



Planning Ahead

Opening Prayer

Almighty God and Lord, as You have called us to labor in Your vineyard, so grant us now Your presence. Enlighten and guide us by Your Word that in all matters of deliberation we may always consider the best interests of Your Church and this congregation. Let Your Holy Spirit rule and direct our hearts that, in the spirit of Christian love, we may present and discuss matters and be kindly disposed toward one another, to the end that all we say and do may please You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

How would you summarize these verses (Gen. 41:14-49), including what led up to this episode in Joseph's life?

This is a central part to the larger well-known story of Joseph. After Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because of their jealousy, Joseph wound up in prison because of false accusations against him. There, he interpreted the dream of a man who would become Pharaoh's cupbearer. When Pharaoh had his dreams of the cows and the corn that nobody else could interpret, his cupbearer told him about Joseph, who was then called to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Joseph told Pharaoh that the Lord was revealing what was about to happen. There would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph encouraged Pharaoh to plan ahead for the years of famine during the years of plenty. Pharaoh appointed Joseph to oversee these preparations.

What happens by the Lord's blessing and as a result of Joseph's planning and work?

The famine came to all the lands, but there was bread in Egypt because of Joseph's work and planning (Gen. 41:54). The people of Egypt and people from all over the world came to buy food in Egypt. As a result, Egypt became the richest kingdom in the world (41:56-57). Joseph's brothers eventually came to buy bread in Egypt. Joseph tested his brothers to see if they had mistreated their youngest brother, Benjamin, as they had mistreated him. When Joseph knew that his brothers hadn't mistreated Benjamin, he was glad to be reconciled to his brothers. Eventually, Joseph's family moved to Egypt so that he could provide for them. This had been the Lord's plan to preserve life and continue to be faithful to His promise to send the Savior (45:5-7).

How could this biblical example be helpful for us as we think about congregational partnerships?

In discussions of congregational partnerships, people might only think in terms of their present situation. However, it's better to be thinking ahead and planning in advance. Congregations are often 50 or 75 or 100 years old or more. We should take the long view when setting up congregations and partnerships. Also, the work of setting up congregational partnerships takes time, and it's best to set these up before we "have to." Ideally, a congregational partnership can be discussed and planned at a time when congregations can maximize benefits and strengthen the ministry in a way that will advance the mission of God. (See also Luke 12:54-56, "Interpreting the Time.")

What have you learned about partnerships in the Gospel from this passage or study?

The hope is that participants will learn from Joseph and see the wisdom of planning ahead when it comes to congregational partnerships. Perhaps this means that congregations can work ahead and from a stronger position. This will likely benefit the ministry more than setting up a partnership at a time when the only desire is to keep the doors open.

What can you or your congregation do to work with other “members,” considering this Word from God?

Answers will vary. This might range from holding some joint activities with a neighboring LCMS church to forming an official congregational partnership.

With whom can you talk about ways to promote partnerships in the Gospel?

Answers will vary. This might involve talking to other churches or leaders in the community about how a congregation can work together with others to benefit the community. It might involve conversations with leaders of area LCMS congregations about a joint activity like a youth event, a retreat for some different groups in the church, or hosting a seminar or circuit forum. Finally, conversations might be had with area pastors, elders, or council members of other area LCMS congregations about exploring a formal partnership arrangement. (See also Prov. 15:22, “Without counsel plans fail ...”)

Closing Prayer

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.