

Health Trumps All

By DR. MARCUS J. CARLSON
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To say that the last year or more has been a challenging season for the church would be deemed a dramatic understatement by its pastors, staff and other leaders. Forty percent of churches are at risk of closing in this year alone. Pastors are burning out and leaving ministry in higher numbers. Churches are experiencing more conflict than has been seen in decades. The health of leaders and churches may be at its worst level in recent memory. As someone who does work as an intentional interim, I could find work in multiple churches simultaneously. For those working in churches, the challenges and expectations have increased dramatically as has the criticism and mistreatment from church members. The current situation is clearly a crisis.

Crisis has a way of doing two things: being an accelerant and being revelatory. Crisis accelerates. Crisis reveals. Churches, pastors and ministry leaders who were unhealthy entering the pandemic find their health declining exponentially. Churches, pastors and ministry leaders who were healthy at the start of the pandemic are experiencing great growth and health. I am blessed to have been in the second category. While I too have found this season challenging, I entered it experiencing the greatest health of my life.

Crisis also reveals. It reveals our priorities. It reveals the health of our heart, our relationship with Jesus and much more. Crisis reveals our weaknesses, our blind spots, our habits and addictions. For some, this has been good news. Yet for others, this has been very painful.

While the challenges have been great, so are the opportunities. That is the beautiful thing about the Gospel and the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Any crisis is an opportunity for God to redeem, to take something bad and make something great of it, to use a season of challenge for the good of the Kingdom of God.

Patrick Lencioni, in his book, *The Advantage*, notes that 'organizational health trumps everything.' Not only have I found his argument to be true in the church to a high degree, but I have also found it to be true for the leaders of the church as well. Outside of the Gospel, the most important factor in the effectiveness of a church is the health of the church. Outside of the work of God, health is the most important factor in the effectiveness of pastors, staff and ministry leaders. Health trumps.



DR. MARCUS J. CARLSON

When I think about the health of ministry leaders, I find myself reflecting on the categories provided by the Greatest Commandment: heart, soul and mind.

We often think of health just in terms of the physical, but that is a rather limited view. As I think about these categories I have come to understand that in addition to the foundational questions of health, there are seven areas of health for ministry leaders to examine: spiritual health, emotional health (including mental health), physical health, intellectual health, relational health, vocational health and other health (including financial). In future articles, I will examine some of these categories and the questions we can ask ourselves to evaluate our health in these areas.

Our health as individuals, whether or not we serve as pastors, staff or ministry leaders in churches or other ministries, directly impacts so many of the most important things in our lives. I once left a very unhealthy environment. It was impacting my faith, my physical and emotional health, my marriage and my children. Within 24 hours of resigning, my blood pressure dropped 10 points on each side. Within 18 months of leaving, I had lost 85 pounds. My daughter who had lost her faith found faith again. My son began to smile and laugh again. I found a healthier sense of confidence and started to really embrace God's grace in my own life. Getting healthy changed everything for our family, and so by time the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we were all in some of the best shape of our lives as a family. When we are healthy, we have a more positive outlook, and we are more easily able to dream and vision. As a result of getting healthier in every way, I am doing some of the best ministry and best work of my whole career.

Sometimes we are the source of our own lack of health because of our perspective on ministry. One of the dangers pastors and staff face is finding our identity in our ministry work. While it is understandable that caring



Rev. Wade Hudson

Submitted Rev. Daniel Landin

Rev. Wade Hudson was ordained and installed as pastor of Maria Lutheran Church, Hershey, NE, on November 8, 2020. Participating in the service (shown l-r): Rev. Jeff Cottingham, STS, Trinity Lutheran, Gothenburg, NE; Rev. Daniel Landin, Hope Evangelical Lutheran, Smithfield, NE; Rev. Gale Dorn, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran, Axtell, NE; and Jeremy Martin, Maria Lutheran council president.



Rev. Daniel John Stahl

Submitted By Rev. Chad Kyler

Rev. Daniel John Stahl was ordained and installed as pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, West Falls, NY, on October 25, 2020. Participants in the service included (front l-r): Nathan Stoddart, crucifer; Rev. Daniel; Pr. Thomas Thorstad, St. Peter's Lutheran, Sanborn, NY; (back l-r): Rev. Jonathan Haseley, Lutheran Church of the Master, Omaha, NE; and presiding minister Rev. Chad Kyler, St. Paul's Lutheran, West Falls, NY.

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people would do so, it is also unhealthy and leads to dramatic pain in seasons such as this. One of the gifts of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has given us the vision, the opportunity and the call to change the focus of our priorities and possibly find life-changing health.

Health does not happen by accident: it takes intention and action. Your church may not be the biggest, best or most resourced, but it can be the healthiest church it can be. You may not be the most dynamic pastor or staff member, but you can be the healthiest you can be. Health trumps. Healthy leaders are thriving leaders. Healthy churches are thriving churches. God wants His children and his churches to experience lasting and transformative health. Health in every area of our lives is part of the promise of the abundant life. Health is not easy, but it is essential.

Note: This is the first in a four-part series focused on the health of pastors, staff and other ministry leaders. The next article will examine the nature of leader health and provide some insight on how to make health a priority.

Dr. Marcus J. Carlson is an LCMC certified pastor, professor, consultant and non-profit ministry leader. He is the Executive Director of Preparing for Amazement Ministries (amazed15.org) focusing on church and leader health. He, his wife and two teenage children reside in northeast IN. You can also visit his professional site: revdrorange.com.

Pastors, Please Update Your Contact Info!

By CATHY NICHOL
LCMC Administrative Coordinator

Thank you for responding to our requests to give us your contact information and ministry training credentials for pastors, both in a contract call and on our list of certified pastors. We are still looking for more participation.

Go to www.lcmc.net/pastor-update and be sure to fill in the Ministry Education/Credentials fields. There is also a request for a picture to be submitted. We hope this will allow greater access to our pastors and help each of us to be able to put a face to a name!