

Order of Worship for June 14, 2026

Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

Opening Hymn: “O Christ Who Called the Twelve” – Hymn #856

Confession and Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

ALL: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

P: Christ Jesus, You have given us to do ministry, to be Your servant in sharing Your Gospel to the whole world. But so often we fail.

C: **We think, “Let someone else do it.” “I don’t know what to say.” “I don’t have enough time.” “I have enough just taking care of me.” “I don’t know where to start.” We pay church workers to do that.”**

P: You have promised that whoever is ashamed of You, You will be ashamed of in heaven.

ALL: Lord, have mercy.

P: Jesus Christ died on the cross to take away our sins. Now He has given to us His Church the gifts of God’s Word, the forgiveness of sins, Baptism, and Holy Communion to bring the Gospel into the lives of people we meet every day and to people all over the world. And He gives us His servants, called ministers, to equip us for His work. As a called and ordained servant of Christ Jesus, I forgive You all Your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: Let the peoples praise You, O God;

C: **let all the peoples praise You!**

P: Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,

C: **for You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.**

P: Let the peoples praise You, O God;

C: **let all the peoples praise You!**

P: The earth has yielded its increase;

C: **God, our God, shall bless us.**

P: God shall bless us;

C: **let all the ends of the earth fear Him!**

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: Let the peoples praise You, O God;

C: let all the peoples praise You.

Prayer of the Day:

P: Almighty, eternal God, in the Word of Your apostles and prophets You have proclaimed to us Your saving will. Grant us faith to believe Your promises that we may receive eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

Hymn of Praise: “Hark the Voice of Jesus Crying” – Hymn #826

Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 19:2–8

R: [The people of Israel] set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle: Romans 5:6–15

R: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

R: This is the Word of our Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:35—10:8

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 9th and 10th chapters.

C: Glory be to You, O Lord.

P: Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

And Jesus called to Him His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay."

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Children's Message

Sermon Hymn: "*Spread the Reign of God, the Lord*" – Hymn #830

Sermon: "*Laborers in the Harvest*" - **Matthew 9:35—10:8**

One of the surprise breakout movies this year is *The Sheep Detectives*. After a group of sheep discover their shepherd has been murdered, they work together to solve the case. They can do so because their shepherd read murder mysteries to them every night, and so they know what they need to do to solve the case. The challenges come from the fact that they're sheep, and they have to convince the humans to do the investigating and to put the clues together. While they succeed in the end, they also show that they need a shepherd. They've never left their meadow, and struggle with crossing the road. They can't protect themselves from a neighboring shepherd who is partnering with the local butcher to raise sheep for meat, not just wool. They

can't protect themselves from wolves. They can be on their own for a time, but to truly have an abundant life, they need a shepherd. And in the happy ending, they get one.

That's what Jesus sees as he looks out at the crowd. He sees sheep without a shepherd. And as one of my pastor friends says, "What do you call sheep without a shepherd? Lunch!" That's right: lunch. The Bible warns us that "your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). One of my theology professors reminded us that the devil is more like a panther, though, hiding in the shadows ready to pounce when we least expect it. The threats in this world are numerous. Without a shepherd to protect them, the sheep are going to die or scatter to starve in the wilderness.

Sheep need a shepherd. So, what did Jesus do for the "harassed and helpless" crowds? First, he told his disciples to pray for more shepherds; then he called the twelve apostles to be shepherds over his flock. Earlier in the chapter we find the call of Matthew. Back in Matthew 4 we see the calling of the fishermen; Peter, Andrew, James, and John. After the prayer for more workers, we see them sent out. They pray, and then are the answers to their prayers.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. A survey a couple of years ago revealed fifty-eight percent of Iowans attend religious services less than once a year. Just 23% of Iowans are going to a house of worship on a weekly basis. Students come from all over the country and all over the world to Ames. While some are seeing an uptick in religiosity among younger people, especially young men, there's debate over if young men are becoming more religious or they're just not leaving as quickly as young women. Political scientist Ryan Burge notes that recent surveys have shown that Christianity's decline has plateaued, and that Gen Z seems only slightly less religious than the millennials. Nones, the share of Americans who claim to be atheist, agnostic, or have no religion in particular has continued to decline, from 36% in 2021 to 32% of the population in 2024.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. There are literally tens of millions of people in the United States who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They are literally without hope in this world unless someone preaches the Word of God to them. But there aren't enough pastors, missionaries, and evangelists to get the work done. So, what does Jesus ask his Church to do? To pray for more workers in the harvest.

I have a pastor friend who likes to call this The Lord's Other Prayer. We know the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. But that's not the only prayer Jesus gives his disciples to pray. He also tells us to pray for more laborers in the harvest—more pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries to preach and teach the Gospel of salvation.

The Bible says that God gives pastors to the Church. The Office of the Holy Ministry is a gift to God's people. The sheep need a shepherd. So, God supplies: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..." (Ephesians 4:11-12). Pastors are a gift sent by God to feed, lead, and equip God's people. Of course, this takes a bit more importance to us in these coming days, as we prepare for Pastor Mark's retirement and going through a vacancy and call process.

The idea of a congregation without a pastor is as absurd as the picture of a flock of sheep without a shepherd. And the idea of an individual Christian not being part of a congregation led by a pastor is doubly absurd. The Bible is very clear that people in the Church need each other. We need fellowship, (*koinonia*)—life together. A life apart from the Body of Christ ends up as spiritual death. There are no lone ranger sheep out in the world. Why not? Because a lonely sheep is a dead sheep. Remember, sheep without a shepherd are called lunch.

When farmers harvest their crops, there are lots of different jobs that needed to be done, and the church isn't any different. There are many people who support the mission and ministry of our church. The LCMS recognizes 8 church work vocations: pastor, Lutheran school teacher, director of Christian education, director of church ministries, director of Christian outreach, director of family life ministry, director of parish music, and deaconess. The Office of International Missions recruits others to support the work of missionaries, such as project managers, communication specialists, volunteer coordinators, and business managers in addition to theological educators, teachers, church planters, and deaconesses. Others are volunteers, such as president, treasurer, Sunday school teacher, snack server, and lightbulb changer. Judy Newhouse has been doing some praying for VBS volunteers as the number of kids registered for our Vacation Bible School keeps rising. All of these are important roles for the proper function of the church. Every member in the Body of Christ matters.

Yet the sad reality of our time is that very few men seek the noble task of the call to ministry. Quite plainly, pastors are becoming a dying breed. Across denominations in America, pastors are retiring from the ministry faster than they are entering it.

When I began studying at Concordia Seminary in St Louis, we had about 150 guys entering in the Fall 2003. We were the largest class in thirty years, and one of the largest classes since the 1950's. When we graduated four years later, in 2007, I had classmates who were waiting to receive their first call, and others were encouraged to continue on to further education. This year, one hundred fifty congregations asked for candidates to serve them as pastors. About seventy-five of those calls were filled between both LCMS seminaries, St Louis and Fort Wayne. It's sad and discouraging, especially for those congregations who asked for a pastor and did not receive one. What are they to do? Congregations need pastors, and pastors need congregations. And it's not just those hundred fifty congregations that needed pastors. About a

thousand LCMS congregations are vacant, and we are producing less than a hundred new pastors every year.

This sounds dire. It sounds potentially catastrophic. What is the church to do? What are we to do? Now, as a side note, I should say that the situation isn't actually as dire as that sounds. There are pastors who want to serve who don't have calls now for a variety of reasons, and the vast majority of those thousand congregations are vacant because they are unwilling or unable to pay a pastor a living wage. Nevertheless, Jesus answers the question of what we are to do quite clearly in today's Gospel reading. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The answer is to pray. The action demanded of the church is more than human busyness and effort. Yes, there are efforts to raise up more church workers through scholarships and other programs. Yes, there are efforts to make training more affordable, more online, more contextual. That will be one of the big areas of discussion at the LCMS National Convention in July. But new programs and approaches won't fully solve the problem. Praying reminds us there are things that need doing in the world that are beyond our ability to accomplish solely by our own effort and programs. Thoughts and prayers may be criticized as a response to tragedy or crisis, but sometimes it is all we can do.

Jesus promised Peter that He (Jesus) would build his Church (Matthew 16:18). And so he will. He can do that with us or without us, but I pray that he will do it with us. So, what are we called to do? We are called to pray. Pastor Mark Gerken, the former missions executive for Iowa District West, had an alarm set on his phone that would go off at 10:02 every morning because of the Luke parallel of this passage, Luke 10:02. It was his reminder to stop and pray for workers in the harvest. You can do that too, or set it for 9:37 since we've heard Matthew's account today.

There is a pastoral shortage, and there always will be. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" will always be the Word of God. It will always be true. And the solution to this shortage will always be the same. "Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

The same Lord who calls pastors to His church who give out the eternal gifts of life and salvation is the one who Himself went to the cross to win those gifts for you. He suffered what your sin deserved. He won life and forgiveness for all people. He declared your forgiveness and the completion of all that was necessary for your salvation while hanging from the wood of a cross.

There is no crisis to be averted. The Lord's got this, and more importantly, the Lord's got you. He's got the nail marks to prove it. Rejoice, people loved by God. Your sins are forgiven, and you are free.

Creed: 3rd Article of Creed and Explanation

Responses:

P: No matter how young or old we are, we are all working for the Lord.

C: Come, let us labor for the Lord.

P: There is still so much work to be done getting out the Gospel to unbelievers near and far.

C: Come, let us labor for the Lord.

P: There is still so much work to be done caring for the sick, the aged, the dying, the homeless, the hungry, the poor and the orphan.

C: Come, let us labor for the Lord.

P: There is still so much work to be done building up the Church, allowing it to grow and develop and expand.

C: Come, let us labor for the Lord.

P: There is still so much work to be done to teach our children the ways of God.

C: Come, let us labor for the Lord.

P: There is still so much work that the Lord has in store for us.

C: Come, let us labor for the Lord and serve Him with joy.

Hymn: "How Clear is Our Vocation, Lord" – Hymn #853

Prayers:

P: Watchful Father, you have sent us ...

C: We are sent like lambs into the midst of wolves.

P: Prince of Peace, You have directed us on our way ...

C: to spread your message of peace ... to live your mandate of love.

P: Protect us from all that would thwart us on our mission ...

C: The snakes that spread their venomous deceit, the scorpions with their stinging distraction, the wolves that prowl to attack your will.

P: And lead us to spread Your good, good news—

C: "Peace to this house!"

P: And again--

C: "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

P: Then we will be filled with joy ...

C: for our names are written in heaven.

(Other Petitions)

The Lord's Prayer:

Closing Prayer:

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“Your Hand, O Lord, in Days of Old”* – **Hymn #846**

Postlude: