

Issues, Etc.

JOURNAL



Some Thoughts on Reverence in Worship

by Will Weedon

Wittenberg Trail: From East to West, Finding Evangelical Orthodoxy in the Lutheran Church

by Joshua Schooping

Summer—2024



Greetings in the name of Jesus.

In this edition of the **Issues, Etc. Journal**, Pastor Will Weedon poses the question, “If we truly believe that Jesus is among us when we gather in His name, then won’t we show that in how we worship?” The answer to this question explains why Lutherans practice reverence on Sunday mornings. Read more in Pr. Weedon’s article, “Some Thoughts on Reverence in Worship.”

Also, in this edition, Pastor Joshua Schooping tells the story of his disillusionment with the errors of Eastern Orthodoxy and his joy in finding a truly Gospel-centered confession of faith in Confessional Lutheranism.

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Todd Wilken, host

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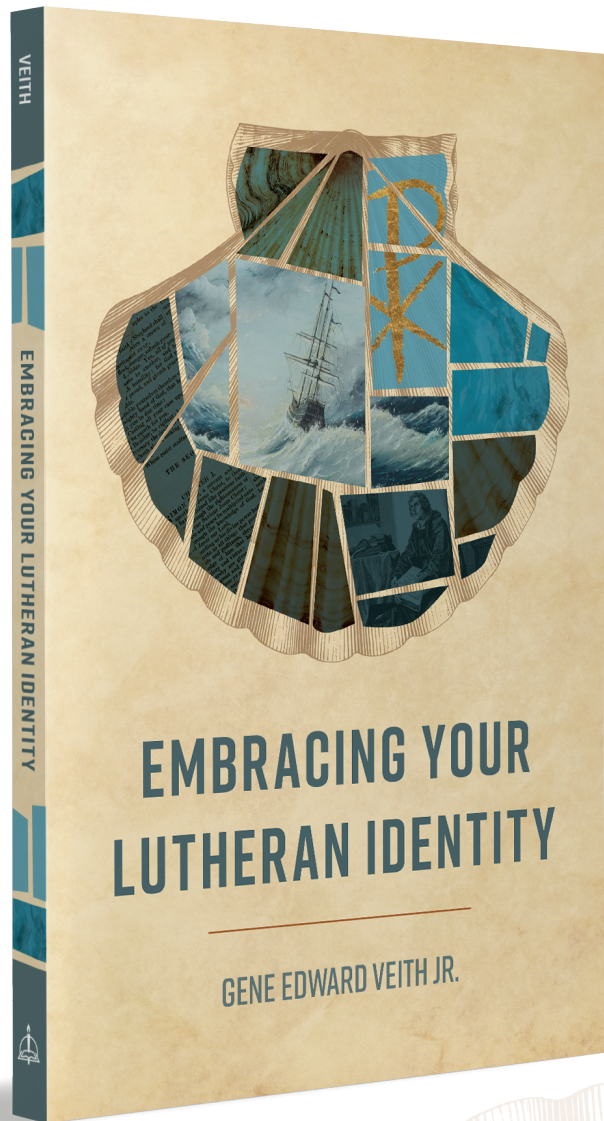
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Some Thoughts on Reverence in Worship

by Will Weedon

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28-29 (English Standard Version)

The sainted liturgiologist, Dr. Arthur Carl Piepkorn, opens up his little book *The Conduct of the Service* with the following observation: “There is really only one basic rule of good form: ‘Be courteous!’ And similarly there is really only one basic rule of altar decorum: ‘Be reverent!’ Every other rule is simply a practical application of this basic charge.” Ever since I first read that many years ago, I thought that the old fellow had it exactly right. “Be reverent” is the key. But what exactly *is* this reverence?

The Lutheran Confessors did not hesitate to boast in their day: “The Mass is held among us and *celebrated with the highest reverence*. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved...” (AC XXIV:1, 2). They also strenuously objected to the notion that their Roman opponents actually outdid them in reverence: “Therefore, it does not appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries than among us.” (AC XXIV:9)

Nor do we merely have to depend on the Confessors’ word for this! When the German theologian Wolfgang Musculus was on his way to the meeting that we know as the Wittenberg Concord, he kept notes on what he experienced in the Saxon churches. He didn’t sound too pleased with it, but he faithfully recorded it. Here are some excerpts from his description of the Mass he attended in Lutheran Wittenberg on May 28, 1536:

First, the Introit was played on the organ, accompanied by the choir in Latin... Indeed, the minister meanwhile proceeded from the sacristy dressed sacrificially [that means, wearing the traditional vestments including the chasuble] and, kneeling before the altar, made his confession together with the assisting sacristan. After the confession, he ascended to the altar to the book that was located on the right side, according to papist custom... The collect for that day followed in Latin, then he sang the Epistle in Latin... When it was done, the Gospel for that Sunday was sung by the minister in Latin on the left side of the altar, as is the custom of the adherents of the pope... Then he sang the words of the supper, and these in German with his back turned toward the people, first

those of the bread, which, when the words had been offered, he then elevated to the sounding of bells; likewise with the chalice, which he also elevated to the sounding of bells. (See *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism*, pp. 195)

Despite Musculus' evident disdain for and discomfort with much of what he was observing, his description of the practice at Wittenberg shows that Philip Melanchthon was not blowing smoke when he insisted in the Augsburg Confession that "among us" the Mass is celebrated "with the highest reverence." That reverence would mark the Lutheran celebration of the holy Supper for centuries, and it still does to this day (or at least, it *ought* to).

But despite the description Musculus gave of the Saxon service, you'd quite miss the point of reverence if you thought it was about merely copying what folks were doing then. Reverence is *not* something that can be simply copied and then externally mimicked. It is entirely possible to accurately perform every motion of a reverent conduct of the Divine Service and yet to execute every one of them in a manner wholly devoid of genuine reverence. Furthermore, I do believe that people can sense the difference. They may have trouble putting into words exactly why the same action comes across as reverent in one case and not in the other. But they can tell whether they are watching a performance or watching a man who is cognizant of handling divine but unseen realities.

If we truly believe that Jesus is among us when we gather in His name, then won't we show that in how we worship? Picture two congregations gathering for worship. In the first nave, the people are chattering loudly with one another, turning to each other, having a jolly time visiting, laughing and sharing what's new or what's happened with them this week. Meanwhile, in the second nave, there is marked silence as the people enter. You may see people stopping to bow toward the altar on the way into their pew. Across the congregation, you see, rather than people yakking with each other, bent heads and people praying to the Lord. The chatter from the narthex seems to be laid aside as they enter the nave.

Someone may ask, "Which is a friendlier setting?" I think that wholly misses the point. Rather, ask yourself which one better confesses that when we come together for the Divine Service, we are gathering before the Lord? Which confesses that He is *present* and that the angels are there with us? Said another way, which one fits better

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with the words of Jesus, and other scriptural teachings about the house of God?

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”
(Mt. 18:20)

But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.
(Hab. 2:20)

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools. (Ecc. 5:1)

If one truly believes as we sing in the hymn, “To Jordan Came the Christ Our Lord”

*All that the mortal eye beholds
Is water as we pour it.
Before the eye of faith unfolds
The pow’r of Jesus’ merit.
For here it sees the crimson flood
To all our ills brings healing.
The wonders of His precious blood
The love of God revealing,
Assuring His own pardon. (Lutheran Service Book 406:7)*

then one will handle that water in a very reverent way, no? It’s the water of eternal life! When we pour it over the baptismal candidate, that person is buried with Christ and raised again. The Holy Spirit is given him, and all his sins are gone. Such is the virtue of the blood of Christ which His Word places into the water.

And, of course, if we truly believe that in the Eucharist Jesus extends to us His very body and blood by means of the external elements and does so to give us forgiveness for all our sins, a share in His own divine life, and our eternal healing, well, then it surely ought to show in our handling of the gifts. In Wittenberg, as Musculus observed, they confessed the real presence of the Savior with the elevation, genuflection and ringing of the bell. That’s how they showed that they believed what the Words of Institution (just sung by the pastor) had accomplished. They knew themselves to be in the very presence of the body of Him through whom the world was created, and who had come into the flesh, born of Mary, that He might offer His body upon the tree and pour out His blood for the blotting out of the sins of the entire world. That’s what the pastor holds in his hand. That’s what the pastor puts into their mouths. The pastors showed it by the reverence with which they handled those most holy things, and the people by the way they received them. They kneel before Him to whom

every knee shall one day bow. They sing to confess to Him whom every tongue will one day proclaim as Lord. They open their mouths wide, and God fills them with the bread of heaven.

“Be reverent,” therefore, simply means to behave in a way that shows that you BELIEVE in the unseen realities that the Word of God proclaims to you. Be reverent as you come together, for you’ve gathered with angels and archangels. Be reverent, for you’re surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1), the saints who have gone before you: Peter, James, John, Paul, the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, together with all your sainted loved ones. Be reverent, for you’re standing with the whole Church before the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 5:6ff). Be reverent, for the Words that are read to you and then preached into you are the Words of your Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier, words that shall never perish (Mt 24:35) and that give eternal life (John 6:38) to all who receive in faith. Be reverent, for the cup of blessing that we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ and the bread that we break is the communion of the blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). Be reverent, for in Baptism the “blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Be reverent, you are surrounded by unseen, divine realities.

Poor old Musculus was having trouble with folks ACTING like they believed what the Word of God promises. Let’s not make the same mistake! I trust that Musculus is among those who now celebrate with us the joy that the Word of God delivers exactly what it promises. Unseen, but oh so present. Hence, reverence!



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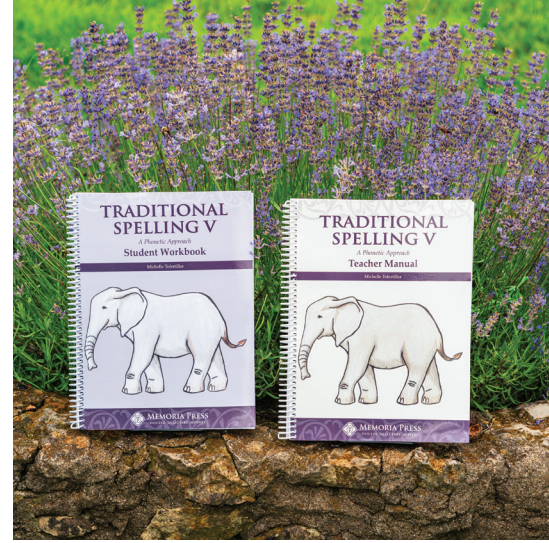
There is such hope in the Gospel message! With three regional conferences taking place this fall—under the theme **Life Shines in Darkness**—we'll be able to draw near to folks across the nation to share the Gospel of Life.


The first conference takes place on **September 14** in the outskirts of Hartford, **Connecticut**, in Bristol, at Immanuel Lutheran Church. Rev. Evan McClanahan, author of our recently released biblical manhood resource, will present at all three conferences, presenting on the same subject. Our very own Rev. Scott Licht will share on the Gospel of Life among widows and orphans in India; our National Director of Y4Life, Michelle Bauman, will present on raising life-affirming kids; and Rev. Michael Salemink, our Executive Director, will also share the For Life message.

On **October 12**, at Hope Lutheran in Shawnee, **Kansas**, in the Kansas City Metro area, we'll hear again from Rev. McClanahan. As a complement to his presentation on biblical manhood, Deaconess Rose Adle of Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne will present on Christian womanhood. Our Director of Volunteer Relations, Virginia Flo, will facilitate a panel with local Life Teams sharing their inspiring work. And wrapping up the conference, Rev. Dr. James Lamb, formerly of LFL and Lutheran Family Service, will shed light on Christian citizenship, especially in light of this election year.

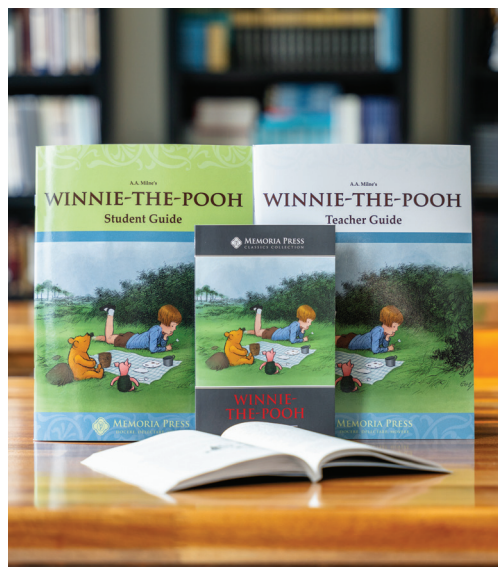
Finally, rounding out the conferences on **November 9**, we will be in Winter Garden, **Florida**, just outside Orlando at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. In addition to Rev. McClanahan and Rev. Licht presenting, we will also hear from the founder and owner of Skoog Dementia Support, Teri Skoog, on caring for those with dementia; and on the heels of our election day, author and current Vice President of External and Government Relations at Focus on the Family, Tim Goeglein, will share his thoughts on faith in the halls of power, exploring what is next for America in the Pro-Life movement.

We hope you will be able to join us at one or more of these conferences to be encouraged and equipped to continue on your Gospel-motivated For Life journey. For additional information on each conference, or to register, visit lutheransforlife.org/conferences or snap a photo of the QR code.




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Wittenberg Trail:

From East to West: Finding Evangelical Orthodoxy in the Lutheran Church

by Joshua Schooping

My journey into the confessional Lutheran church has been amazing, and trying to condense it down to manageable size is daunting. The story has doctrinal and historical dimensions, ecclesiological and liturgical dimensions, and pastoral and autobiographical dimensions, together with God's grace. The pure preaching of the Gospel properly distinguished from the Law and the proper understanding and administration of the Sacraments were at the center of my falling in love with the Lutheran confessions.

I attended seminary for four years and served in the Eastern Orthodox priesthood for five. Before coming out of the priesthood and the Orthodox church, I was first engaged in apologetics *against* confessional Protestant theologies. Many of my colleagues in the priesthood would make claims against this or that "Protestant" doctrine, such as Christ's vicarious atonement, justification by grace alone through faith alone, or Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. As I sought to substantiate these claims against "the Protestants," I would go to actual confessional sources. Over and over again, I realized that the confessional Protestants were being misrepresented by the Eastern apologists. This caused me no small consternation and confusion. I ended up in a position of defending misrepresented Protestant claims against my Eastern Christian brethren. As time went on, my library of confessional writings and authors grew. I began to wonder if there were such documents in the Eastern Orthodox church.

During Covid, I began to assemble the most authoritative confessions of faith of the Eastern churches, several of which were almost completely unknown amongst

Western converts. It will be helpful here to briefly explain the Orthodox conception of ecclesiological authority. The Eastern Church formally confesses that it is of equal authority with the Scriptures; that the Church, “like the Divine Scriptures, is infallible, and has perpetual authority” (Council of Jerusalem 1672, Decree 2). Moreover, the Church’s infallible, equal-to-Scripture authority is most fully manifest in the Ecumenical Councils, “whose rule is acknowledged to be the Holy and Ecumenical Synods” (Council of Jerusalem 1672, Decree 12). In this context, to be *ecumenical* means to be *universal*, and to have universal authority.

There are two acknowledged paths to a Council’s having this universal or ecumenical authority: direct and indirect. The so-called Seven Ecumenical Councils are *directly* ecumenical. However, the Seventh Ecumenical Council required decades of political intrigue and imperial power to enforce. It was not wholeheartedly accepted in the West, and certainly not at Charlemagne’s court. Martin Chemnitz accurately calls this Seventh Ecumenical Council a “pseudosynod” (*Examination of the Council of Trent*).

The second or *indirect* manner in which a Council takes on ecumenical authority is through universal acceptance by the major Patriarchates of the Eastern churches, especially by the “Ecumenical” Patriarch in Constantinople. The Council of Jerusalem of 1672 took on universal authority for the East in this indirect way. It was reconfirmed in a Council in Istanbul (Constantinople) in 1691 and also at the most recent Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete in 2016.

The key point is that these Councils are considered to possess authority and infallibility equal with the holy Scriptures. They are, therefore, completely binding upon the conscience of the Eastern Christian.

Picking up the story again at Covid, as I was carefully reading the finer print of the Seventh Ecumenical pseudosynod, I discovered that the East’s affirmation of icon “veneration” was not a matter of affirming Christian freedom in the use of art. It is a matter of divine law. The Council decreed that unless a person will bow before an

image and kiss it, with affection, then they are cursed forever with the anathema, i.e. an eternal curse. The Council itself states: “Now anathema is nothing less than complete separation from God” (see *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*). This is also the contemporary Eastern understanding of anathema. The *Orthodox Canon Law: Reference Book* describes an anathema as “the most severe ecclesiastical sanction” where “the guilty person is cut off from the Church and from salvation.” It goes on, “Anathema is parallel to the death penalty in secular society, as spiritual death is seen by the Church as analogous to physical death.” Therefore, when the Seventh Ecumenical Council commands that people bow before and kiss images, threatening anathema to those who dissent, it is proclaiming that icon veneration is absolutely necessary for one’s salvation.

As I read how the veneration of icons was absolutely necessary, lest one go to hell, I simply could not believe it. I also could not accept the pseudo-council’s “infallible” and “inerrant” historical claim that this was literally an apostolic practice. Here, things only got worse. The Council of Jerusalem 1672 says in Decree 10 “that the dignity of the [Eastern] Bishop is so necessary in the Church, that without him, neither Church nor Christian could either be or be spoken of.” In other words, the absolutely authoritative voice of the Eastern church, speaking in Council and equal to Scripture, declares that no one is, in reality, a Christian unless they are in the Eastern Orthodox church.

Tragically, the East also decrees the patristic teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son (filioque)* to be blasphemy. Their “infallible” Council of Blachernae in 1285 states of those “who affirm that the Paraclete [the Holy Spirit], which is from the Father, has its existence through the Son and from the Son... we cut them off from the membership of the [Eastern] Orthodox, and we banish them from the flock of the Church of God” (*Crisis in Byzantium*, Aristeides Papadakis). Historically, it was the fraudulently ordained Patriarch Photios in the ninth century who *created* a problem with the filioque. In an effort to secure his discredited patriarchal



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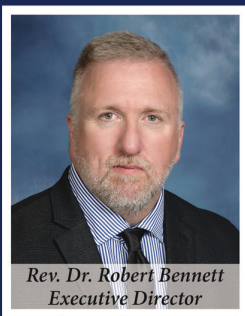
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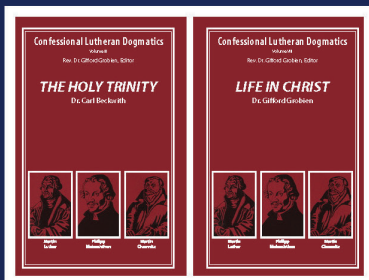
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power and gain influence, he endeavored to get the Bulgarians to join the Eastern churches by discrediting the Western churches through the accusation of heresy. It has been shown that the Eastern fathers taught the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father *and the Son*, especially in Epiphanius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria. The East has also agreed to the *filioque* twice in seemingly ecumenical councils. But they have formally bound themselves to anathematize it. Apparently, the Eastern churches have a kind of mania for anathemas, even anathematizing those who use the Gregorian Calendar and those who use unleavened bread.

As I encountered the foregoing and realized that it was the inescapably binding position of the Eastern churches, I was utterly disillusioned. Many (perhaps most) people in the Eastern churches have little or no idea of these realities of their own tradition, including some priests. But as a priest myself, I was conscience-bound not only to believe it but also to teach and confess it. At this point, the errors of the Eastern church were clear, together with my need to leave. The plain truth of Scripture and Christian history ran contrary to the Middle Byzantine church's conciliar propaganda. It was abundantly clear to me that Scripture *alone* could be the highest and only infallible umpire in any given contest. But I also knew I could not fully endorse an amorphous and non-confessional "American Christianity." I knew I had deep prayer, meditation, and spiritual trial to undergo in order to wrestle out the central issues.

During this period, I studied such works as Luther's Commentaries on Romans and Galatians, his Heidelberg Disputation, Martin Chemnitz's *The Two Natures of Christ*, Jakob Andreae's dialogue with Patriarch Jeremiah II, and C.F.W. Walther's *Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, among others. I became convinced that the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is true and undeniable, not to mention the centrality of Christ's penal substitutionary atonement. But I am a confessionally-oriented person, so I began a period of protracted study and engagement with the classic confessions of the Protestant

Reformation and their representative theologians. With the Word as my lamp, my commitment to catholicity (universality), orthodoxy (true belief), and orthopraxy (true practice) acted like a walking stick.

In this pursuit I found over and over again that the *Book of Concord* was absolutely superior to all the other Protestant confessions I studied. In addition to the *Book of Concord*, I read deeply in the Anglican Formularies, the Three Forms of Unity, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Standards, the London Baptist Confession of 1689, and others. I also studied readings in the writers who were considered authoritative and representative of their various traditions. I spoke and consulted with confessional pastors from these traditions. The joyously clear result was that the Lutheran *Book of Concord* stood head and shoulders above the others in terms of Scriptural fidelity, catholicity, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy—especially in the doctrines of justification, the objectivity and universality of Christ’s atonement, the imputation of His alien righteousness (*extra nos*), His real presence in holy Communion, mystical union, the *filioque*, the regenerating nature of Baptism, the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, the theology of the cross, and a non-sectarian ecclesiology.

Over the years, I have fallen in love not only with Martin Luther but also Martin Chemnitz, Jakob Andreae, Philipp Nicolai, Johann Arndt, Johann Gerhard, and C.F.W. Walther. It is not only the orthodox theology of the Lutheran Reformation that is persuasive, but the commitment to the catholicity of the Church. One can read hardly a page of the Book of Concord without coming across a positive yet discerning reference to the church fathers, whether St. Augustine, St. Cyril of Alexandria, or others. Together with this orthodoxy and catholicity is the Lutheran love of the beautiful, historically grounded liturgical worship of the Church. I recall the first time I attended a Divine Service in the Lutheran church after having served in the Eastern Orthodox priesthood. I was deeply impacted by its majesty, economy, and beauty, even for weeks afterward.

I have failed to condense my story to a manageable size, and yet I feel I have only scratched the surface. I have left out so much of the richness of my journey: the grace and patience the Lord has shown me, the support from my wife and children, their love for the Lutheran church and her liturgy, the faithful Lutheran pastors who have encouraged me along the way, the colloquy process, the clear excellence of the Mid-South district president and office, the fellow brother pastors in my circuit, and the love shown by the congregation that graciously received me as their pastor and servant in Word and Sacrament. I am utterly humbled and overjoyed to be counted a confessional Lutheran and deeply thankful for the winding path by which the Lord has brought me here. It has served to magnify the unambiguous value of all the Lutheran church holds dear.



Pastor Joshua Schooping is married and has three children. Originally from Central Florida, he lives in Russellville, Arkansas, where he serves God's people in Word and Sacrament at St. John's LCMS Lutheran Church.

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