



June 25, 2021

Dear Lay Leader,

Greetings in the name of Jesus from your seminary in Mequon! About four weeks ago we had the privilege of seeing another graduating class assigned into our synod's public pastoral ministry.

May 2022 will mark a key ministry milestone since your pastor graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. We are encouraging your congregation to mark this anniversary by making it possible for your pastor (and wife) to attend a Celebration of Ministry retreat. This retreat will be held Monday, April 25, through Wednesday, April 27, 2022, in San Antonio, Texas.

Grow in Grace, the Seminary's continuing education division, began offering retreats in 2012. Retreats are held for those marking 3 years since graduation (**Begun in Grace**); for those celebrating 10 years (**Renewed in Grace**); for those celebrating 25 years (**Excelling in Grace**); and for those who are marking 35 years (**Remaining in Grace**). The retreat is meant to be a time of ministry refreshment, not only celebrating the milestone, but also giving encouragement through worship and Bible study, and providing opportunities to reconnect with peers.

And, this year will be particularly interesting. Because of the Covid-19 shutdowns, the San Antonio retreats scheduled for 2020 and 2021 had to be postponed. So, this year there will be multiple classes gathering for this celebration in San Antonio.

This retreat (and other efforts such as mentoring for new pastors) is part of a comprehensive effort by your synod to strengthen and encourage those serving us in pastoral ministry. In the previous four decades, 541 pastors resigned from ministry. Thankfully, during the 2010s we saw a 28% decrease in resignations. Certainly, there may be many reasons for that, but we are convinced the retreats play at least a small role. Investing in the growth and encouragement of our pastors is an investment in ongoing gospel ministry, both for your congregation and for your synod!

Here are comments from some who attended previous retreats:

- Everything was wonderful, from the relevant topics to the fellowship/free time to the accommodations! It's hard to pick a highlight from such a wonderfully planned event.
- I was thankful that the themes focused on joy in the personal Gospel and support for ministry struggles; I had been worried that the emphasis would be more on improving one's ministry skills, etc. There is surely a time and place for that, but it was wonderful to come and hear the good news without any guilt-tripping about things that could be done better! Thank you for the joyful Gospel focus!
- Being there with just my wife. This was the first time we've been away from our children in 11 years for more than two nights. They were fine. We were fine. It was great!
- The Bible studies renewed my eagerness to serve. The fellowship was wonderful; it was so fun to catch up with everyone. We hadn't seen anyone there since graduation.

GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. 2 PETER 3:18

- Time being refreshed. Knowing we're not alone. Remembering what an awesome job we have before us. Seeing old friends. Digging into the Word. Talking through things. We came home refreshed in every way possible. This was a blessing beyond our expectations. Thank you!!!!

In the months ahead, more information will be posted on the **Grow in Grace** web site and/or will be emailed as we finalize the agenda for each retreat.

Of course, as someone charged with being a good steward of your congregation's resources, we realize that the cost of this retreat is an important part of the decision you make. ***While final costs for the 2022 retreat will depend on finalizing contracts with our vendors,*** we hope to keep the costs comparable to previous years' retreats. Here are the estimated costs:

- Two nights hotel: \$ 399.54 (Including taxes)
- Retreat registration (per person): \$ 199.00 (Registrations after 2/18/22 will be \$425)
- Travel/airfare (base amount per person): \$ 350.00
- Total cost: \$ 948.54

To help even out travel costs, **Grow in Grace** will match dollar-for-dollar all travel costs beyond \$350/person. In the past, doing so kept the average total quite close to the amount listed above. While many congregations encouraged their pastor (and wife) to arrive early or stay later, the cost of those "extra" nights are not reflected above.

It may be of interest to note that in 2019 about 75% of congregations covered the entire cost (2-night hotel stay, conference registration, and travel costs not matched by **Grow in Grace**). Obviously, you are free to do whatever you wish, but we'd encourage you to fund this if at all possible. As the above comments indicate, the retreat has been a huge blessing for pastors and their wives.

How do congregations cover the costs? It varies. Some have simply put the cost into their budget. Others have used a door offering. Still others have made the congregation aware of the opportunity and allowed members to respond with special gifts. You do what is wise in your situation.

Online registration will open in October. We will send out further information as that time approaches.

We would humbly ask you to discuss this opportunity to support your pastor's ministry with the other leaders of your congregation. It is our prayer that, with your congregation's support, your pastor will be among those who gather in San Antonio next year. And, it is our prayer that his attendance at the retreat will prove to be a blessing to him – and to you – for many years to come!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or our event coordinator, Kim Workentine, at (Kimberly.Workentine@wisluthsem.org).

In Him,

Professor Tom Kock