

C is for Conference

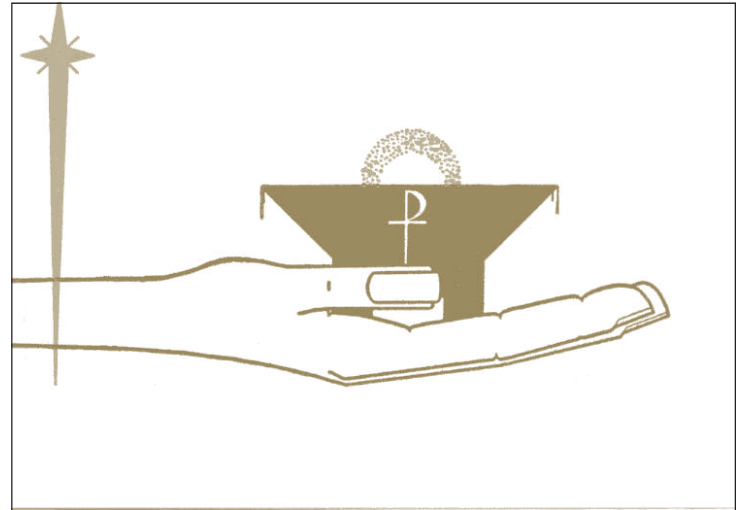
(& the conf is fr u.)

Let me quote the official synopsis of what our conference will be about, January 22-25, 2012 in Belleville, Illinois:

What does it mean “to follow Jesus” today?

That question is often answered in self-help therapeutic and moralistic tones, as though “to follow” means “to imitate” Jesus, as if he were a model of common sense behavior and sensibility, as though discipleship were rooted in the demands of the law. But such a view of discipleship produces, at best, anxious Christians, and, at worst, presumptuous ones.

This conference revisits the theme of discipleship in order to recover both its biblical and gospel basis. “To follow Jesus” means first and foremost to trust him and what he promises to do to and for us as we make our way with him in church and world. It means to follow him to the cross. At the heart of discipleship, then, is the invitation “come and die with me,” as Bonhoeffer observed. Exploring the counterintuitive power of this invitation to create a genuinely gospel-given life is what this conference is all about.



This design, based on the famous Christmas Chorale, depicts the hand of God giving us Christ. It is designed by Martin Marty.

R is for Revisit

The conference will “revisit” Our Lady of the Snows center and its Shrine Hotel, which has provided hospitality to each of our earlier conferences. We look forward to the quiet atmosphere, pleasant surroundings, the good conversation around round tables, fine meals including deluxe continental breakfast where you make your own waffles, and the nip in the air as you walk between the two buildings. This would be a great place to spend January 22-24 even if the topic were “Banality Revisited: Should Christians Be Good?”

But we are not gathering in Prettycity (Belleville?) to rehash the obvious. We want to reboot a concept which, used in the wrong way, can do actual harm to Christians. Remember section one of the Hippocratic Oath: “First, do no harm”? My hunch is, Jesus in his Nazarene twenties listened respectfully to a whole lot of preachers. He put up with their stuff for a few years, before exploding (mildly): “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.” Is that Matthew 23:4?

S-S are for Steven Kuhl, and other very kuhl Speakers

We are offering something different this time, which we hope will be an improvement on past conferences. Everyone will get to hear all the speakers, since each of them will address the whole assembly. Instead of having to pick and choose for breakouts, you will be addressed—and have a chance to interrogate afterwards—a large number of speakers addressing the big question from their own particular angle, or according to a particular question we have asked them to tell us about.

Steven Kuhl will launch us and set the course with three talks which will outline our days: “The Disciple and Christ,” “The Disciple and the Church,” and “The Disciple and the World.” His subtitles indicate where he is going with those broad topics: “Faith Alone,” “The Fellowship of Faith,” and “The Hidden Discipline, or Faith Working Incognito.” But he will not be sailing alone. He will have conversation partners under each heading.

For part one, Mark Mattes evaluating contemporary views of discipleship and Robert Kolb offering a history of “discipleship” in the Lutheran tradition. For part two, Matthew Becker on the *theologian* as a disciple of Christ (is it possible??) and Martin Wells on the *church executive* as disciple of Christ. (Is this eye of the needle stuff, or what?) (Get over it. I’m just kidding.) For part three, Kathryn Kleinhans just in from A College Campus suggesting we “tweet” if we love Jesus, and (this I can’t wait for) from South Africa Pastor Felix Meylahn on “Following Jesus when Things are Falling Apart.” Whew.

Also featuring you. As “speaker,” we hope, or at least not silent. Speaking with us and to us, coming from wherever you are coming from, cross-examining these witnesses and taking your thoughts back up the hill to the Shrine Hotel, where there might be some wine and cheese and tables at which the colloquium can continue.

Revisit the concept with us. What does it mean to be a disciple, to follow Jesus? What on earth did Bonhoeffer mean by his “come and die with me”? (Which is not what he wrote. Read the second edition, now available as volume 4 in **Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works**. Look up this footnote on page 87:

In the earlier English version of **The Cost of Discipleship**, Fuller translated this famous aphorism as: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” The austere German text reads “*Jeder Ruf Christi führt in den Tod.*” Literally, that says, “Every call of Christ leads into death.”)

Revisit the aphorism. And wonder with us what he meant to communicate thereby to us. Especially given that he also equates “discipleship” with “being bound to the suffering Christ” and at the same time “nothing but grace and joy.” Huh?

Every time a Christian tells me “I’m not really very religious,” I suspect I have found one more person who thinks discipleship is for martyrs-in-training like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed at 37 for binding himself to the suffering of Christ, the suffering of Jews, the suffering of his country. Is it really that special and onerous? This is worth revisiting, so we can heartily commend discipleship without people only hearing what a heavy burden it is, and how hard to bear.

O is for online

Where to register: www.crossings.org/conference.

Bertram Book being Published!

Michael Hoy has finished editing the book Robert Bertram was working on before his death, and it is being published in time for the January conference. We’ll let you know how you can get a copy. The title is:

The Divorce of Sex and Marriage: Sain Sex



Conference keynote speaker:
very kuhl!

I is for If . . .

If you like, you may come a day early to what we call the “pre-conference,” a sort of “early bird special,” an option with two tracks. “Track A” persons will spend the day with Cathy Lessmann and me (Marcus Felde) learning how to get all the good out of a text using the Six-Step Method for studying a Bible text, like when you are preparing to preach or to hear a sermon. If you receive the weekly “Sabbatheology” from Crossings but are not sure why they are organized in that manner, come and let us elucidate. We’ll look at a lot of those, and teach you to do it yourself.

“Track B” will be terribly exciting, and I’m going to be sorry to miss it myself, because last year Jerry Burce did such an outstanding job of laying a foundation for preaching Matthew during Year A, and he is back by popular demand to do the same thing for the Gospel of Mark.

Not only that. In the afternoon, a couple of Bonhoeffer experts (Matthew Becker, Richard Bliese) will be leading a seminar on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who—did I mention it before?—wrote a book about discipleship. I’m worried about missing their insights, because when we start the conference proper the next day I’m likely to say something dumb like the guy who doesn’t have quite the latest smartphone, and everybody will be looking at me like “boy, was that inane.”

I am taking measures, however. With good friend and neighbor Pastor Steve Albertin, I am studying Dietrich’s book with about twenty lay people from our congregations, and finding out how little I learned when I read it as a 23-year-old teenager and moved on.

You know, buying those books listed as preparation material and reading them before the conference would be two days well spent. Bishop Stephen Neill always said, “A conference is only as good as the

preparation.” That Philip Cary book is interesting, too, about practical things Christians *don’t* have to do! Lighten your packs, pilgrims! (Remember who said his yoke was easy.)

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“If.”

I like Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of Mark 8:31, to the effect that when setting the terms of discipleship, Jesus begins remarkably by setting them entirely free once more. “*If* [emphasis his] any want to become my followers,” Jesus says. Following him is not something that is self-evident, *even among the disciples* [emphasis mine]. No one can be forced, no one can even be expected to follow him.

So I guess no one should be forced or even expected to come to the conference, since the disciple is not above the master. Still, we wish you would. (Am I coming across whiny?)

N is for Navigare necesse est,

vivere non est necesse.

The title of my sermon, a few weeks ago. Plutarch tells us that Pompey the Younger ordered his sailors to leave the coast of Africa, directly into the path of a deadly storm, with these words: “To sail is necessary; to live is not.” Discipleship is optional? Necessary? Dangerous? Fun? What!?

Let me share the last few paragraphs of that sermon. You can find the whole thing somewhere on my church’s website: www.indylutheran.org.

Of course, this is not merely a wise saying. When Jesus teaches us that it is better to give than to receive, or that those who mourn shall be comforted, he is not just dropping aphorisms about. He himself is promising, and guaranteeing to us, that our God will save those who sail out of the harbor by faith.

That is what he himself did! Given the choice “to sit it out or dance” (we read in Philippians), though he was already God, he did not consider equality with God something to be clung to, but gambled it all, sailed, emptied himself, and became human, and risked that as well by becoming a slave, and threw that away as well by becoming a convict, and got executed, losing it all on our behalf. But (shocker!) God raised him up and gave him not just five additional talents, but the name that is above every name . . .

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Every calling of Christ is a calling towards death.” And it looked like certain death when Pompey told his sailors to sail. The difference, of course, is that while Pompey was calling his men to roll the dice with courage, facing the real prospect of death, we do not roll the dice when we sail. Our faith is that when God is calling us, he is actually calling us away from death, and towards life itself. For life is not mere survival; it cannot successfully be hoarded.

Of course, it is not necessary to sail. It is also not necessary to be an investor, like the characters in the parable. God calls us into different ventures, in various venues. Look at the stories about the many different kinds of people with whom Jesus interacted in the Gospels. The common thread is not that he called them all to become preachers. But he called them all to receive the spirit of God, so that they might work in God’s ways to heal the world. The God who has given us every gift wants to fill our sails and move us towards joy and peace, and life. Amen.

The **G**race of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your Spirit. Consider the Crossings Community and our work, and support it if you will, by sending us your gift in the enclosed envelope; or online, where there is a link for electronic donation.

See you in Belleville, I hope.

Marcus Felde

Pre-Conference Schedule

Sunday, January 22

Arrival and Check-in	3:00 pm and after
Reception for early arrivals	6:00 pm
Introduction: Why Crossings?	7:00 pm

Monday, January 23

Morning Prayer	9:00 am
Workshops	9:30 am – 5:00 pm

OPTION I:

You **Can** Handle the Truth (Crossings Method)

OPTION II

Reading St. Mark (morning)
Thought & Challenge of Bonhoeffer (afternoon)

Conference Schedule:

Monday, January 23

Arrival and Check-In	3:00 pm and after
Dinner & Introductions	6:00
Steven Kuhl: Keynote 1	7:00
Evening Prayer	8:15
Wine & Cheese Reception	8:30

Tuesday, January 24

Continental Breakfast	7:00 am
Morning Prayer	7:45
Mark Mattes	8:15
Robert Kolb	9:15
Round table w/ Kolb & Mattes	10:30
Steven Kuhl: Keynote 2	11:30
Lunch	12:30 pm
Prayer at Midday	1:30
Matthew Becker	1:45
Martin Wells	2:45
Round Table w/ Becker & Wells	4:00
Dinner	6:00
Eucharist: Lori Cornell, Preacher	7:30
Wine & Cheese Reception	8:30

Wednesday, January 25

Continental Breakfast	7:00 am
Morning Prayer	7:45
Steven Kuhl: Keynote 3	8:00
Kathryn Kleinhans	9:00
Felix Meylahn	10:15
Round table w/ Kleinhans & Meylahn	11:15

Printing and mailing this quarterly is paid for by your gifts, thank you. If you are a reader but not yet a giver, we can wait. When you are ready to be both, we won't object.