



CARE BAGS 4 KIDS - OCTOBER COLLECTION

-- Even before we listened to Annie (Wignall) Foskett speak at the September LWML meeting, our hearts were already searching for ways to contribute to this local cause. Annie began by refreshing us on the start-up of the Care Bag 4 Kids initiative, as well as bringing us up to date on the who, what, where, and why, that even after 20+ years, brings joy to everyone involved – from the volunteers, donors, and the recipients.

FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

-- LWML is encouraging our OS� members to donate items for Care Bags 4 Kids. At the meeting, Annie provided a small list of some items that are currently low in supply – things like *refillable water bottles (for teens), small card games (like UNO, Crazy 8s, etc), small girl toys or small art kits, pacifiers, 2-in-1 or 3-in-1 shampoo/conditioner/body wash, hairbrushes.* But your donations aren't limited to just those items – they accept donations of assorted new items appropriate for infants on up to teens – that can be packed in a pillowcase-sized bag. When you're shopping, consider items that would bring comfort and security to a child who is experiencing a crisis situation.

**Look for a collection box in the Narthex –
and thank you in advance for your generosity!**

MORE FROM LWML: We are getting back to our "normal" routine with our first Fall meeting held on September 20th. It is clear that OS� has not been sitting around all summer with nothing to do. The Holy Spirit has been working tirelessly in pushing us to reach out to so many in our community. What a blessing for all of us and the community too!! The LWML Mission Statement is one we can all follow: "As Lutheran Women (or Men!) in Mission, we joyfully proclaim Christ, support missions, and equip women (and men) to honor God by serving others."

With joy, we will be starting up our quilting days once again. Remember, this is open to all and you do not need to have any sewing skills. There are many other roles to be done in the whole quilting process. The fellowship is the best part of the day with coffee time and lunch shared around the tables, talking and laughing. A wonderful way to get to know your fellow church members! Dates set are: October 13th and 15th, with tentative dates of October 27th and 29th. Hope to see you!

Enjoy this beautiful time of year! God has his paintbrush out now to share all the fabulous colors of fall with each of us.

**Our next meeting is set for Monday, October 18th at 4pm in Fellowship Hall.
We would love to see all the women there!**

The Systemic Matthew 18 Problem in Lutheran Congregations

POSTED ON JULY 7, 2021 BY PASTOR RYAN LOESLIE [FROM STEADFASTLUTHERANS.ORG]

Most pastors are familiar with this. Out of the blue the pastor will get a phone call or surprise visit from his congregation president or one of the elders. "Some people are not happy with...You hurt a few people when you...Someone said that..." It is one of the most unpleasant things in ministry. The pastor does not get to face his accusers. It cultivates apprehension and distrust between a pastor and his leadership, and it creates an overall toxic atmosphere in the congregation. Pastors generally do not show improvement when criticized this way, and none of the congregation grows spiritually. And it goes on and on and on. This is a problem in Lutheran congregations which only seems to perpetuate itself: congregation leaders act as complaint boxes towards their pastors, and trust deteriorates.

That this happens often is actually quite understandable. I read one of the duties of elders from my congregation's constitution. It reads, "(They shall) consider complaints and grievances of the members of the congregation and determine if Matthew 18:15-16 have been fully applied, and shall report to the congregation those which cannot be otherwise adjusted in accordance with Matthew 18:17-18." So there it is. Elders are supposed to consider complaints and grievances, right? It is no wonder that scores of elders over time have thought that considering complaints is their job. It's written right into our governing documents.

But we must read these words carefully. They shall consider complaints and grievances and "determine if Matthew 18:15-16 have been fully applied." We dare not shrug these words off right here. What exactly do these Scriptures say? We read from our Lord Jesus' words, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses" (Matthew 18:15-16 ESV). So we see here. If someone has a complaint against a pastor, he should not go running off to complain to an elder. He should approach his pastor first, face to face. If the pastor cannot be won over by God's Word and clear reason, the one with a complaint should return with one or two others along. Maybe even in this step, bringing along an elder may be a good thing to do. God-willing, reconciliation may take place.

Why should we act this way? For one, it is the courageous thing to do. Those with complaints against a pastor should not hide behind a cloak of anonymity, behind another man's shield. This weak behavior is what foments a toxic atmosphere in the congregation. When anyone can make accusations or complaints without having to own his or her words, the congregation can become a breeding ground for gossip and even malicious lies.

Following Matthew 18 also protects the pastor's reputation. Jesus did not preach his words from Matthew 18 out of the blue, but they are in accord with the 8th Commandment which is given to protect a man's reputation. You first approach a man privately, so if possible no one else finds out about his sin. You do not want your own sins broadcasted all over the community, so we try to keep our neighbor's sins hidden also. By attempting to keep complaints private, you preserve his reputation as best as possible.

It is finally courteous to your congregation leaders, the elders especially. They have been elected to support your pastor in matters pertaining to the spiritual welfare of the congregation. To be entrusted with spiritual care, this is a high calling which Jesus wants men to have for their own joy and blessing. If their job is to deal with a never-ending barrage of complaints and grievances, this joy and blessing cannot be realized. Spiritual care has its own share of challenges and sorrows which come without Matthew 18 being trampled underfoot. As God's people, we owe it to our spiritual leaders to do our best when there are clear Scriptures to guide us. They will be so much happier – pastors and elders alike.

Some may say that they are uncomfortable to approach their pastor, or an elder may think he's only attempting to be a liaison, trying to help. Do not buy the lie. God gave you your pastor that you may have a true spiritual father who loves you and cares for your soul. Approach him with confidence, and know that he cares. Know that God himself appointed him to your congregation, and you have nothing to fear in him. If your problem with him cannot be resolved privately, Matthew 18 gives you provision to make sure this happens eventually. When we avoid the Scriptural process by succumbing to appeals about someone's comfort level, everyone remains miserable and the devil wins the day.

So elders and presidents especially, be bold and decisive here. If someone tugs your ear with a complaint about the pastor, do not entertain it. Gently ask, "Have you taken this up with the pastor himself?" If they say no, tell them that's the first thing to do. Tell them that if the problem can't be resolved, come back and you'll be of help. Be gentle, and give the aura of confidence. Tell them that everything will be okay. As long as Jesus is risen from the dead, we have to believe this is true.

As I mention in the title of this article, I believe this is a systemic problem in Lutheran congregations. For my almost 12 years in the ministry, I have found that it is a constant theme which shows no signs of going away. I believe that if congregation leaders can learn to apply Matthew 18 in their congregations, they would be stronger than probably 90% of our congregations out there. We can make a good faith effort here. It only requires close attention to the 8th Commandment, which we were all taught as youth. It involves close attention to our Lord Jesus' words from Matthew 18, which are clear and wise. It will also involve love for and commitment to our congregations, which are God's gracious establishment wherever we live. Most of all, it will require faith that God's forgiveness is enough to conquer all sources of conflict in the congregation. True Christians must have this attitude. We can do this. Our congregations don't have to be toxic. They can be salt and light, which is what Jesus intended us to be.