

# All...Preached the Word Wherever They Went

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100 million times? A billion? No, by your 73rd birthday your heart will have beat almost three billion beats. That many people have not had a chance to hear of Jesus Christ in today's world which just surpassed five billion souls. Not statistics, but like us they are breathing, real people except that they will live and die without hope and without God unless Christians reach them with the good news of a Savior. About 106 million U.S. unchurched, including 40 million in the urban underclass, are numbered among them in our most evangelized of any nation in history. WELS is a bit below the national average of sending one missionary out for every 20 pastors at home. Since world population is 20 times that of the United States, the opposite ratio could well prevail. With 60-80 percent of the world's "trained" Christians and 70-90 percent of the church's material resources reservoired in the U.S.A., the task is not only for professional world missionaries, no matter how many are commissioned to "go into all the world," as our representatives. There have to be other ways and means.

All lay people are ministers. If any of us have the privilege of serving as public ministers in the Lord's Church, we were called from among the laity by God through his people. When our calling to a special ministry concludes, we will continue to be lay people. The titles that distinguish types of service in the church are descriptive of our work, and sometimes honorary, but are neither earned nor permanently bestowed. While we do not wish to downplay the divine call into the public ministry, let it be emphasized that every Christian is a full-time minister. This remains true even though he may only seem to serve part-time because of life's obligations and priorities. This basic function cannot be delegated, since each Christian ministers in ways that are common to all Christians. For unique service, including that of foreign mission work, fellow believers with differing and special gifts are called and sent out. Does that end the mission ministry of lay people? Must only skilled missionaries do mission work? As an incentive to all of God's people and for encouragement to broader mission activity, let us use a theme for this essay suggested from Acts 8:1&4:

## ALL...PREACHED THE WORD WHEREVER THEY WENT

In tres partes divisus est:

- I. Lay Ministry is Not Something New
- II. An Evaluation of WELS Lay Ministry at Home and Overseas
- III. Some Possible Extensions of Lay Ministry in World Missions

The church of Jesus Christ early learned about lay ministry. Jerusalem and its surrounding environs had provided a growing membership. But when a severe persecution set in beginning with Stephen's martyrdom, thousands of believers fled or were dispersed. Laity of the infant church took their faith with them to new regions of Judea and Samaria. Their "official" leaders, the apostles, remained behind at headquarters shepherding Jerusalem sufferers. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." These ordinary, everyday, informal Christians testified to their faith in Jesus Christ. They were lay preachers deeply concerned for the lost. The church was spread, at least for a while, without benefit of clergy.

### **I. Lay Ministry Is Not New**

The early church was at its best when it served as a caring, sharing, sacrificing and open-hearted fellowship of believers. Each member was more conscious of responsibilities and opportunities not unlike the attitude in many small mission churches today. But with growth and nominal Christianity an indifference

developed among the laity and an imbalance caused by delegation of church work to professionals. Throughout ensuing history in the Christian church the pendulum, which never stops in the middle, has swung from extreme to extreme. The clergy at times has been elevated and even claimed an "indelible character." Priests arrogantly claimed their superiority to the laymen by divine right. When clergy dominate, the church becomes an institution simply to be maintained by the laity. Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches typify this in a setting of actors (priests) and observers (laymen). Our churches are not immune to these developments. A pastor-centered church happens where the laity takes no other religious obligation except to listen to a sermon once a week. That can soon become similar to a stifling visit at a museum.

At the opposite pole we see many protestant and sectarian churches churning out guidelines for lay ministry and promoting the use of special charismatic gifts. Claiming to be scriptural, successful and satisfying, they are often little more than appeals to ego, emotion and enterprise. Today with heavy emphasis on lay involvement, we need to maintain our balance against another extreme. An aroused laity in a spirit of anti-clericalism, can bypass pastors as it enthusiastically goes out to conquer the world for Christ. Prayer groups and house churches create the norm. Missionaries, too, are looked upon as a curiosity from a bygone era. As in every historical trend, there are actions and reactions to be evaluated. So let's discover again and apply some scriptural principles and Christian judgment to the subject of lay ministry.

### *Members of Christ's Body*

We think of the church as a group of people rather than an institution or set of buildings. The very word laity from the Greek laos, means people who were of the same stock and nation. In the New Testament the term was loaded by the inspired writers to mean the community of Christians, the "people of God." Yet the favored term for the Christian Church was the Greek word ekklesia, a congregation or assembly called out of the world and united in the body of Christ. Christians are compared to members of a body which is subject to its head. Christ in this case is the head calling signals for the church. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church..." (Col. 1:17,18) "Christ feeds and cares for the church – for we are members of his body." (Eph. 5:30)

None of the members of the body dare assume that they are either superior or inferior. All parts serve a vital, though unequal, purpose to the well being of the body. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (I Cor. 12:17) Each member plays an important and essential part in the work of the church. In the analogy of the body a hand or foot is prevented from carrying out some extreme or uncontrollable action. It is connected to the head which both motivates and disciplines any of its functions. Christ, as the head of the church, directs it by means of His Holy Spirit in the Word.

### *Gathered Around Word and Sacraments*

And the work of each member of the church is the ministry of the Word for "God has committed unto us the message of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:19) Where the true Word is preached and the sacraments rightly administered, there is the church. The ministry of the Word occupies a central spot in the church. By word and sacrament we are made a part of the church, not by our own choice or doing. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (I Peter 2:9) This was to Luther a basic principle that enabled him to see the essence of the communion of saints in the fellowship of all Christ's people.

The Reformation also developed the truth that a man's everyday life as a Christian was an opportunity to show his faith by living in the fear of God. Being a church member was not restricted to attendance at mass, obedience to man-made laws and dues paying. Luther explained to his fellow pastors in the Catechism introduction: "Our ministry is a different thing now from what it was under the pope; it has now become earnest and wholesome." It was a whole breath of fresh air that had pervaded the church. The doctrine of good works was put in the proper relationship to faith. Man was saved by faith in Christ; out of appreciation he then spoke: "I have been crucified and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in

the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) He could approach God directly because he was a child of God. He needed no further priestly sacrifices. He was, in fact, a priest because every believer in Christ is a member of the priesthood.

### *The Universal Priesthood*

In the Old Testament, the Levitical order of priests functioned as intermediaries between God and man. This pattern was set aside by Christ, our true High Priest, "who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." (Heb. 7:26,27) This same Lord "loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father..." (Rev. 1:5,6) Believers are royal priests. Think of what this really means.

It is unmistakably clear that the term "priest" as used in the New Testament does not refer to officiants in a church building. It describes rather all Christians in their role as the priesthood of believers. Each and every believing person, regardless of race, nationality, color or station in life is equally a priest before God. He through Christ has access to the heavenly Father; he can serve his Savior together with all his fellow priests.

### *Usurped By Professionals*

This truth of the universal spiritual priesthood of all believers was blurred as early as the latter half of the second century A.D. Some bishops assumed for themselves and others were accorded special honors and privileges. A detailed system of sacerdotalism (priestcraft) gradually developed to sap the Christian church of its early strength. This corruption reached its peak in the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. The elevation of papal powers, a priestly hierarchy, monasticism and the entire system of holy orders was an abomination. Ordination was even claimed to confer an indelible character. The priesthood of Rome became a professional religious order, mediating between God and the ordinary laity. Laymen in that church, until recently, were more or less relegated to inactivity in any spiritual ministry.

Luther had some very sharp statements in rejecting the Roman distinction between the priesthood and the laity. "The pope has usurped the term 'priest' for his anointed and tonsured hordes. By this means they have separated themselves from the ordinary Christians and have called themselves uniquely the 'clergy of God,' God's heritage and chosen people, who must help other Christians by their sacrifice and worship. Yes, this is the reason why they shamelessly say in their decretal Translatio Sacerdotio that Christ has transferred His priestly office to St. Peter and that Saint Peter, in turn, has assigned it to the pope in Rome. Therefore the pope argues that he alone has the right and power to ordain and do what he will. Is it not a manifest lie and blasphemy to dare teach publicly that Christ has given away or transferred his priestly office"? (SL 5, 1034)

Since the Apostle Peter addresses the whole church as royal priests, Luther also said, "All Christians are priests in equal degree"; (L.W. 40:39) "Every baptized believer, women included, can baptize and administer the Word of Life"; (L.W. 20:25) "The keys, too, belong to the whole church and to each of its members." (L.W. 40:27) This challenge to Rome was a turning point in the restoration of the church which has never been the same since. Vast new areas of thought were opened up as the priesthood of all believers was taught and championed.

### *A Practicing Priesthood*

But as people in Luther's day had trouble applying this truth to their life, so church members today have a weak appreciation of what this means in their lives. It has been said that the universal priesthood is a teaching never lost by the church but not fully received. We need to encourage a wider practicing acceptance of this scriptural truth restored by the Reformation that all Christians are united in one ministry of the Word. Jesus told his followers they were to "go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

Previous to ascending he also said, "You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) These words were not meant for the disciples alone. Nor were they intended for a certain class in an apostolic succession. Peter encourages us as priests of God to "declare the praises of him who has called us." Witnessing to Christ is one of the ways in which the new life created in believers shows itself. It is my personal responsibility to publish what God has done for me in Christ, and to praise him for saving me. Through each believer the Holy Spirit invites others to know that they, too, can be called out of darkness into his kingdom of grace.

### *Laity and Clergy United*

In no way does this demean the public ministry. Some form of organization and a well prepared leadership must be developed. Such gifts of spiritual leadership were promised to the church by the ascended Lord. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Eph. 4:11,12)

These workers do not usurp the priesthood, but are called from its midst. "The public ministry," Luther stated, "is set within the church and not above it." There would be no public ministry if there were no Christian congregations. Only it can establish such an office and call candidates to fill it. But we should not assume that the universal priesthood and the public ministry are therefore identical. Clergy and laity are to work together side by side.

It is the call from the congregation that gives a minister in the church an office. To insist that the public ministry exists as an order bestowed by God or by apostolic succession directly upon individuals without action by a Christian congregation is a Romanizing, hierarchical tendency. Luther sharply distinguishes when he writes: "Though all of us are priests, we may and should not on that account all preach or teach and govern. However from the whole congregation some must be selected and chosen to whom this office is to be committed; and whoever holds this office is because of it, not a priest (like all the rest), but a servant, a minister, of all the others. And if he can or will no more preach or serve, he steps back into the common crowd, commits his office to someone else, and is now again no more than every common Christian. Behold, thus must the office of preaching, or the ministry, be distinguished from the universal priesthood of all baptized Christians. For this office is nothing more than a public service, which is delegated to one by the whole congregation, though all of them are priests together." (S.L. 5: 1037)

The ministry is conferred by God through the congregation. By issuing a divine call, they are not giving up anything, but rather they are establishing a representative office through which the Keys, entrusted to all believers, can be best administered. Calvin, father of Reformed Protestantism, introduced the doctrine of the ministry by writing, "Now He must speak of the order by which the Lord willed His Church to be governed." (Institutes, IV, 3, 1) His wording shows that he placed a higher estimate on the ministry as an order distinct from the congregation. He was opposed, for instance, to emergency baptism by laymen and assistance at the Lord's Supper for these were "a function of the ecclesiastical ministry." He maintained that "the power of the Keys is given to the ministry of the Church." (Institutes, IV, 1, 22) Thus while not approving of apostolic succession, he upheld the idea of rank and hierarchy in the church.

Luther, on the other hand, upheld the scriptural view that the power of the Keys was entrusted to all believers. (cf. Matthew 16:19 and John 20:21-23) The called worker exercises a priesthood which all Christians possess. It is carried out not instead of the people but alongside them, with them but not for them. If the Gospel is to reach all mankind, it must be preached by every person that has received it. There is no warrant for the attitude that sometimes prevails in a congregation, "we pay the preacher to do that for us." We cannot stress this enough. Called workers can no more carry out Christ's commission alone than scientists alone can put a spaceship on the moon.

## *Delegated Ministry*

We do "ordain," "induct" or "commission" workers to show that they are qualified and set aside for the work into which they have been called. This is in keeping with Acts 13:2,3, "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

This action in no way, however, sets called workers on a pedestal above the laity. That the highest respect should be given the office of the ministry and those who faithfully labor in it is another matter. "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." (I Tim. 5:17) It is because of the work, not the person, that this honor is accorded.

Another seeming contradiction arises in the nature of the office itself for the congregation and its called workers. On the one hand they are called to serve the people with the word as God's shepherds. On the other hand they are called to train the laity and to multiply their ministry. The very word minister means "servant." This does not mean that the public minister is to rob saints of their privilege and do all the work of serving single-handedly. All believers are ministering servants of God. They need to be trained to recognize and carry out such service as detailed by God in his Word. In this area the called servants become the trainers "to prepare God's people for works of service." (Eph. 4:12) This function of the ministry is not always emphasized, and again we could lose our balance and overemphasize it. When the church is considered only to be a pastor preaching and a congregation hearing there is an element missing. The public ministry flows from the ministry of all Christians (the Church) for the benefit of all Christians (the Church.) Even the terminology of lay and clergy is loaded with the secular overtones of amateur and professional. The difference between ministers and the public ministry is not one of status, but of function. In Colossians 4:11 Paul speaks to laymen as "my fellow workers for the kingdom of God."

Observing church history as an analyst Latourette makes this observation: "The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or made it a major part of their occupation, but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those they met in this natural fashion." And O. Feucht in his book Everyone a Minister (p. 54) states "Seminaries have a strategic task... The priesthood of believers can be lost by a single generation of pastors who think they alone are priests of the parish." Our pastors will best encourage a surge of lay leaders if the church is to faithfully fulfill its mission to the world. C. Toppe in an article about the NWC curriculum (WLQ, Vol. 83 No. 1) injects a further thought: "It should be noted that many 'practical' requirements in the parish ministry can be met better by trained and competent members of the congregation. Let the pastor concentrate on work for which his liberal arts theological education has prepared him well." To what extent are these distinctions descriptive of current WELS practice in its congregations and schools as exemplified in its pastors and missionaries?

This presentation will attempt in part...

## **II. An Evaluation of WELS Lay Ministry at Home and Overseas**

An unsigned essay in my file quoted a certain Dr. Paul Scherer who opined: "The church life of the majority of our people is characterized by a formal and passive receptivity and nothing more. The individual church member is usually nothing more than an animated receiving instrument and seldom becomes a broadcaster. We have DONE AGAIN what the Reformation UNDOED. We have professionalized religion. Having turned witness bearing into class prerogative and paying some man a salary to do it for us, we only come to church and listen." Could any of this be true of WELS, its congregations, its pastors, teachers and missionaries? We wish not.

### *What about WELS?*

And perhaps pointing out what we are doing well is more difficult than what we are not doing. It goes without saying that good preaching and example has brought many a current WELS congregation's laypeople to a flurry of God-pleasing interest and activity. Since there's always room for improvement, we will take ourselves to task. In an essay given at an evangelism convocation in 1978, Pastor Reuel Schulz offered a critique of WELS which may be a sort of springboard for us: "Surely the God-pleasing explosion of interest in world missions in our Synod in the past two decades should not be disparaged, but it still seems to me that most of the rank and file members of our church body remain uninvolved, unchallenged and (we in the clergy must bear the responsibility for their being almost totally) untrained in the narrow sense of personal proclamation of the gospel to the non-Christian. With few exceptions WELS laypeople are involved (in evangelism) only peripherally and vicariously, supplying financial and prayer support for the full-time pros; the pastors, teachers and missionaries."

How does the scriptural theology of the universal priesthood find its path into our parishes? Historically we are a pastor-centered church body. It's quite natural since our roots were transplanted from Europe, especially Germany. The mission zeal of the fellow Christians of Langenberg, Ehlerfeld and Barmen banded them in a society to serve scattered Lutherans and unnumbered heathen in the new world. Most of our Synod's early Lutheran congregations sought a trained pastor to work among them. Lay readers were common, and congregations did the best they could within the limitations of language and education. Later the Herr pastor became the main spokesman out of respect for his office and often because he was most thoroughly educated even in areas beyond theology. This prevailed until recent generations when a higher percentage of lay leaders in WELS congregations also held positions of leadership in business and professional life.

The high regard for the church as an institution was also typical of our old country forefathers. That isn't all bad, except it may lead to misplaced respect. In a recent review in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* of a German church growth book, *Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus*, by Fritz Swartz, (1984) the author contends "that German Christianity since, and including, Luther has failed uniformly to pursue biblical church growth, and largely due to the confusion of 'Kirche ' (institutional church) with 'ecclesia ' (Greek: actual church, the chosen believers.)" If this is an accurate assessment of state church membership in a call for renewal, it appears that we should examine our attitudes in a free church with roots not so different. Does our baptism-confirmation-marriage-burial syndrome reflect an attitude among our people of their part in an institutional more than an actual church?

### *In Today's Congregations*

We emphasize cradle to graduation instruction. Is the stress placed on delivering a package of knowledge necessary to pass membership tests, or is it on preparing a new generation of active and participating church members? Let your mind drift over your past ministerial life. Was there a conscious effort to involve more lay people and to let go of a sole ministry? Why or why not? What were the greatest obstacles? At a WLC class I was asked a few years ago to lead an hour class discussion on lay ministry. After casting around a bit, I settled on the following outline to get at the subject:

#### Skills and Issues of Lay Ministry—Practical Problems of Starting

- I. On the Part of Lay People
  - A. Apathy – "That's what we call a pastor for."
  - B. Lack of Self-Confidence – "Not me; I couldn't possibly do that."
  - C. Not Enough Time – "Don't expect me to help; I'm too busy."
  - D. Burn-Out – "You always end up asking the same willing people."
  - E. Spectator – "Our church has an ambitious pastor."
  - F. Unawareness – "Everything's getting done okay, isn't it?"

- II. On the Part of Pastors (Who are also really lay persons)
  - A. Tradition, Fear of Change – "We've always done it like this."
  - B. Martyrdom – "Nobody can do it as well...I'll do it myself."
  - C. Blockage – "It won't work."
  - D. Pride – "We're already doing it in the best possible way."
  - E. Ownership – "My congregation doesn't want to do it."
  - F. Concept Limitation – "We've already got people cutting the church lawn."
- III. Letting the Universal Priesthood Loose
  - A. Involvement in Ministry – "The scripture teaches...all are priests."
  - B. Family Circle in the Congregation – "Each part supplies to benefit all."
  - C. Goals and Objectives – "This is where we're going."
  - D. Planning – "This is how we'll get there."
  - E. Training – "This is how we'll do it together."
  - F. Lay Leadership – "Pastor, this is what we're going to do...  
this is what we're doing...  
this is what we've done."

*Not a One Man Show*

We need only to examine ourselves to find that in the area of lay training, as in many others, we fall woefully short of the ideal. How could Jesus enlist the like of fisherman and tax collectors and in less than three years entrust the work of his church to them. They in turn had a large band of followers to whom they could commit the carrying of the message. An adequate ministry in today's church is not a one-man show. The modern church could take stock of itself to see if it hasn't departed from the practice of apostolic times. Guido Merkens, a pastor of the LC-MS serving in San Antonio, TX, wrote in his book Training Lay Leadership (CPH, 1961):

In many cases the ministry is undermanned, the pastor overburdened, and the Lord's cause suffers... We have all too often reserved for the clergy exclusively the rights, privileges, and duties which Christ has given to all believers. We thereby train a laity which has a mass inferiority complex, is unaccustomed to spiritual expression, and is in reality trained for nothing else than eloquent silence.

The pastor who today is convinced that he is able to be not only prophet, but also priest and king, in his church and to minister effectively to the spiritual, educational, and physical needs of all his parishioners without their assistance is either suffering from delusions of grandeur or else is engaged in the near fatal habit of head burying... This often meant that the pastor, in his misguided zeal, has attempted to be linguist, scholar, speaker, publisher, printer, propagandist, play director, psychiatrist, plumber, musician, basketball coach and ping-pong instructor all in one ministerial lifetime. This has meant a terrific decimation of the preacher's time and an abuse of his talents.

Since the pastor has limited time and energy, seeing that he does not share the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, he can greatly multiply his usefulness by surrounding himself with a corps of faithful and competent laymen as co-workers, co-leaders, serving with and under him. This leadership training is not an easy task, which probably explains why it has not enjoyed more enthusiastic support in the past. Pastors have often been satisfied to put the finger on Thornton Percival Kinworth III as superintendent of the Sunday school and call it lay leadership, or draft John Zero as financial chairman and then feel satisfied that the laymen's spiritual horizon has thereby been broadened.

Some of this comes close to home. Of the four parishes I served, three of them were new mission starts. One has no choice but to be the "whole cheese" as a sainted professor liked to call such a ministerial position. Working oneself out of a hundred and one menial tasks along the way takes a conscious effort. Pastors have not been suggested as church council chairmen for several decades in model constitutions. How many WELS congregations still adhere to that system? How many pastors still chair the Ladies Aid behind the scenes if not

up front? Who turns the furnace on, cleans the filters, flushes the toilets, closes the windows, locks the church, shovels the sidewalks, mows the grass and changes the altar cloths? Whether or not there is a secretary, cannot trained volunteers type, print, distribute and even contribute to the newsletters, prepare and fold bulletins and maintain the church records? Who orders offering envelopes, paper supplies, equipment? Or candles, wafers and wine? Who makes decisions about the color of paint in the restrooms? We do the congregation no long-term benefit when we usurp the priesthood to justify our keep or impress ourselves and others with how busy we are. No wonder the intimidated member says, "Pastor, there's a new family that moved in next to us whom you should visit." Or worse, "Pastor, we have noticed that your sermons are not as meaningful as they once were to us," or even, "Pastor, we know you're too busy to see us." And this is a two-edged sword. While the shepherds are waiting on tables, the sheep are neglected. (Acts 6:2-4) The time for spiritual training in study of the word, stewardship, evangelism, care of the needy and raising the mission vision is frittered away. Sharing spiritual tasks is difficult in itself. Trying to be a one-man show makes it doubly hard.

### *From Home to Overseas*

If this can happen in varying degrees in stateside congregations, how much of our habits is transferred overseas? Our world mission program stresses eventual independence of the national church. Missionaries are to be church planters who train lay people and leaders in the budding church as they commit their ministry to faithful men. If the laity in the mother church are primarily spectators, can't this role unwittingly also become a model for a missionary show at which his observers applaud. Are we really so much different in overseas fields in our willingness to let go and let God's people be the church? On the other hand, there are some noble examples.

In Central Africa much of the ongoing instruction, of necessity, is delegated to congregational lay leaders and evangelists. Other fields use lay people in a variety of activities. You can document these better than I can. Our Bible institutes around the world are beginning to concentrate also on providing lay persons with thorough training instead of zeroing in chiefly on future pastors. This may prove to be the best step yet in identifying naturally the talents and commitment of the church's future pastors as well as lay leaders.

With our proper zeal to develop a truly confessional Lutheran church, standards may be established that expect too much too soon. We may act chiefly as guardians of pure doctrine. In their role as spiritual advisors, missionaries also steer the national church in its maturing process toward self-discipline. Not all lay people reach thorough doctrinal understanding at the same time; some never will. Does this inhibit us from entrusting the work to lay leaders? In its objective of establishing indigenous churches, the BWM aims to "awaken and foster in newly converted children of God the awareness, the willingness and the joy of using the gifts which are given by the Holy Spirit as fruits of faith for the administration, the support and the propagation of the work of the Church in their midst by:

- a. the early baptism of adults after basic instruction: (Acts 8:36; 10:47; 16:33; 22:16);
- b. the early development of responsible Christian leaders after thorough instruction and confirmation, of elders, teachers and preachers among the mature and dedicated converts, selected not only because of intellectual capacity, but because of consecration, Christian knowledge and sound judgment and good report;
- c. more and more active participation by the converts to decide on the basis of God's Word who is to be baptized, admitted to the Lord's Table, and entrusted with teaching and preaching eldership;
- d. the early inclusion of the converts through elected representatives in the administrative body of the new national church;
- e. the early assumption of offices of trust in the national church, such as the handling of the church funds;
- f. the early training in the responsibility and method of evangelizing activities on the part of the national church and its members;



- g. the early acceptance of partial and, as soon as possible, full support of the national church by its members, the missionary making it a matter of his duty to exercise restraint in keeping the program from developing beyond the ability of the national church to carry it on independently, while at the same time working to the end of his own elimination from control (I Pet. 2:9; Eph. 5:8; Acts 20:28; Gal. 6:1-10; Acts 14:21; 13:49; 15:22-41; 16:4,5; 18:20-23; Isa. 60:11-13; I Thess. 1:5,7,8).

Almost two decades ago the principles for the Christian Missioner Corps were also developed within WELS. This form of world mission development has found its best proving grounds in Colombia, South America. Its tenets help prod us to think of an earlier exodus of expatriates from a field than is customarily the case among us.

These believers are to be trained from the beginning in the principles of self-administration, self-support, and self-propagation through the ministry of the Word in their midst, thus gradually but surely eliminating the expatriate missionaries.

To the greatest extent possible these national ventures are to get along without expatriate support from the beginning; they are to learn to provide the means for their needs as a church from their own resources and in keeping with their own economic standards and cultural levels.

According to the example of the churches founded by St. Paul and the other apostles, these national churches are expected to spread the Gospel into other areas, as the Holy Spirit will direct.

The Christian Missioners will not permit themselves to become too firmly established in one place, so that they may turn the work of leading and building the young Christian church over to the national Christians as soon as ever possible, in order that they themselves might be released for work in another field.

Granted, this is an ideal not easily realized in practice. In fact an interview with an Indonesian leader of a church in that country, Chris Marantika, was reported in Evangelical Missions Quarterly (Jan. 1986, p.6ff.) in which he frankly disavows that the three self principle (self-supporting, self-propagating, self-governing) is a biblical ideal. He claims that the people who came up with the concept were Westerners. Though they had good intentions, they were influenced by the Western philosophy of individualism. For Westerners the ideal is to be independent; to stand on your own. He prefers the concept of the body, the family of God, togetherness and interdependence. (End of comments.) My Western mind wonders how much of the article is based on theology and how much is financial pragmatism. Yet his point is well taken.

An ALC missionary to Japan many years ago already felt the loss common to parish pastors who become church planters overseas when he wrote: "The shock comes after language training when he is assigned to his first place where his duties are to supplement the work of the national pastor without undercutting the latter's position as shepherd. Many such missionaries feel the burden of an unfulfilled ministry, the disappointment and frustration of a task half done...he finds himself on the periphery of a society he came to serve unable to be a pastor he was trained to be." (The Lutheran Standard, 3/4/69)...Small wonder that missionary pastors fall into the comfortable molds transplanted from the mother church to the daughter and sister churches. At very least, wherever the Lord has placed us in kingdom service we will be aware of these pitfalls and adjust our attitudes and our practices toward long range correction. We will also be open to the possibilities of expanding our world mission horizons to include more and more lay persons at home and overseas.

The final part of our essay will explore:

### **III. Some Possible Extensions of Lay Ministry in World Missions**

"I'll tell you what you're missing. You need a cause to live for! Something bigger than personal, spiritual maintenance or church activities. And you can have it. Focus your life in Christ on the whole world, nothing less, and you'll have a cause on your hands. Discover that you don't have to be a spectator in God's global

drama, but a teammate with those that are reaching out to earth's unreached billions." (In The Gap, Bryant, 1984, p .53)

Missions are not only activities the church does with money or the places it goes through missionaries. Mission is the church's very essence, its reason for being. As recipients of the choice blessing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we all have the commission to be his spokespersons everywhere as he makes disciples of the nations. Elton Trueblood summarized it this way, "The missionary program of the church of Christ is not simply one aspect of the Christian cause. It is, instead, the concept which is capable of bringing order and meaning into the entire Christian enterprise."

The Wisconsin Synod, although no less concerned with saving souls, has struggled to come to real grips with such propositions. The Synodalbericht of our 1919 convention decried: "Our work to date in the mission field has been a miserable, petty bugling, a botchery lacking fire and force at every convention. We seem to be asking ourselves do we, or do we not want to do mission work? Half a heart, half an effort and half a result? We work as in a dream. In 1947, page 11, the BoRaM simply reports a resolution: "That the Synod authorize the expansion of our mission in foreign fields." The 1961 BoRaM on page 41 echoes, "Are we indeed seriously at work in missions, at home and abroad?" Much of our present "mission" work at home is still but the gathering of already Lutheran Christians into congregations. Are we still spending far more on education than on carrying the saving gospel to those who have never had it? By 1965 a reporter on p. 45 of BoRaM commented: "It is evident that members of our Synod are becoming more and more mission minded."

The 1969 convention resolved "that we give top priority to mission work, both world and home." A veteran pastor, now retired, offered five observations on what effected a change in WELS mission outreach: "1. A change to evangelical leadership; 2. Those voices that had but one theme 'avoid' had either left the Synod or had been disarmed; 3. The hearts that had been waiting for the proper emphasis on the Lord's Word 'Go' received the positive inspiration; 4. Lay people became involved; 5. The Synod began to see the fruits of positive kingdom work."

### *Lay People Involved*

Lay involvement happens best if the entire congregation, not just a select few, is aroused. Our efforts will be directed toward raising the mission consciousness of all God's saints. The communication of this mission and the acceptance of it by more and more Christians are essential for building the joy, dedication and excitement that is so obvious in the earliest congregations described in the book of Acts. For the recent WELS convention we prepared a profile intended to lift sights and urge involvement. A MISSION-MINDED CONGREGATION:

- Is structured around the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)
- Searches the Scripture for its mission
- Conducts mission emphasis services regularly
- Reads The Northwestern Lutheran
- Strives to make missions meaningful to youths and adults
- Organizes a mission resource library
- Finds evangelism opportunities in its own area
- Designs mission fairs, festivals, banners
- Distributes mission information in bulletins and newsletters
- Emphasizes missions in educational groups (CDS, SS, VBS, BC and organizations)
- Prays for missionary work and families
- Feels a sense of personal ownership for WELS missions
- Invites mission speakers for worship and classes
- Posts various mission bulletin boards
- Becomes a transmitter, as well as a receiver, of God's grace
- Reviews its mission commitment with eager involvement
- Pools its resources for special mission efforts

- Sponsors a Lutheran Women's Missionary Society
- Seeks direct information from fellow Christians in mission work
- Educates members in sacrificial mission giving
- Delights in hearing about mission conquests elsewhere
- Personalizes its underwriting of mission projects
- Sends letters and cards of encouragement to missionaries
- Circularizes the members with "Topics" articles
- Attends area mission rallies
- Appoints a Synod Contact Man as a channel for continuing information

The exchange of mission information via the new WELS Connection will link Synod programs and church councils. A regular flow of videos, audios and printed updates is an innovation of our Commission on Communication and Financial Support. World missions, for instance, can't happen without a vital, growing fellowship of disciples who burn with a fire of a world vision. What amazing blessings would result if those hundreds of thousands of gospel-motivated WELS members would dedicate themselves increasingly to sharing the gospel with the unchurched. Why don't they? Why don't we?

### *Resources and Personnel*

Church historian R. Lovelace comments: "While the broad mass of the laity in American churches continue to be exhaustingly absorbed in the rat race of business life, at least a portion of their finances is being diverted to furnish a substantial economic foundation for a remarkable missionary program abroad. One cannot wonder what the result would be if this mass of lay people could be spiritually released from the servitude in the American success system and reoriented to channel their major energies toward building the kingdom of God. Foreign missions would be enriched with a new flow of personnel and resources."

Money and manpower are the two shortages that alternately plague any attempts to expand our mission outreach. Perhaps we have unduly tied our own hands by placing limits on the spontaneous responses the Holy Spirit works on human hearts. Special gifts beyond the approved offering channels never cease to amaze me. Cautious steps, with all proper safeguards, are being taken by WELS to provide the opportunity for individuals, groups, congregations and areas to sponsor a synodically approved program of missions, education and the like. What if a band of capable lay people suddenly raised three or five million dollars for outreach? Where would the world mission division direct its portion? This is not so far fetched. A new organization of mission-minded laymen and pastors with LC-MS affiliation, I believe, has recently organized. It's called ALL NATIONS (LUTHERAN) MISSIONS with headquarters in Fort Wayne, IN, with no official synodical accountability to my knowledge. Their present efforts include literacy work in tribal and national languages, Bible teaching and evangelistic outreach, teaching English as a second language in the U.S. and overseas, and Christ-exalting community development projects. Workers are in Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Mexico, Brazil and among the Lakota Sioux and Navajo Indians in the States.

Opportunities abound for people to spend a few months to a few years abroad teaching English as a second language. Many countries, otherwise closed to mission work, are asking for thousands of teachers of English. Spirit-filled people can share their faith convincingly, yet tactfully, in lands where Christians are outnumbered as much as 10,000 to one. God is also bringing hundreds of thousands of refugees, immigrants and international students to our doorstep every year. Teaching English in the States provides a tremendous opportunity to share the gospel with them and bring them into the Christian fold. Muslims, Buddhists and others are much more open to communication about Christ than in their homeland where 99 percent or more of the populace adheres to the centuries old religious faiths. And many nationalistic governments are restricting or denying work permits to foreign missionaries.

Who will be the personnel for this magnificent and overwhelming task? Will the funding of 15 or so missionaries approved by a recent convention help? Most assuredly. Is that the only direction WELS should go? Mere statistics show that in the U.S. there is one Christian pastor for every 600 people. In Central America the

ratio is one for every 15,000 and in the Muslim world it is one per 500,000. A 1981 list of the 12 most populous nations in millions showed: China (985) India (688) Soviet Union (268) USA (230) Indonesia (148) Brazil (122) Japan (117) Bangladesh (93) Pakistan (89) Nigeria (80) Mexico (70) W. Germany (61). Can Christian business and professional people make entrance and contact where western missionaries can't, through the "back door" of teaching, witnessing and sharing the scriptures. What can we do to assist?

### *Lay Witnesses Abroad*

Hardly a month in the BWM office goes by without at least one call from a traveler, a college student or a lay volunteer inquiring about the possibility of overseas work or contacts. These rare individuals among us have or are about to face and perhaps overcome ethnocentrism. Most Christians prefer to be armchair tourists of the world and are scared silly to make the word missions too personal. We like the idea of someone going for us to Asia, Africa and South America. Maybe we'd consider checking out Hawaii, with a return ticket of course. It is a diverse, and sometimes hostile, world out there which I don't understand and I am not so sure I really want to know what would not fit my prejudices and preconceptions. The Lord breaks in upon our narrow and petty outlook and says, "GO INTO ALL THE WORLD." Only a few can go. And only a few will go. And in today's world many of the goers will not be formal missionaries. They will be engineers, salesmen, teachers, government workers and tourists. Can our world mission program amalgamate such efforts into its own, or should there be a para-church structure? Can we offer general and individual guidance? How can it be financed? Do we need a layman's league? What about an international WELSMEN? OWLS? LWMS?

In a recent Japan field visit one of the staff sessions was devoted to using WELS laity overseas. Notes by secretary W. Bernhardt included helpful remarks: "It's a good idea to use these people when they are able to help – and should be able to help. Our Synod needs to get organized and get an effective program going. There are problems: People may not know the language of the country, have no applicable talents and/or become a burden for the missionaries. On the other hand, people going to live in foreign countries can be of great help. There are tracts and other materials available. Again, we need to "oil the machinery" to equip people. We think it would be a good idea to have information on Japanese churches – including bilingual services – in the WELS Yearbook. This is especially important to do in our "shrinking world." Encourage people who want to help out to get some language training, etc. before they come. The "program" has to originate from the field; otherwise it would be pushed on the field, and we don't want that. A non-Japanese speaking helper becomes a greater burden than a help. The helpers have to do the paperwork themselves, and receive guarantees from the Board for World Missions. A screening process has to be established to see what gifts the person has and to make him/her aware of what he is getting into. The main thing to determine: Can the field use such helpers at all – a little – or a lot? We may be able to use existing sponsoring programs that are non-church affiliated – to avoid the liability and hassle of such a program. A cultural visa is also a way of getting into Japan. There has to be a letter of guarantee."

Brainstorming sessions will help us to get the subject on the table with all the pros and cons. Some other far-flung proposals have come...

[The three plans given in the conference paper have been omitted from this online version for security reasons.  
– WLS Library Staff]

### *Scattered Abroad With a Common Goal*

Will WELS Christians, too, want to preach the Word wherever they go? Yes, but it can be frightening. We are easily intimidated by our own neighbors, not to mention interacting in our own hemisphere with Blacks, Asians and Hispanics. Where suddenly will come the great courage to speak about Jesus to anyone of the three billion unreached? A searching of the Word will connect the Spirit's power into that believing heart. It will, in turn, be drawn to compassion over unbeliever's awesome lostness. And it will react in new and unique ways to accomplish God's purposes.

Tracts will be produced and training for witnessing to Muslims, Jews, Chinese, Marxists, Buddhists, Hindus and Animists. Our schools and seminary will incorporate strong missiological emphases into their curricula and activities. Congregations will not look upon mission-minded lay persons as a "fringe element," but will want to follow its committed, pacesetting lay leaders. Pastors will rouse themselves and the pew-sitters to realize that the church exists more for the benefit of the lost than those who are safely inside. To each of us will come the searching question, "Why do you live, Christian, if not to spread the good news of the kingdom into which you, by the rich grace of God in Christ, have already come? Take your faith with you WHEREVER you go. That's a full-time ministry for everyone.