which includes coaching for the pastor, training for the lay leaders, inspiration and activation for the congregation. By the end of the first year, an outward looking vision is established. By the end of the second year, the vision is fully activated with directed outreach to the surrounding community. Atlantic District Pastors who are in the process of Seasons will assist in the presentation.

Rev. Dr. Terry Tieman, Executive Director of Transforming Churches Network

Session 3

I. VBS: Creating for Success!

Do you struggle to figure out which "prepackaged" VBS to use each year? Do you find yourself overwhelmed with costs & materials? Whatever the case, the church always desires to share God's gifts through our Vacation Bible School programs, yet sometimes struggles to find the right fit. Perhaps, it is time to consider writing your own VBS. Come & learn about the process, which does not need to be as "laborious" as one might assume... and can actually be lots of fun!

Pastor Matthew Ryan Gonzalez, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church - The Bronx, NY

J. Sabbaticals: A Blessing for Parish and Pastor

Every time Jesus went off to be by Himself, he was gently teaching the Disciples how to cope and flourish without Him. Ultimately a pastoral sabbatical serves the same purpose while, at the same time, making the pastor a better Under-Shepherd of Christ. Let's explore these mutual benefits together while paying attention to the step-by-step process of getting from the concept to the implementation.

The sabbatical changed my parish and me for the better: I don't see a downside, why should you!?

Rev. Ingo Dutzmann, First Lutheran Church of Boston

K. "Caring Shepherds: Taking the Love of Christ to the Streets"

Join the founders of Hands of Grace: Caring Shepherds, a new outreach ministry in Willimantic, CT, as they discuss their mission to bring both the needs of body and soul to those less fortunate. The Caring Shepherds work with other ministries to take hygiene kits, food, clothing, and the Gospel of Jesus into places where others can't go. They walk the streets where others avoid and share God's love. Topics discussed include reaching out to Hispanic populations, interacting with the homeless and substance-addicted, and how Christians must sometimes leave their comfort zones to reach others for Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Phil Booe, Vicar Angel Rodriguez, Christ Lutheran Church, Hebron, CT

L. Live-Streaming Your Worship Services: Why You Should / You Can

Live streaming your weekly worship services is not only easier than ever, but it is a surprisingly effective way to engage your unreached neighbors, expand your ministry's impact, and to enhance your pastoral care. Join us as we discuss, in very practical ways, the "how" and the "why" of live streaming your Sunday services. Each week, Our Saviour live streams their worship services from Queens to viewers around the world.

Rev. Matt Popovits, Our Saviour, New York.

Session 4

M. Lead Out of the WHY Instead of the WHAT

Why are people so attached to worship styles, music choices, and outdated programs? Why do we have such a hard time letting go of things that no longer help us reach our rapidly changing communities? So often we lead out of **what** we have always done and it leaves us feeling stuck. In this session we will talk about how you can help your people look past the **what** and help them see the **why** that can lead to new effective ministry opportunities, to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing culture.

The Rev. Matt Peeples, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Ridgewood, NJ

N. Making Better Use of Visual Media in Worship

Screens have become a way of life. Many churches use projections screens as part of Sunday worship. How do we most effectively use these tools of technology to effectively communicate with those in attendance at worship? We will look at best practices for preparing screens and share some tools and resources to help make the task easier.

Rev. Phil Ressler, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Old Bridge, NJ

O. Leading Financial Stewardship

How does the pastor lead his congregation in the stewardship of finances? How does the pastor lead stewardship in the midst of financial hard times? How does the pastor lead in raising funds for a special project? Victor Nelson has had a special interest in stewardship for his 33 years of ministry. He has lead his congregations (two over the years) in three building programs, three special projects, three financial crises, and has lived to tell about it.

Victor Nelson, Pastor,
Resurrection Lutheran Church, Cairo, NY

S. The Language of Leadership

The distrust of words—whether in politics, business, advertising or even church—signals a public crisis. This widespread cynicism, moreover, represents an opportunity to examine strategies for communication that are both trustworthy and motivational. What does this mean for clergy—beyond their preaching—but their place in parish leadership as the primary narrators of the church's mission and vision?

The Rev. John Arthur Nunes, Ph.D.
President, Concordia College New York

Session 5

P. Doing up the Holy-days

Holidays—or "holy days"—are tremendous opportunities to reach out to the unchurched and to engage the saints in piety and worship. Visual arts, musical arts, culinary arts, drama, and the like offer catechetical ways to highlight the importance of these days. Gain some perspectives on some things that one parish in The Bronx does while "doing up the Holy-days."

The Rev. Dien Ashley Taylor, Ph.D., Pastor, Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Bronx, New York

Q. Mission to the Young Families of (Papua) Long Island, NY

How making some big changes in order to minister to our young families as a mission field rather than as congregational members has led to encouraging success. (There isn't actually any place on Long Island called 'Papua', but we call it that to remind ourselves we're on a mission field.)

Rev. Neil Mittelstaedt, Pastor, St. James Lutheran Church, St. James, NY

R. Leading a Mosaic Parish

Mosaic movement is everywhere. Every parish is mosaic parish. Whether your congregation is expressively mosaic or unintentionally mosaic or interested in becoming a mosaic parish some take home lessons to learn and unlearn about mosaic parish culture and life.

Rev. Dr. Johnson Rethinasamy, Lead Pastor,
Immanuel Lutheran Church Whitestone, NY & Atlantic District Mission Executive

T. It was a Good Funeral

This workshop explores the practices of the modern funeral and the influence of post-modern thought. This workshop is led by a pastor who has been on both sides of the casket, as in his former career, he was a funeral director.

Rev. Jonathan Hodges, Pastor, St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Hudson, NY

Bonus Stewardship Session, 3:30-5:30 pm

Necessary Elements for Strengthening and Revitalizing Congregations

What are the necessary elements in strengthening a healthy congregation? What are the vital components in revitalizing a weakening congregation? The necessary factors are the same for both. Pastor Terry Tieman will present detailed components necessary to strengthen and revitalize congregations. (During the presentation, pizza and drinks will be available so you are revitalized for your trip home!)

Rev. Dr. Terry Tieman, Executive Director of Transforming Churches Network