

PROPOSAL FOR DISCIPLESHIP NETWORKING

(August, 2010)

The Foundations

Discipleship includes both a passionate, intimate, and growing relationship with our LORD, the Creator of the universe, and Christian classical spiritual practices which encourage this relationship. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the classical summation of Christian discipleship in Acts 2:41-47 succinctly summarize both this relationship and the spiritual practices (of prayer, worship, the Word, servanthood, evangelization/mission, Christian community, and giving generously). One without the other --- relationship and spiritual practices --- is naïve, unrealistic, and empty. Together both are powerful and life transforming. This discipleship is not a program or check list. It is an invitational way of all of life, personally and congregationally. Our greatest recent Lutheran hero of discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, has invited the Church and the world to both a passionate relationship with Jesus and a joyful obedience through Christian spiritual practices. This is the core of both of his books, *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life together*.

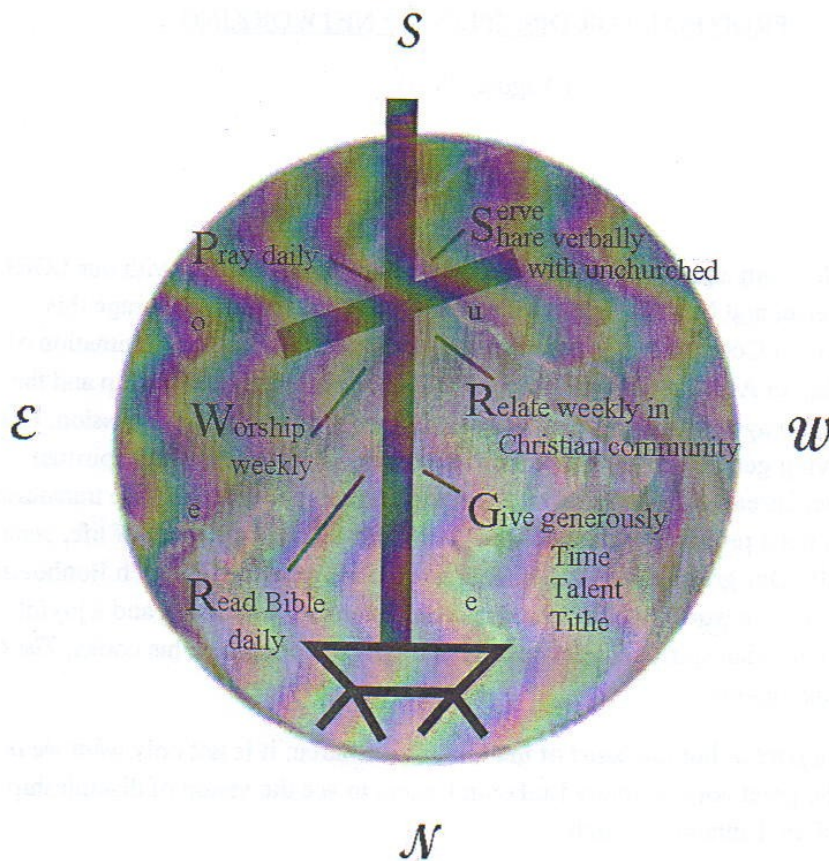
Discipleship is not a *part* of but the *heart* of the Christian Church; it is not only *what we do* but *who we are*. It is the great hope of many Lutheran leaders to see the vision of discipleship become the DNA of the Lutheran Church.

It is important that such a powerful vision and plan not simply remain on paper but that this discipleship DNA of the Church actually becomes reality. This proposal is radical because it is rooted in the proclamation and practice of the Early New Testament Church. It is confessional because it is anchored within one of the most balanced, holistic, and powerful theologies --- the Lutheran Confessions. It is Traditionally-grounded because it lifts up the best of the Church Catholic throughout 2,000 years of Christian history.

The Discipleship Picture

As mentioned above, Matthew 28 and Acts 2 clarify Christian discipleship. One helpful communication tool is the “PoWeR SuRGe” acrostic/image seen on the following page #2. (Note, as we further describe this discipleship, the references to the picture are in *italic letters*.)

PoWeR SuRGe acrostic/image



We invite pastors, leaders, and laity to become passionate disciples of Jesus Christ (*the bold and red colored cross*). This focus is Christ-Centered. We are invited to continue to grow in this relationship and intimacy with Jesus, such that we become more and more like the incarnate, crucified, resurrected Christ (*the manger, and the empty cross which extends from beyond the globe into planet earth*). By the power of the Holy Spirit, such discipleship will transform not only the Church but also the entire planet earth (*the emanating lines away from the cross into the world*). Discipleship has been and always will be a radical (“to the roots”) and revolutionary movement. Notice the image of an “*upside down globe*,” referring to the commentary about the early Christians --- these Christians “have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). This “*upside down globe*” keeps before us the ultimate purpose of discipleship --- to disciple all nations. This emphasis is indeed mission focused.

We are also invited to grow in relationship with Jesus through holistic spiritual practices. The words “PoWeR SuRGe” come from Acts 2 --- describing the continuing and ongoing powerful surge and continuing filling of the Holy Spirit within the Church and culture. One definition of “surge” from Webster’s dictionary uses the words “continuous and ongoing surging.” Notice that these seven practices are worded for beginning disciples, which we believe describe most Lutherans. Those practices are described as: Pray daily, Worship weekly, Read the Bible daily, Serve and verbally Share with others (especially the unchurched), Relate weekly in Christian community, and Give generously of one’s time, talent, and tithe. These seven practices summarize the practices taught by Jesus to the disciples during His three years of ministry. These seven are holistic, including a focus upon the personal (“PoWeR”) and the social (“SuRGe”) dimensions. As mentioned earlier, this acrostic succinctly captures one of the central and marvelous passages in all of The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:41-47). Those verses summarize the life of the early disciples and the first century Christian Church. Those verses also summarize today’s Christians’ answer for the question, “What is discipleship/spiritual formation?”

The Discipleship Network of Pastors, Leaders, and Congregations.

We are proposing the development of a discipleship network of pastors and leaders. Such a network would include several components:

Part 1 --- Regional two-three day “Call to Discipleship” Conferences would invite pastors and leaders to consider becoming 1st century disciples in the 21st century. Such conferences would cast the vision, clarify the Biblical understanding of discipleship, and explicate the depth of discipleship through the Great Commission and through the classical spiritual practices of the Church catholic (Matthew 28 and Acts 2). In these conferences, the “PoWeR SuRGe” image and acrostic would be shared and explained. The radical and exciting implications of discipleship DNA (for oneself personally and for the Church) would be shared. And the realism of a needed congregational paradigm shift would be unfolded.

Part 2 --- Regional/geographic clusters would be established. One important purpose (maybe the most important purpose) of the two-three day Call to Discipleship Conferences, described in Part 1 above, would be to invite pastors, leaders, and congregations to a three year commitment to each other. Monthly gatherings would provide further education, encouragement, equipping, community, and accountability. Large, medium-sized and small Churches would learn not only from their own kind, but also from all other participants.

Part 3 --- Periodic national gatherings of clusters in North America would help leaders further experience inspiration, insight, and support.

Part 4 --- An international network of Churches would be established so that we learn together with the Church catholic. There is already a beginning interest from Ethiopia, Tanzania, India, the Church of Sweden, the Lutheran Church in Latvia, and the Lutheran Church in Australia.