

Church Conduct: To Ask or Not to Ask, that is the Question!

By Pastor Thomas Goodroad

This is the third installment in a series of articles I have titled “Church Conduct.” In the first two, I talked about how to reverently approach the table of the Lord and receive His Holy Supper. In this article, I’d like to cover the topic of asking questions, both in Bible Study and outside of it.

Pastor Moline and I love questions. Something I’ve always heard, even when I was young and still attending children’s Sunday School at Trinity Lutheran Church in Kearney, Missouri, is, “I’m too afraid to ask. I might sound silly.” And other variations of this. It always comes down to being too self-conscious to ask a question. Now, don’t get me wrong, being self-aware when asking a question can be a good thing. Not every single question is truly helpful to ask, so a small dose of self-awareness helps to think about your question with the intention of clarifying what you’re asking so you can get an answer that is useful to you. But it’s possible to overthink your question, too. The goal should be to find a healthy balance between *thinking over* your question, but not *over thinking* your question! Here are a couple tips that can help you to decide whether or not you should ask your question in Bible Study, and hopefully give you some confidence in asking questions. Remember, Pastor Moline and I are here to preach and teach the Word of God to you in its truth and purity, so even if you decide not to ask the question in Bible Study, you should still consider asking us some time outside of Bible Study (As long as we’re not late for the Divine Service, that is!). Answering questions is one of our favorite parts of being your Pastors!

Tip #1: Is your question relevant? Off-the-wall questions can be great, informative, and topics that are well worth discussing, but can sometimes be a distraction from the lesson that is being taught. Discussing Augustine’s view of the Sacraments is fun and informative, but would be a distraction during a discussion on parables, for example! But if you have been listening intently to the lesson and want to know more about an aspect that Pastor hasn’t covered yet, or even just need him to repeat something, ask away!

Tip #2: Why are you asking? Your question should always be because you yourself want to know the answer to your question for your own edification. If you are asking your question because you think it might make you sound smart, you should reconsider. You should also not be asking a question for the benefit of others, thinking it would be good for Pastor to cover something, even though you already know about it. Leave others to ask their own questions, focus instead on what you can be learning from the lesson, not what others should be learning. If you are genuinely asking because you want to know the answer and it will be helpful to you in understanding the lesson, ask away!

Tip #3: Don’t be afraid of others in the room. Here at Good Shepherd, we have a whole mix of God’s people. Pastors both former and present, professors, doctors, law enforcement, those who are brand new to the faith, as well as those who have grown up in The Lutheran Church—

Missouri Synod their entire lives. Everyone is different, everyone is at different levels of theological knowledge. Don't be afraid to ask a question, even if it seems basic or too easy, or you think someone else will be impatient with you for asking it. The chances are, yes, someone else knows the answer, but that doesn't mean you already should. Don't be ashamed of where you are at in your progress towards learning more of God's Word. Ask your question, even if it's short, even if it seems unimportant, even if it seems basic. As your pastors, called and ordained servants of the Word, we want to teach every single one of you, no matter where you are at in your level of knowledge. In fact, it's even more important to us to answer those easy or basic questions, as these are often the foundation of your faith. It's important to have a solid foundation. If it's relevant, if it is for your own edification, even if it's basic or easy, ask away!

Tip #4: Try to make it short, sweet, and to the point. We always welcome questions, thoughts, or comments, they help us to understand where you are at in your understanding of God's Word, which in turn helps us to teach you better. But we only have a limited amount of time to teach a lesson, typically under an hour. If you have a personal story to share, that's excellent! The pastors and others often love a good story, but consider sharing it outside of class time, especially if it's a bit on the wordier side. Keep questions or comments to just a few sentences, whatever is necessary to get your point across or ask your question. Anything more than that could potentially be disrespectful to the others in the classroom who came to learn from their Pastor, or even Pastor himself, if the story starts to take over the lesson. After you've thought through your question and boiled it down to the important part, ask away!

That's all for now! I hope you will continue to ask questions and meditate on God's Word as we all learn together as God's people on Earth. God's richest blessings in Christ!

Pastor Goodroad