For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance and for this we labor and strive, that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:4-16)

In the name of our Savior Jesus, dear friends,

Everybody loves sports. I know that’s an exaggeration, but for the most part I think it’s a true statement. How many boys DON’T grow up dreaming of playing in the NFL or NBA? And how many girls wish they could be a gymnastics or soccer star on a Wheaties box? Sports are popular. And I suppose it’s not a bad thing that we encourage our kids to be active in sports. After all, it’s good exercise, which counts for something. Why, even the Bible says so. Paul told Timothy in our second lesson today that “physical training [was] of some value.”

But before we get too carried away with the Biblical benefits of athletics, we should remember what Paul said next in that verse. “Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

If physical training is beneficial, spiritual “exercise” is much more beneficial. If we are concerned about our children’s physical well-being, shouldn’t we be much more concerned with their spiritual well-being? And if we encourage our children when they dream of a career in professional athletics…shouldn’t we encourage our children much more to consider pursuing a career in a much greater profession—becoming a pastor or teacher in God’s church?

So, based on Paul’s words to Timothy, we’re going to consider the question: 

**Why should we encourage people to PURSUE PUBLIC MINISTRY?**

And Paul gives us two answers:

1. It’s good for them
2. It’s good for God’s Church

**I. Pursuing public ministry is good for those who pursue it**

Sometimes when a family is expecting a child, people will ask the parents whether they are hoping for a boy or a girl. Almost every time, the parents give the same answer: “All we’re hoping for is a healthy baby.” Later, as the child is growing up, parents’ fondest wish might change a little. They might say, “What I really want is for her to be a good person, to know right from wrong.” As Christians, our greatest
hope for our children is a little bit different. We say, “All I really want is for him to grow up to know Jesus.”

Isn’t that the greatest hope and dream we could have for our children? Isn’t our greatest prayer for our children not that they become rich and successful, but that they remain faithful to their Savior? Isn’t it our dream that our children can continue in the true faith after we’re gone—and that they will live with us and with their Savior forever and ever in glory?

Well, if we are concerned about our children’s spiritual welfare, we could hope for nothing better than for them to PURSUE PUBLIC MINISTRY. Paul told a young pastor named Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching…be diligent in these matters, give yourself wholly to them.” How many of you have the opportunity to read your Bible while you’re “on the clock” at work? For most of you that would be grounds for docking your pay, or worse. But for me and our Christian teachers, that’s not true, is it? We have the opportunity to devote time and attention to learning, as well as teaching, the most important truths about life and eternity. And that is a blessing, first of all, for us. What better opportunity could there be for a person to grow in faith and the knowledge of God’s Word that by doing the work that’s expected of you every day?

Paul told Timothy that by doing these things he would be “a good minister [literally, a good servant] of Christ Jesus.” I can’t think of a job description that I would rather have than that one—a servant of Christ Jesus. And the amazing thing about all this is that God didn’t need to have pastors and teachers to spread his message of salvation. God could have done it himself or sent his angels to do it, and I’m sure they would have done a fine job of it! But God was so gracious to us that he not only sent his Son to pay for our sins upon a cross, but he gives us the privilege of sharing that message with other redeemed sinners. To be able to make that work your livelihood is an incredible privilege and blessing for those who are called to that ministry. Paul said, “Watch your life and doctrine closely…if you do, you will save both yourself…”

II. Pursuing public ministry is good for God’s Church

“…and your hearers.” And this is the second reason we ought to pray for and encourage people to PURSUE PUBLIC MINISTRY. It’s not only for their own good, but for the good of God’s Church. Because God uses the message of pastors and teachers to save people for eternity.

As the year 2006 draws to a close, has the need for faithful preachers and teachers of God’s Word grown any smaller lately? Are Christians struggling less with the temptation to try a taste of the world’s poisonous immorality? Are there any fewer sinners under God’s wrath who need to be told to repent—and taught about their Savior who died so that they could live with God forever? Have marriages and families gotten stronger, or has Satan given up trying to lure Christians away from their Savior? And has Jesus who died on a cross stopped loving and forgiving sinners? I think you know the answer. None of those things has changed. What may change, however, is that we may start to take that precious Gospel, and the preaching of that Gospel, for granted.

11 years ago our Wisconsin Synod combined its two worker training colleges into one school—Martin Luther College. It is the school through which every WELS pastor and teacher is to be trained or certified. There are three members of Peace that are currently enrolled at that college of ministry. But today that college’s enrollment is at its lowest level since it opened its doors. With record numbers of pastors nearing retirement age, the number of students entering the field of pastoral study is the lowest in years. And our church body’s financial support for that school and its students is just a fraction of what it was a few years ago.
Those problems don’t seem to have any easy solutions. But in reality the solution is quite simple. We need to do just what Jesus told his disciples to do: “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Mt. 9:38) God continues to give his people the gifts they need to become faithful spiritual overseers, preachers and teachers of his Word. And he continues to give his people the gifts they need to support the training of those who are gifted and willing to serve.

And he continues to bless the message that his servants bring. “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.” Offering hope—real hope to a dying world. That’s what God sends his public ministers to do. To sit in a Christian classroom and explain day by day the story of the love of Jesus to a six-year-old, or to a sixteen-year-old for that matter. To preach, teach, counsel, and comfort people, ordinary people just like yourself, with the good news about a life that will never end.

Is it always easy? Is public ministry all fun and games? No, it’s a heavy responsibility to be, as Paul said, “an example to all the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and purity.” Does it mean all happy endings and no disappointments? No. Paul told Timothy that it would be a struggle, that it would be frustrating, that it would be hard work. But it’s good work. And it’s work that has God’s promise: “Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

**Conclusion**

100 years ago last spring a Lutheran pastor in a small Michigan town made a suggestion to a family of one of the students he was confirming. The family was not extraordinary or particularly well-to-do—Dad worked in a furniture factory, and the family had ten children. But in spite of this the pastor suggested to the parents that they send one of their sons, who was being confirmed that year, out of the state to a school called Northwestern in Watertown, Wisconsin. He said, “I think you ought to encourage this one to study to be a pastor.”

God led that family and that young man to take that advice. He did become a pastor for all of 50 years. Not only that, but he also had two sons who both became pastors. And he also had a grandson who happens to be standing in front of you today.

That’s my story, or a little bit of it, anyway. But I hope and pray that there be a lot of stories like it—among you. Because the hymn writer asked a good question for us when he wrote:

*Hark! The voice of Jesus crying, “Who will go and work today?”
Fields are white and harvests waiting—who will bear the sheaves away?
Loud and long the Master’s calling—rich rewards he offers you!
Who will answer, gladly saying “Here am I, send me, send me!”?*

Pray that that question is answered. Pray that it is answered among us! Amen.