

**1 Peter 3:15**August 30, 2009 – Special Service <sup>1</sup>

Pastor Mark A. Cordes

**Always Be Prepared**

In the name of Jesus, our ever ready Savior, dear students and parents, faculty and staff, and especially my dear son Joel and my classmate Pastor Tom Schneider:

It was almost a panic attack about 30,000 feet above Montana in the Fall of 1971. My first flight at age fourteen, and I was not prepared for whom I was to meet at the Bismarck International Airport. My father and brother had left me overnight in Portland, to shuttle to the airport, but I had no idea who would take me to Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Mobridge, SD. We were new to the Wisconsin Synod, and the nearest high school was 1500 miles away. Was it worth it to be the first of seven children to leave home? Time and eternity say, “Yes!” a thousand times over. I could not realize then what a wonderful Christian education would continue for me in WELS schools. And now with scores of area high schools like this one the blessings continue as you well know, Joel and Pastor Schneider. For God has prepared you to give an answer in lessons and sermons to the great hope that we have in Christ.

What can prevent us from being prepared as pastors and teachers? First, we must confess our sin of laziness. It didn’t seem so bad for me to try to opt out of freshman Latin. But the NLA registrar was the Latin teacher. Don’t we all have to look back on laziness in our schoolwork as if not trying our best with God-given gifts is not really a bad sin? By our laziness we crucified the Son of God all over again. Our God says through Peter, **“Be holy, because I am holy.”** (1:16) **“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”** (Hebrews 12:14) If it weren’t for faithful pastors and teachers proclaiming true holiness by faith in Christ, who of us could ever repent and **“be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”**? Nerves alone would make us belligerent and unkind with our faith, except that our dear Lord kindly commands, **“But do this with gentleness and respect.”**

We need Christian teachers to help us not only toe the line on faithful preparation, but bow the knee in humble adoration of Christ who is our hope in everything. Some high school students actually think they won’t need math and science, geometry and geography, or more religion classes when “we’ve had so much already!” Sometimes adults act as if we were born knowing these things. Sins of pride can always get in the way of being prepared. We tend to forget God’s gift of solid teachers who not only taught us, but helped us learn. We forget our God always prepares us for more than academic exercises.

Sometimes what hinders our preparation is the business of campus and classroom. We forget the big picture of where our students are going with the Gospel in God’s great world. More than ever, we have to prepare them for the global reach of Christ’s Great Commission to **“Preach the Gospel to all creation.”** (Mark 16:15) I praise God that, thanks to faithful teachers, even a lowly parish pastor could visit China back in November of 2005. Like so many of our WELS youth, I was **“prepared to give an answer...for the hope that is in [me].”** A morning I thought would be boring, a knock on my door, and a quick walk half a mile through crowded streets to a Seminary where the teacher said as I walked up to the lectern, “We’re in 1 Corinthians 1. You teach. And give us the Greek too.”

Compared to this beautiful school, theirs is just rented space from the YMCA in a city of over 8 million people. But the students were so eager to learn God’s Word. One Chinese boy whose American name is Daniel ran back to the dormitory for a sheet to hang over blackboard for my projector screen. In love for Christ, Daniel carried my briefcase and projector everywhere he could. One young woman kept two cups of hot tea revolving for my voice. And a few nights later when I was told about thirty minutes in advance, “Tonight you teach on relationships,” advice from one of my daughters prepared a Power Point of pictures to tell my hope through a translator: “My Family... My Work...My Best Friend.”

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<sup>1</sup> Michigan LHS Opening Service, Installation of Mr. Joel Cordes, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ministry Pastor Tom Schneider

Strangers off the street in Communist China heard about my Savior Jesus. And all the work of my English and religion teachers bore fruit in ways none but God could imagine in His grace.

But you know how is, Joel and Pastor Schneider. You may well master your material, but how will the Master master your life and ministry? The Lord's Apostle Peter helps us here too. As WELS pastors we've been prepared to see behind the language barrier to the original Greek which the Holy Spirit inspired in the New Testament. When Peter says, "***Always be prepared to give an answer,***" he uses the word *απολογία*, but that's "apology" in the old meaning, as in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. Hauled into ecclesiastical court the first Lutherans in Germany had Melancthon write the Apology, the defense which means, "We're absolutely not sorry, and here are more Bible reasons why we steadfastly defend this faith in Christ alone even in the face of persecution and death." It reminds me of WELS students in public universities with a fine reputation for firm but respectful answers to humanistic professors. Like one in Massachusetts who said he'd help their final exam with his magical Shamanism. One WELS woman told him she would not let that bother her. Wasn't he shocked when she got the highest grade ever, 103%, on a test he bragged was impossible? Her answer was more than academic.

***"Always be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks you to give the reason,"*** the NIV translates. But the Greek here for "***reason***" is not what some pastors might guess. It's not *λογισω*, as in logical reckoning with all the finest arguments. This is for "***everyone who asks you to give the λογος for the hope that you have.***" Even if you don't know Greek, you can figure out *λογος* from the most famous passage right before today's Gospel in John 1: "***In the beginning was the Λογος, and the Λογος was with God, and the Λογος was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through the Λογος all things were made; without the Λογος nothing was made that has been made.***" You all know the *Λογος* because "***the Λογος became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Begotten, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***" (John 1:1-3,14 TPA)

Isn't Christ, the *Λογος*, our glorious hope that shines in our lives no matter how deep and dark our circumstances? One of the brightest examples in the Bible is the Jewish slave girl held captive in the home of the enemy general Naaman. What a surprise in our Old Testament lesson that she would speak up and tell her mistress, "***If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.***" (2 Kings 5:3 NIV) Most slaves would want their enemy master dead. By her powerful answer in the living hope of the coming Christ, Naaman was healed not only of his physical leprosy, but the sin inside that eats away our soul like leprosy. "***Always be prepared***" doesn't mean having all the latest and greatest arguments for every question. Philip gave the classic answer to Nathaniel's impossible, "***Can anything good come from [Nazareth]?***" Philip answered, "***Come and see.***"

***"Come and see"*** this living hope in a school where teachers are animated by it from their early morning prayers and personal devotions, sitting quietly for even a verse or two with God alone and them. "***Come and see***" how this hope can comfort a student feeling so guilty and worthless. How his eyes light up and her tears are dried when God says again through a faithful teacher or pastor: "***Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you***" (5:7 NIV) Our living Hope who washed away your sins with His holy, precious blood, teaches students and faculty to comfort each other with living hope in Christ.

Twenty-five years seems like a long time until you blink and here you are. But it's one day at a time to "***always be prepared to answer everyone who asks you to give the Word for the hope that is in you.***" How do we remember teachers like the one we called "Smiley," because he rarely did. Today students who feared "Smiley Latin," tell how he counseled, comforted, paid tuition for struggling students. Or "Turk," whose student-players at his funeral, men with tears in their eyes, remember how he cared. Coach Thomson's grown children tell of finding him alone in prayer, reading his Bible. "***All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.***" ***And this is the word that was preached to you.***" (1:24f NIV) Now God gives you another year to proclaim this hope to another generation. Let praise overflow lips and life as the dear Holy Spirit comforts and strengthens one and all with hope – always prepared. Amen.