

COLLECTIVE VS. INDIVIDUAL MINISTRY:  
A LOOK AT A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO MINISTRY FOR MULTIPLE  
CONGREGATIONS IN A SMALL AREA

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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February, 2015

## **ABSTRACT**

There are several places in the United States, particularly in the Midwest, in which there are three or more churches located within 10-15 miles from each other. While some of these congregations are thriving, others are surviving. This paper looks at the question, “Is there a more effective form of ministry for congregations that are in relatively close proximity with each other?” This might mean a new paradigm of doing ministry that enhances the spirit of unity that exists across the fellowship of several churches while also allowing churches to remain individual congregations. It could also mean multiple congregations no longer remaining as their own individual entity but joining together as a collective for the benefit of God’s kingdom.

This paper looks at this form of multi-congregational ministry from two perspectives: a case study of the Mequon-Thiensville churches who are moving in the direction of combining ministry between their congregations and a case study of specific churches in Dodge County that are all within 15 miles from each other. This paper does not want paint with a broad brush, suggesting that all churches that are in close proximity should follow one pattern. Rather, the paper intends to shed light on two specific cases with their own unique set of circumstances. This paper hopes to enlighten congregations that are facing similar circumstances to at least ask the question: Is this a way that could improve our ministry in God’s kingdom?

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Introduction..... 1**

**Scope of the Study..... 2**

**Rural Ministry in Dodge County..... 4**

**What is the Vision of these Churches?..... 12**

**Why the Vision of these Churches Needs to Change?..... 15**

**The Churches of Mequon-Thiensville..... 20**

**How these Churches Look Today..... 22**

**The Events Leading up to the Combined Ministry Plan..... 25**

**What did the Vision of these Churches Look Like Before this Plan..... 27**

**A New Vision: The Combined Ministry Plan of the Mequon-Thiensville**

**Churches ..... 28**

**Reception of the plan by the Members ..... 32**

**Conclusion ..... 38**

**Bibliography ..... 41**

**Appendix A – Articles of Shared Ministry ..... 42**

**Appendix B – Consolidation Report of Mequon-Thiensville WELS Churches..... 43**

## INTRODUCTION

Growing up in the thumb of Michigan, my family had the privilege of going to a Lutheran grade school at New Salem in Sebewaing, Michigan. Because of my dad's career, we ended up moving not even 20 miles away to Elkton. Not only did we have a new house but my parents also sent us kids to a new school at St. John in Pigeon, not even 15 miles from where our old church and school was. After Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade were over for me our family moved once again. That was the last Lutheran education I received until I enrolled at Martin Luther College. My parents eventually moved back to Sebewaing because of my dad's job. They are currently attending that same church, New Salem, that they attended so many years ago.

One year when I came home to visit, my dad and I had a conversation about the situation of the school that was attached to New Salem, which my brothers had gone to years ago. At that time, due to dwindling enrollment and higher education costs, the congregation was struggling to keep the school open. There simply were not as many families with children as there were in the past. There were discussions about how long the school was expected to last and if they needed to have talks about closing the school down.

It was here that I asked my dad something to the effect of, "Why don't we just send the kids who go to school here fifteen minutes away to the bigger school at St. John in Pigeon?" I thought at the time that it was a simple enough question to ask, with what appeared to me to be a no-brainer answer. Save the church's resources *and* keep the emphasis on a solid Christian education by sending the students to a different school that is in a much better situation than New Salem. It is a win-win situation! Why not take advantage of it?

But what I thought was a seemingly simple question with an even simpler answer turned out to be a complex question tied together with history and various ranges of emotion. Quickly it turned into an "us-them" conversation in which I found myself struggling to see how I could have been so naïve to think that I could solve this issue in one five minute discussion. There were so many factors that needed to be taken into consideration. What would happen to the school building? What would happen to the teachers and staff? Would the parents be willing to drive their children a little farther away?

Today, New Salem has the smallest Lutheran Elementary School in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod with only four students enrolled. While I was immature in the way I approached the situation years ago, I believe it is only one dynamic of a larger observation

among multiple WELS churches that are located within a relatively small area of one another. The observation is that these churches do their ministry not as a collective unit but rather on an individual basis no matter how close they may be to each other.

Big deal! So what? Who cares if there are three, five or even ten or more WELS churches within 15 miles of one another, churches who have not done any ministry together besides the occasional rotation of pastors during Lent? Ministry still gets done; God's people still are fed with the life-giving word; the gospel is still being preached and these churches are still around. Yes, all of these things are true. However, I would challenge these notions with this question: Is there a better way for these kinds of churches to do ministry something? By "a better way" I do not mean simply the way the most dollars could be saved. What I mean is that ministry is done in a way that could benefit God's kingdom in a greater capacity than the current status quo. Whether that includes saving money for gospel ministry by cutting programs or merging with existing entities, the focus is always on advancing God's kingdom and doing gospel ministry. Is there a better, more efficient way to do ministry? This is a question that each and every congregation should be asking itself every single year while keeping all options on the table.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Just by glancing at the current enrollment at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary one can see that the class sizes of future pastors is smaller than it has been in previous decades. At the same time the baby-boomers are retiring from the ministry leaving more and more vacancies to fill with fewer and fewer pastors to fill them. This may mean that some of these congregations that are so close together may not have a pastor. How can ministry be done as well without a pastor at "Church A" as ministry that takes place with a pastor just a few miles down the road at "Church B?" Is there a need to continue to strive to keep all of these churches open or might it be beneficial to God's kingdom if two or more churches merged/assimilated into one church? Why is there this prevailing attitude of doing things individually and independently from one another despite being in each other's "backyards?" Is there a potential benefit from combining ministries across two or more churches with one another, or does it make sense for congregations to continue to do ministry independently from one another as it has been done for so many decades in the past?

These questions are what this paper plans on answering, but not in a way that is meant to generalize a method that all churches fitting these specific criteria should follow. Rather this paper is meant to be a discussion starter for congregations that are asking these questions. Hopefully, they can compare and apply the information found here to their own specific situations. This will be done by looking at two examples of groups of churches: one that is looking ahead to combining ministry in an unprecedented way and another group that continues to do ministry, for the most part, as it has been done in the past several decades.

This paper will approach this topic by examining each group one at a time. First it will take a look at some churches in Dodge County that do not do any ministry together. The paper will examine briefly the background of each of those churches and then offer a snapshot of those congregations based on current statistics and interviews. It will also look at their vision for the future. Then this paper will take a look at the churches in Mequon-Thiensville and how they are planning on combining ministries between the four congregations in a way that has not been done (at least not to the knowledge of this writer) before in the WELS. Finally, this paper will examine the history of those congregations, offer a brief snapshot of those congregations based on current statistics and interviews, and share their vision for the future. These congregations include:

Trinity (West) Lutheran Church in Mequon, WI

Trinity (South) Lutheran Church in Mequon, WI

St. John Lutheran Church in Mequon, WI

Calvary Lutheran Church in Thiensville, WI

The main research of this paper was done through interviews with various people in each area. While it is difficult in some areas of this paper to talk about this topic without naming specific church names or pastors or other people, I did everything I could to keep people anonymous. When writing a paper such as this, there is a concern in writing about one's individual opinion and think that it applies to all the people or places. To avoid that, I interviewed more people and looked for patterns in the conversations. Thus, the findings in this paper are not isolated opinions or statements but rather findings that come from noticing patterns and commonalities that stretch beyond just one individual.

Finally, I'll point out the reason why this – doing ministry jointly - is something that needs to be considered by all WELS churches that fit this profile. I will give my observations

based on the research collected in this study. While I'm not so bold as to claim I am an expert in this field, I certainly do believe these discoveries to be beneficial for any congregation to contemplate as they plan Gospel ministry in God's kingdom in the future.

### **RURAL MINISTRY IN DODGE COUNTY**

Before I begin the major content of this thesis I would be doing the reader a huge disfavor if I did not direct him or her to read a paper by former seminarian, now pastor, Nathan Zastrow entitled, *The Lutherans East of the Marsh: An historical and ministerial evaluation of the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in Northeastern Dodge County, Wisconsin*. He did a wonderful job sharing the history of the churches there, especially in how he explains why there are so many churches close together in Dodge County. He also set out to offer advice to these churches and see what changes might be beneficial for them to continue to do ministry in the future. While I will quote his paper and glean off of his good work, to really get a fuller understanding of the situation in Dodge County, I would recommend reading his paper. It is because of his good work and solid research that I am able to transition into the topic of this paper and get to the question of asking whether or not these churches would be better served and serve better by combining their ministry efforts.

Currently, there are 13 WELS churches all within approximately 20 miles of each other in the northern part of Dodge County, Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> These churches date back as far as 1849 all the way to 1913. Times were obviously a lot different back then. For the sake of simplicity and brevity, I'll state that the rationale for so many churches in such a small geographic area can be summarized in four reasons: the churches were established either for the sake of convenience, confession, conflict or Christ.<sup>2</sup> For a fuller understanding and explanation of these readings, again I would recommend reading Nathan Zastrow's work on this area. Understandably then, there really is no reason for me to duplicate the efforts of his good work in talking about the histories of each congregation. If certain specific information is needed at one point or another, it will be cited accordingly. What is more pertinent to this paper is to discuss the current ministry situation facing the members of these churches of these churches.

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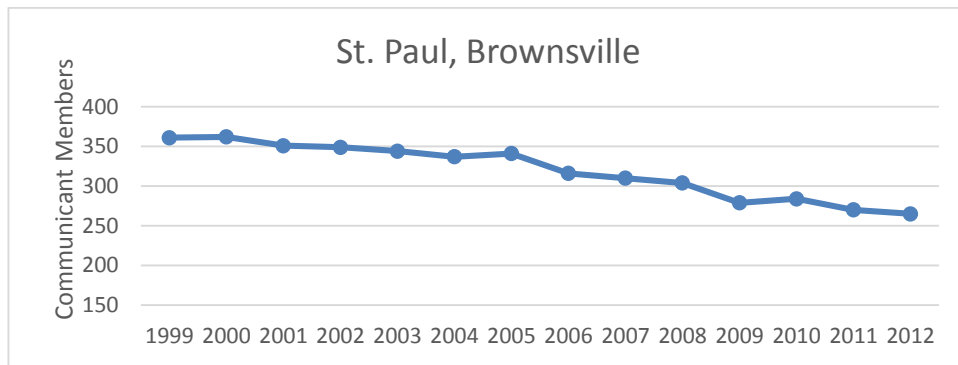
<sup>1</sup> Nathan Zastrow, "The Lutherans East of the Marsh," *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary*, 2013, Appendix #5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

For the most part, many of these churches in Northeastern Dodge County have been declining for quite some time now. I will present the churches in the order that Nathan Zastrow has them in his paper, followed by their 2012 congregational statistics as well as a graph showing the current trend of each church dating back to congregational statistics from 1999.<sup>3</sup>

Saint Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in Brownsville, WI

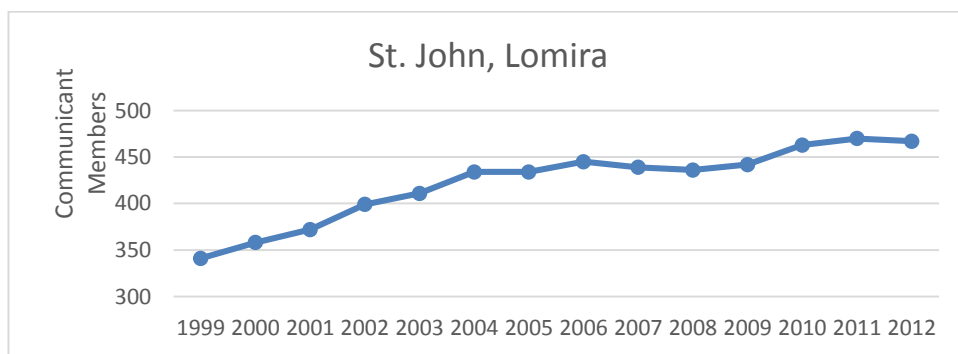
- It has 325 baptized members and 265 communicant members and averages 99 in worship every week.



That is a 27% decrease

Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church in Lomira, WI

- It has 634 baptized members and 467 communicant members and averages 249 in worship every week.



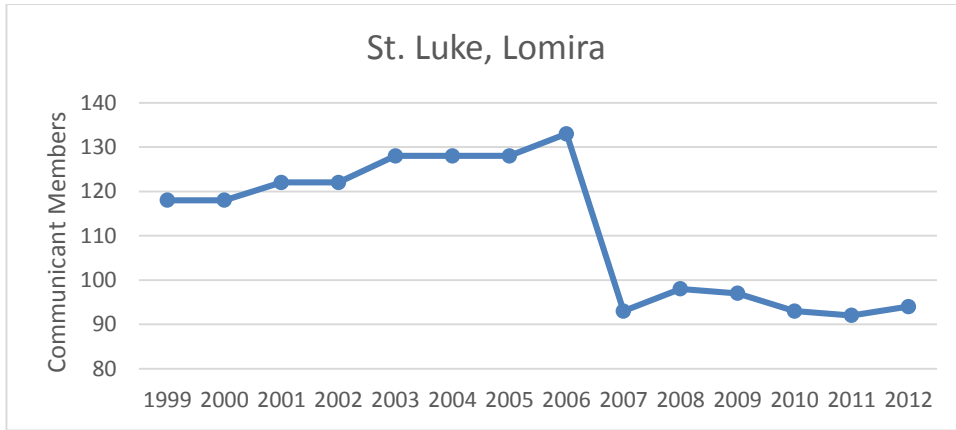
That is a 37% increase

<sup>3</sup> Keep in mind that the information on these graphs is based on the statistical reports the WELS puts out every year. It is based on the reports sent from the leaders of each congregation in the WELS. Sometimes there were years in which the information was not sent in. When that was the case, the same information was carried over to the next year until a new report was sent.



Saint Luke's Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Lomira (Knowles), WI

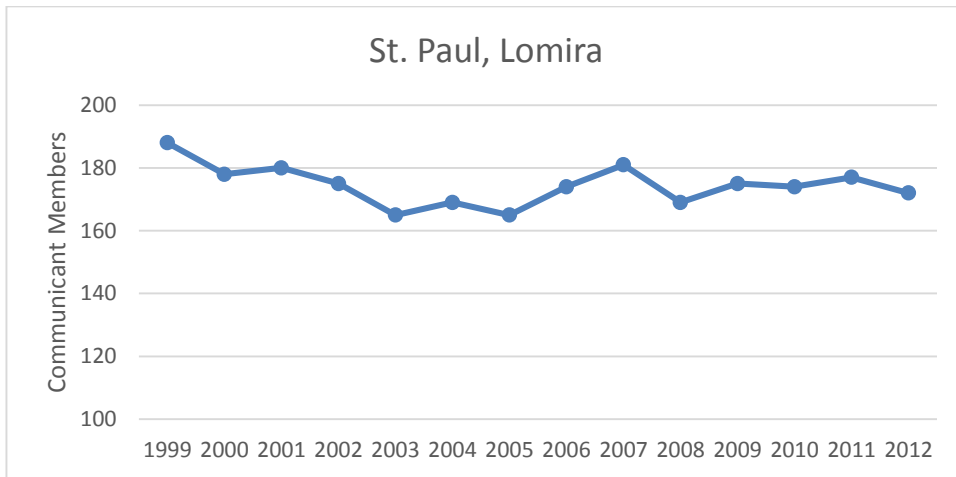
- It has 105 baptized members and 94 communicant members and averages 40 in worship every week.



That is a 20% decrease.

Saint Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Lomira, WI (called "Halfway Church")

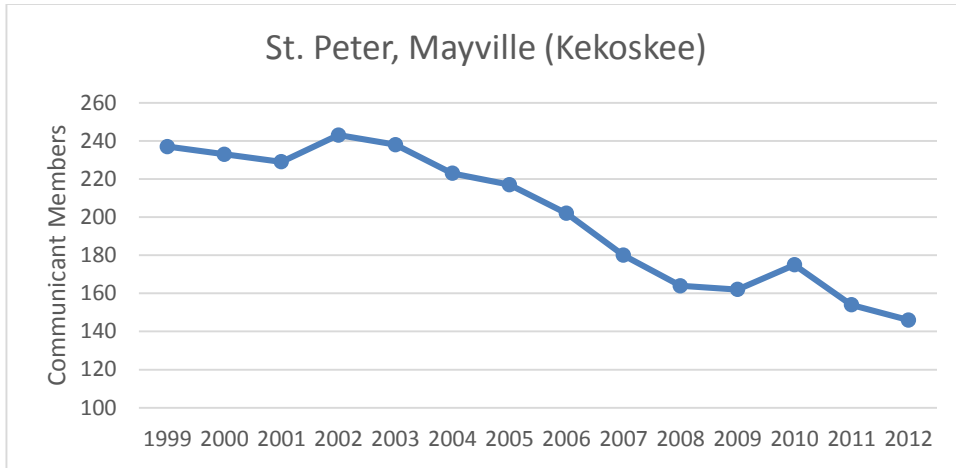
- It has 212 baptized members and 172 communicant members and averages 92 in worship every week.



9% decrease

Saint Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church in Kekoskee, WI

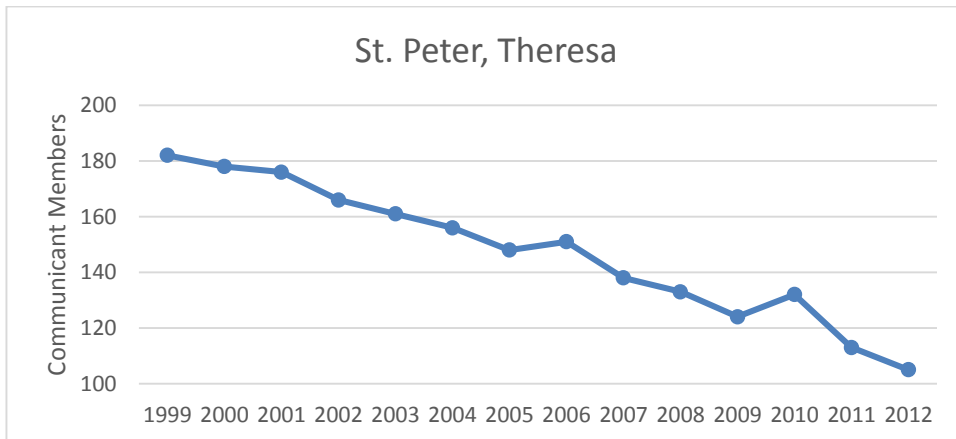
- It has 166 baptized members and 146 communicant members and averages 72 in worship every week.



That is a 38% decrease.

Saint Peter's Ev. Lutheran Church in Theresa, WI

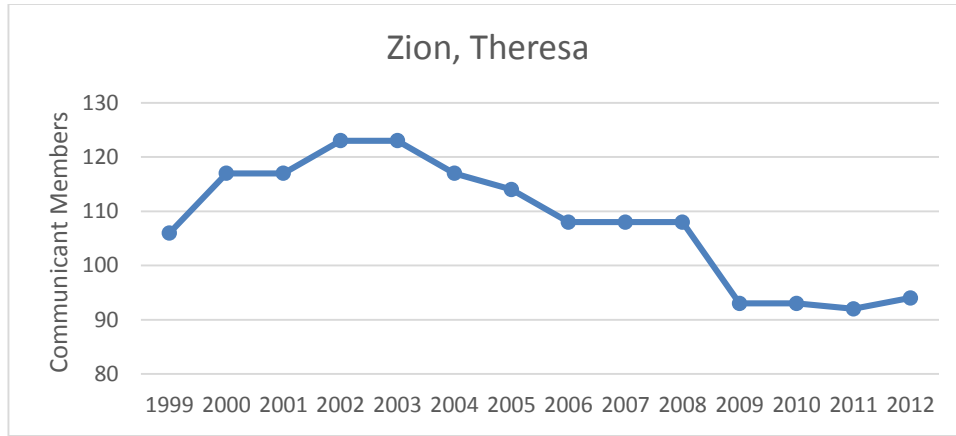
- It has 122 baptized members and 105 communicant members and averages 62 in worship every week.



That is a 42% decrease.

Zion Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Theresa, WI

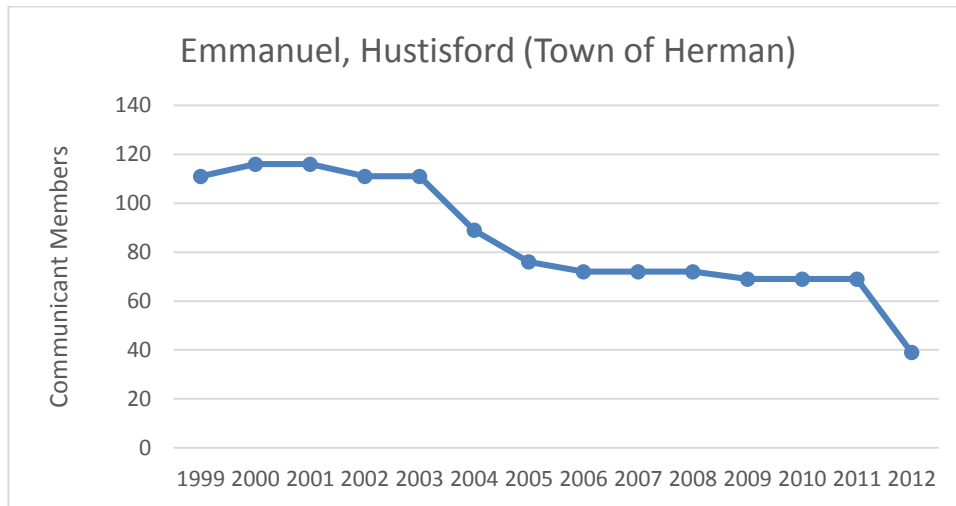
- It has 108 baptized members and 94 communicant members and averages 41 in worship every week.



That is an 11% decrease.

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Herman, WI (on State Highway 33)

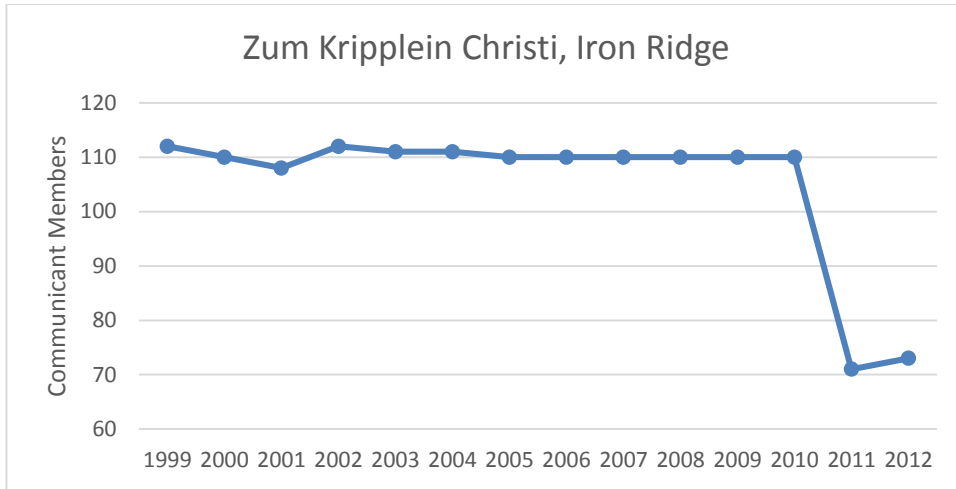
- It has 50 baptized members, 39 communicant members and averages 28 in worship every week.



That is a 65% decrease.

Zum Kripplein Christi Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Herman, WI (called “ZKC”)

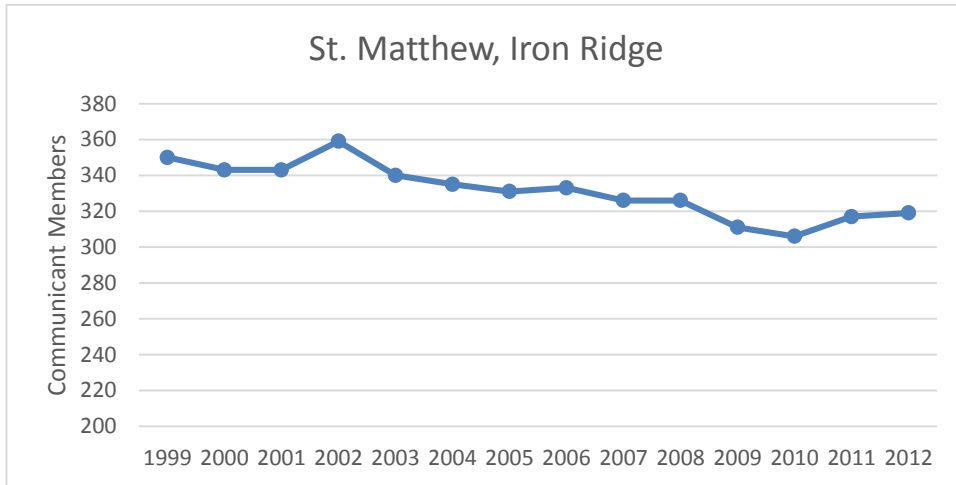
- It has 101 baptized members and 73 communicant members and averages 38 in worship every week.



That is a 35% decrease.

Saint Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Church in Iron Ridge, WI

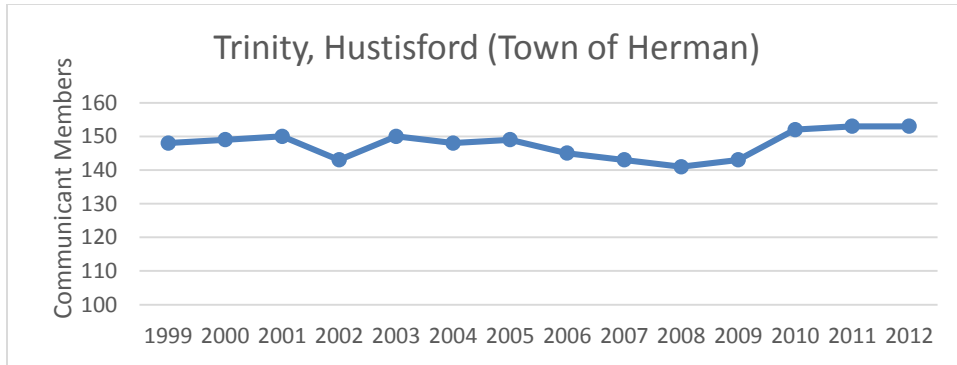
- It has 393 baptized members and 319 communicant members and averages 148 in worship every week.



That is a 9% decrease.

Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Herman (Huilsburg), WI

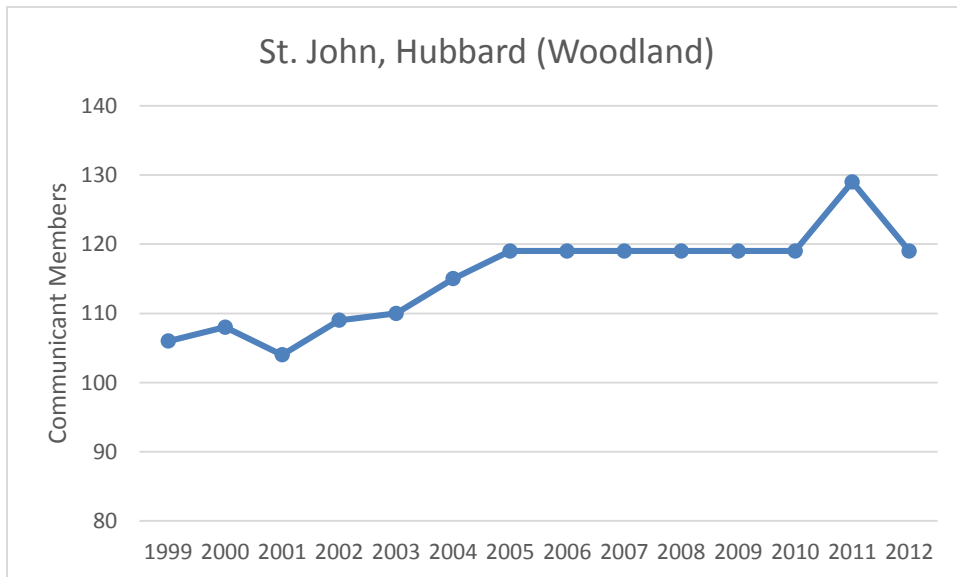
- It has 185 baptized members and 153 communicant members and averages 71 in worship every week.



That is a 3% increase.

Saint John's Ev. Lutheran Church in the Town of Hubbard (Woodland), WI

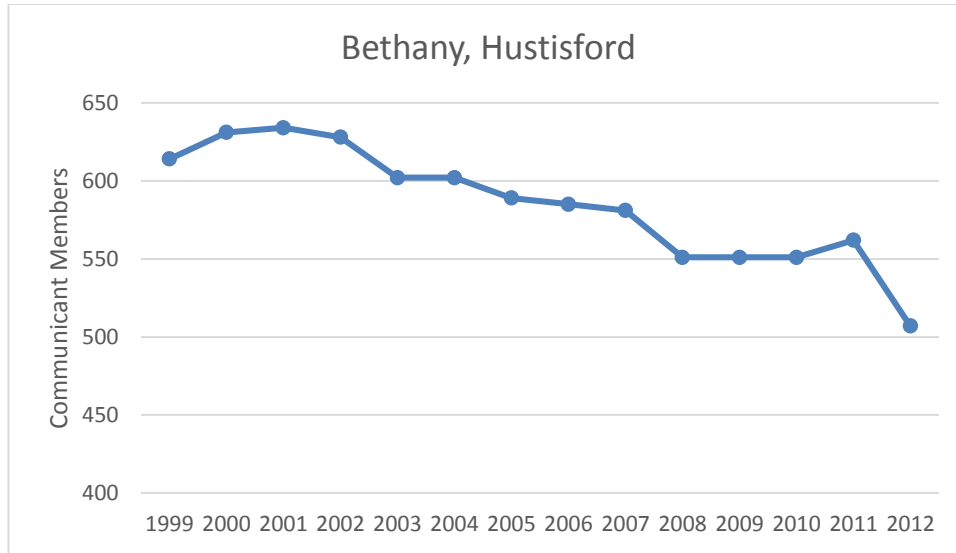
- It has 141 baptized members and 119 communicant members and averages 52 in worship every week.



That is a 12% increase.

Bethany Ev. Lutheran Church in Hustisford, WI

- It has 625 baptized members and 507 communicant members and averages 284 in worship every week.<sup>4</sup>



That is a 17% decrease.

It begs the question, “Why are mostly all of these rural churches declining in membership so much?”<sup>5</sup> 2974 2553 = total communicant numbers since 1999-2012 While the question is easy, the answer is more complex. Part of it has to do with the old way of life in the rural areas compared to the new way of life, or career paths, that younger generations are choosing in life. “The rural land, the land in between big cities is really struggling. The culture of those people used to be something along the lines of living off the land and living with the land. The people actually had a stake in the land and the communities that grew there.”<sup>6</sup> This rural country is farmland. These little churches served as churches for the farmers and the small business people. It was not uncommon for their children to remain in the same area after school and even take over the family farm or live close by and work in the area. That was just the way of life back then.

<sup>4</sup> 2012 Congregational Statistics from WELS Connect

<sup>5</sup> Statistics show that from 1999-2012 the communicant membership of all these churches have lost a total of 421 members.

<sup>6</sup> L. Shannon Jung, “A Theological Vision for Ministry in Rural America,” *Word & World*, Vol. XX, Number 2 (Spring 2000), 2.

However, that way of life is becoming less of a reality. Children are growing up and moving away and going to other WELS churches in their area. For a long time these churches had four or five generations that have lived in the same area, but now the younger people seem to be moving along and out of the area. This is not meant as a criticism but just as an observation. It does not mean there are no young families in the area, but if you look at the members of these churches, you will see predominantly older families whose parents and grandparents grew up in the same area.<sup>7</sup>

These are some of the aspects that truly define the ministry of this rural area. These characteristics are not meant to go beyond this context. It is not Mequon-Thiensville. It is not Milwaukee. These are country churches dealing with their own towns and in their own contexts. I believe that this is important for all congregations in a rural type setting to keep in mind. Each church, rural or not, has its own unique context. However, might these observations be characteristics of rural ministry in general? Each church would have to compare their own context to that of these Dodge County churches. But to say that these observations are characteristic of rural ministry in general would be saying too much.

### **WHAT IS THE VISION OF THESE CHURCHES?**

When I was asking this question, I wondered if I would have to leave this part out of the paper. I assumed I would receive as many different visions as there were churches. However, my findings show that simply is not the case. Among the congregations that are in decline and struggling, there is a pattern of merely hoping to survive. When I asked what some people saw as the vision for their own congregation these are some of the answers I received:

“To stay out of debt and survive.”<sup>8</sup>

“[We] hope to survive.”<sup>9</sup>

“A lot of it around here has been: let’s just get to next Sunday.”<sup>10</sup>

Hardly a vision worth sharing with the community! It can be hard to invite people to come to church, if these statements are indicative of members’ attitudes about the challenges these churches are facing. Whether it is a mountain of debt, not being able to meet the operational costs of the budget with the current offerings or seeing more members leave or die out every year

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<sup>7</sup> This observation is based on an overall anecdotal evidence of the people interviewed.

<sup>8</sup> Anonymous Interview 8.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous Interview 7.

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous Interview 6.

then are coming inside the church, these people believe that the reality is that their churches are not thriving but are surviving.

Imagine that being part of your attitude every time you think about your church. Think of how much stress would come with that kind of mentality. It should be no wonder then that there is this overall feeling of gloominess among the hearts of these people. Now let me be clear. I am not saying trying to say that if you walked into one of these churches and started talking to people you would be faced with this “Eeyore” attitude of people complaining about their church; of people telling you how it is all meaningless; of how people are so depressed and down in the dumps that they are completely defeated and ready to throw in the towel and call it quits. No, that is not how these people come across as you talk to them. What I mean is that this overall attitude of gloominess and doubt comes about when you start having serious conversations about the future of the ministry in these locations. As Nathan Zastrow points out in his paper,

Some might take me to task for saying it –because attitude is a hard thing to quantify– but I think that it is still fair for me to say that there is a general gloominess or desperation that characterizes many of the smaller congregations in the area I am studying. That gloominess may not be seen or heard on the average Sunday, but it often becomes evident in voters meetings, elders meetings, or council meetings. There is a general sense that the future of the organization is uncertain, perhaps even the present is without clear direction, and therefore the whole business and ministry of the congregation is colored in shades of doubt, if not outright crippled by indecision.<sup>11</sup>

People are not ignorant. They know the situation of their congregations. Complacency and defeat characterize the attitude and conversations about the future. Some might say that the writing has been on the wall, so to speak, for a long time now. Indeed, when you look at those graphs, in ten to twenty years some of these churches might not be around if the current trends continue as they are.

Amongst these churches, one will find that they contain a few families who have been in one place for a long period of time. Some of these churches really only contain about three or four sets of different family lineages. These established, rural congregations look much different than your typical mission congregation that has been around for the last ten, twenty or even 30 years simply because the newer mission congregations do not have the generational heritage that these rural congregations have. They are different than other congregations. One man used (and perhaps even coined) the phrase “Generational Inertia” to describe what he saw.

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<sup>11</sup> The Lutherans East of the Marsh, 28.



Because all these congregations are 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation congregations, the support structure for the members is in their families more than in the congregation. Unlike newer congregations or mission congregations where the majority of the members are removed from their family structure and their support group is the congregation, [this generational inertia] results in many members just not knowing each other because they know their family and they know the families who were in school the same time they were in school, but there's not a lot of other connections.<sup>12</sup>

So how does this affect the congregation? There are a variety of ways. A look at the community shows that there are new families that come and live in a given area that are not from that community to begin with. These communities are not what they used to be in respects to being made up of the same families for generations and generations. In other words, they are changing. In speaking on these kinds of rural communities, one writer states:

Congregations will need to be more diverse. If churches want to survive and thrive, they will need to be open to persons beyond the Brethren family connections. Communities are not as homogeneous as they once were. The church will have the opportunity to share the love of Christ with a whole spectrum of people we have not considered before just because they didn't live near us.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of the word "Brethren," insert "WELS" and you will see that this writer has a very good point. When a visitor or someone new arrives to church, how is that person welcomed? Does anyone talk to the individual? If it is a newly transferred family, how does the congregation receive them? Do they feel like they belong? Are the people friendly?

Some might be quick to say, "Of course the people are friendly!" But how is that friendliness perceived to someone who is not a member or who is a new addition to the church? In talking about this one man said from his past experiences, "When we do have people come... I would end up talking to the visitor. And the other people, they saw themselves as a friendly church; friendly to each other. There's a difference."<sup>14</sup> I do not mean to apply this to every single church in the area, but it is something that people need to think about. Having relationships with people at church is a great blessing. We thank God for the fellowship that takes place. On a Sunday morning, of course people want to talk to their church family. But when that is all you talk to the newcomers and visitors are lost and forgotten. How can people

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<sup>12</sup> Anonymous Interview 8.

<sup>13</sup> Connie R. Burkholder; Nadine S. Pence; Alltn T. Hansell; Randall L. Yoder, "Panel : Visions for Ministry in the Twenty-First Century," *Brethren Life and Thought* 44 no 4 Fall 1999, p 62.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous Interview 7.

feel like they are at a place that they can call their church *home* when they still feel like *strangers* by the people they are supposed to call their brothers and sisters?

How else does this “Generational Inertia” effect the congregation and its vision? More often than not I have found in my research that it holds the church back from changing its vision to something different. The attitude might be characterized as *if our church has come this far, why do we need to change a thing?* These older churches are very much characterized by their history. One man said, “History is what we hang our hats on around here; [we] are very proud of [our] history.”<sup>15</sup>

Now history is a blessed thing and history should be honored. WELS Lutherans love their history. Men like Martin Luther and C.F.W. Walther are honored for their efforts of keeping the Orthodox teaching of Scripture. And when you look at the history of particular congregations, it is reason to give thanks for the fact that God has allowed his Word to be preached faithfully for so many year to so many different people. But when ministry is done (or is not done) because history is exalted too highly... when it gets in the way of advancing God’s mission... then there is a problem. In my research, this seems to be one caricature of many of the smaller congregations of this area.

Because the congregations has been around longer, the rate of change is perhaps much slower than in a new congregation. With so much history in the congregation – doing things one certain way for so long – the reason for change is not easily seen. It is almost like there has become an established feeling of tradition that people will continue to do ministry the way it has been done for so long. The feeling of, “We’ve never done it that way...we’ve always done it this way,” is very much a reality in such congregations. Some stronger voices are of the opinion, “If it was good enough for grandpa, it is good enough for me.” It is this kind of attitude that resists any major changes to the way ministry is done in these smaller churches.

### **WHY THE VISION OF THESE CHURCHES NEEDS TO CHANGE**

Not only are the rural communities changing but also the culture of people is changing. What follows is a rather lengthy quote, but I believe it is filled with valuable insight for those in rural communities to consider.

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<sup>15</sup> Anonymous Interview 6.

What becomes especially important in this era is the societal shift from institutions as the cultural center to a diffused array of trans-local entities that make up advertising, entertainment, and communication media. In the past thirty years, we have seen the waning of a society where established local or regional institutions (churches, banks, local businesses, local government) have defined what is important and valuable to its people. In its place, we have an electronic communication and consumer structure which is primarily economically-driven and focused on the ideal of individual choice. Instead of the local bank or school or church helping us decide what to do with our lives (time and money), each of us now believe that we have the chance to construct our identity - who we want to be and how we want to spend our time - tied, of course, to where we live, what we buy and what event we are a part of. Are we city folk or country folk? Bulls fans or Pacers fans? Will our kids be golf stars or soccer stars? Do we go to church camp or send our kids to computer camp?...Each of us believe that we are able to choose an affiliation with a group of people that strike a certain image - take a certain pose - according to what they buy, how they spend their time, and where their kids are headed. It is a joint phenomena of individual decision and mass culture. We decide, as individuals, to which mass cultural identity or group to belong. And so it is with people's perceptions of church...<sup>16</sup>

People want to be a part of something that they can be proud of, something in which they can take ownership. When they look at something, they want to be impressed; they want to see that it has a good future. They will look at the make-up of the church and how it looks and decide if they want to identify with such people and such a place or not.

Again, let me be clear: I'm not saying that these are the most important things that these people should consider when choosing a church. The church is not meant to cater to people's needs as if it were some sort of social club. The church is there for one purpose – to carry out the ministry of spreading the gospel; to tell other people of their Savior, Jesus Christ, who forgives their sins and leads to life after this life. But if the people with a more immature or weaker faith or understanding of ministry do not know this, then they are going to look at other factors. I am confident that every one of these rural churches can offer what is most important – that God's word is taught in its truth and purity. But if spiritually immature people are looking for more than that message, it becomes a challenge that the congregation needs to address. The previous writer summarizes his thoughts about this issue when he says:

We are in a time where people see their larger identity as associated with their chosen affiliations, and all our social institutions that are in the local and regional level are not small enough to help with the individual choice, nor large enough to give the grandiose, mass sense of who we are. Unfortunately, going to the family church down the block (or driving out to it on the country road), does not symbolize promise, blessing, or individual

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<sup>16</sup> Panel : Visions for Ministry in the Twenty-First Century, p63-64.

choice. And the generations that have invested their heart and soul into these institutions and structures are being led to tend to them in their old age. The younger generations do not believe that God is found in the local church, but elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

What this man speaks of comes as a result of getting too caught up in the culture of the world where perception is everything; where people need the biggest, greatest and newest devices; a culture that is wrapped up in the identity that only cares about how other people may see their lives. In other words these people need to hear about their sin and they need to hear about their Savior. They need to hear the message that these rural WELS churches have to give to them. The question is, how will these churches change their ministry to reach out to them?

It is the opinion of this author that the paradigm of ministry in this area needs to change, or at the very least, the attitude and mindset of the members. With such a defeated attitude comes stress and negativity about one's own congregation. Based on my research it seems that the majority of the people are too focused on their building they call their church home instead of God's kingdom at large.

The way I see it, there are really two choices.

The first is to let ministry go on and continue to deal with a likely statistical decline<sup>18</sup>; continue to deal with the stress of an attitude of doubt about the future and the feeling of fighting a losing battle; continue to maintain the status quo in the churches. If this is what happens, God will still continue to bless the ministry done here as he has for the long years these churches have been established in this region of Dodge County. He will continue to bring in souls in his kingdom, and he will continue to nurture those whom he calls his own with his Word and sacrament.

The other option is to seek a change in the vision of these congregations; a change that might be able to take place by combining ministries together. From what I gathered in my research, I feel like the best ministry plan would involve combining these churches into two or three churches and forming a larger body of believers. This choice is not without some risk because there is so much unknown involved, but I do believe that the risk would prove to be worth it in the end.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 64-65.

<sup>18</sup> Please, again, let me be very clear. In no way am I saying that numbers are everything. But declining numbers are a reality that needs to be addressed at some point.

<sup>19</sup> More discussion about the risk and the unknowns involved will be covered at a later section in this paper in dealing with the ministry plan of the Mequon-Thiensville churches. I do want to be clear though. I don't mean

When I asked the people of this area if the churches ever could consolidate, there were those who saw some immediate benefit to it.

What consolidation does is it eliminates duplication of effort; it provides for better stewardship because of economy of scale; it helps members see a bigger picture; and [it] changes small struggling congregations into a larger congregation that doesn't have that "verge of extinction" feel anymore.<sup>20</sup>

There is nothing wrong with having 13 pastors with 13 different sermons to give on one Sunday, but just imagine the man hours that consolidation would save those pastors simply because they do not have to all prepare a sermon for that week. The members could benefit by an overall fellowship with more people in the area and could do more things in a way that maybe was not possible while being in a small church body with limited resources. They could see more of the Holy Christian Church that exists outside of their congregation. Such a consolidated church body would not need to fear closing its doors because of a lack of finances or members. Thus, the members could have that stressful and depressing attitude of "our doors could close at any day now" lifted off of their shoulders.

What the previous writer said about congregations needing to see a bigger picture is something that I've come across in almost every single one of my interviews. The truth of the matter is that the members of these congregations do not seem to understand the bigger picture of the Holy Christian Church and instead are too focused on their church. "Understand that congregations in general are notoriously selfish."<sup>21</sup> Since there is so much history in these congregations, these people are not really interested in looking at the possibility of joining with other churches and doing ministry with them. They have done everything for themselves up to this point, so why change? "When [identity] becomes, 'This is my church and nothing else can become my church,' then it becomes a problem."<sup>22</sup> I believe this goes hand in hand with the "Generational Inertia" that was previously talked about. This kind of attitude has been handed down from one generation to another. The thought of opening up this view is so foreign to some that it restricts them from seeing the bigger picture of the larger Church at work in God's

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that if a group were to pursue such an idea that it would mean God would bless it more. No one can make such a claim. It is God who blesses ministry. There are no guarantees no matter what one does. That being said though, a group does need to plan. Plans are made because God deserves our best, not because it leads to statistical growth.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous Interview 8.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous Interview 7.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous Interview 8.

kingdom – The Holy Christian Church of believers. Nathan Zastrow points out this problem in thought when he says in his paper:

...sometimes we Christians take our high and precious regard for the invisible Christian Church and we project it onto our own local contexts. As someone who has held those thoughts myself, and as a future pastor, that's what I often see in the hearts of many of Lutherans east of the Marsh. For the most part, that perception does not manifest itself obviously as being destructive to the work of the local congregation. It does become destructive, however, when the purposes of that attitude (“I love ministry how we do it”) begin to seriously conflict with the purposes of the Holy Spirit and the invisible Christian Church (“We do ministry because we love people”). The conflict between those two attitudes is revealed more obviously when an organization is struggling to define the future; a struggle that the smaller congregations feel much more heavily and urgently than do the bigger ones.<sup>23</sup>

A wrong type of attitude and a lack of seeing the big picture could lead to seeing a consolidation negatively. “[The choice to consolidate] would create such a dip in moral because it would be seen as, ‘we failed; we couldn’t do it; we couldn’t keep it going.’ The congregation would be in a funk for even longer than it has already been in a funk.”<sup>24</sup> I can certainly understand this feeling. I could see people believing they had failed and were throwing in the towel because they could no longer fight the good fight of keeping their church doors open and their pews stocked with people. But that is not what consolidation is about. It is about working together in the most efficient manner possible to accomplish greater things for God’s kingdom. If the members of the congregation did have a “defeated attitude,” it is the leaders’ job to stress how such an attitude is the wrong type of attitude. If such an attitude is allowed to exist, it will hurt the morale of the consolidated members instead of improve it.

Of course, there are some who would caution against consolidating churches. “Ideally [consolidation] is the way to go. However, you have this disease that started out in Eden...people are blinded by control.”<sup>25</sup> I certainly think he is onto something with this comment. Just because people are pastors does not mean they can all work together. Personalities clash all the time. Some pastors are cut out to be associate pastors, and some are not. It is not as if a group of pastors who have been doing all forms of ministry at their own congregation will be able to suddenly give up control over certain areas of ministry with no trouble at all. Leaders will run the risk of clashing with others over control of certain areas of ministry. That is why there

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<sup>23</sup> The Lutherans East of the Marsh, 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous Interview 8.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous Interview 7.

should be a careful plan set in place that all the leaders can agree to before this type of consolidated ministry could begin. Otherwise, without a detailed plan, there would be a much greater risk of falling apart and doing far more damage than good.

This plan that I speak of is where I will stop this first portion of the thesis about the churches in Dodge County, which represent a traditional way of doing things. Now, I will begin to talk to you about the Mequon-Thiensville churches that are at the moment still crafting a plan that would bring the 4 churches there and combine them into one church – a completely new way of doing ministry. Before I even speak about the plan I will give you a brief history of the congregations as well as review their answers to the questions, the same questions I asked the people of Dodge County.

### **THE CHURCHES OF MEQUON-THIENSVILLE**

The Mequon and Thiensville relationship is a unique one in that Thiensville is completely surrounded by the larger area of Mequon. When people refer to Mequon, generally they are also referring to Thiensville. The city of Mequon boasts a population of 23,132 as of the 2010 census, whereas the village of Thiensville contains 3,235 people according to that same census.<sup>26</sup> Within this cluster of people you will find WELS churches all within five miles or less of one another. How is it possible that four WELS churches became located so close together? Again, it all has to do with the history of how these churches were formed.

Trinity (West)<sup>27</sup> was founded on June 22, 1867 as a congregation that supported the ministry that would be later known as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>28</sup> It was comprised of a group of Saxon Germans who were separate from the Pomeranians who lived primarily west in Freistadt. The church exhibited an attitude of individualism as they did not have any dealings with Trinity congregation south of Mequon, the Trinity congregation of Freistadt, nor any relations with St. John's congregation that was in east Mequon. It was formed

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<sup>26</sup> 2010 United States Census. (<http://factfinder2.census.gov>, Accessed on 11/28/2014).

<sup>27</sup> Most all the historical information for Trinity (West) Mequon was gathered from their 125 year anniversary booklet which the congregation put together based on records from the church. It gives clear and concise information as it was meant to be a general overview of the history of the congregation. However, since it is a booklet the information is not published in any way so it cannot be properly cited. However this note is meant to say that the information is very accurate.

<sup>28</sup> It was not until January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1923, that Trinity (West) officially made application to become a member of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod.

as a church that could serve the poor farmers that lived off the land of that area. While those other churches are not at all far away from each other, back then that distance was quite large.

The relatively short amount of time it takes to travel the few miles that separate Trinity (West) and Trinity (South) would have taken much longer back when your fastest mode of transportation was a horse and buggy. Back then five miles was considered a long enough distance to merit planting a new church that could serve a separate group of people. Besides that, the local geography separated these Germans from those who settled over by St. John in East Mequon by a river. For the most part, these Germans of Trinity (West), made up of the local farming families, stayed primarily to themselves. It would take a while for them to accept those whom they would consider to be “outsiders.”

From their early days they were served by several pastors who also served other congregations outside of Mequon. It was not until 1905 that Trinity (West) had its own pastor. They held services in German; it was not until 1921 that they decided to hold four English services per year. 19 years later, in 1940, it was decided to hold English and German services at different times on the same Sunday.

When Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was being built in the 1920's it was understood that if they called a resident pastor then Trinity (West) would become the “seminary's church” partially also because of its close proximity. However, even after they called their first resident pastor, the faculty at the seminary and the leadership of Trinity did not see eye to eye on certain issues. The seminary wanted a church that would support English services but the forefathers of Trinity (West) were not willing to give up their regular German services. Another factor that led to some tension was that the faculty was looking for a church that had a Christian day-school and Trinity (West) was content with keeping it's “Church-School” (what we would know as Sunday School) and had no intentions of adding a school to their congregation. These two reasons are why the faculty sought out Calvary in Thiensville as “their church.”

Calvary<sup>29</sup> Lutheran Church<sup>30</sup> in Thiensville did not exist when the seminary was established in 1929. Calvary began as a mission of the Synod that was made up of the members from various other local churches who wanted to have a church that not only had a Christian

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<sup>29</sup> The church was not always known as Calvary Lutheran Church. It was called Lutheran Memorial Church and shortly after they called their first pastor they voted to close the congregation. However, because the synod owned the church, they reopened it under a new name: Calvary Lutheran church.

<sup>30</sup> Most of the historical information that was gathered for Calvary was primarily from interviews.



day-school but also one that could teach their children in English. The school is really the overwhelming difference between the other three Mequon churches and has a big part to do with the current make-up of Calvary today.

Since the seminary saw Calvary as meeting all of their criteria, they were adopted and have since always been known as the “seminary’s church.” This caused some tension with some of those at Trinity (West). Some felt cheated or at the very least seen as second rate because the seminary chose Calvary over them.

Trinity (South) in Mequon had its first recorded communion service in 1853 but unfortunately the first records of this church were lost due to a fire. They began as a Missouri Synod church and it was founded primarily to serve the Pomeranians that were moving into the area. In 1872 they began a dual parish with St. John in East Mequon. These two continued this sort of relationship till 1932 when both churches then became self-supporting.

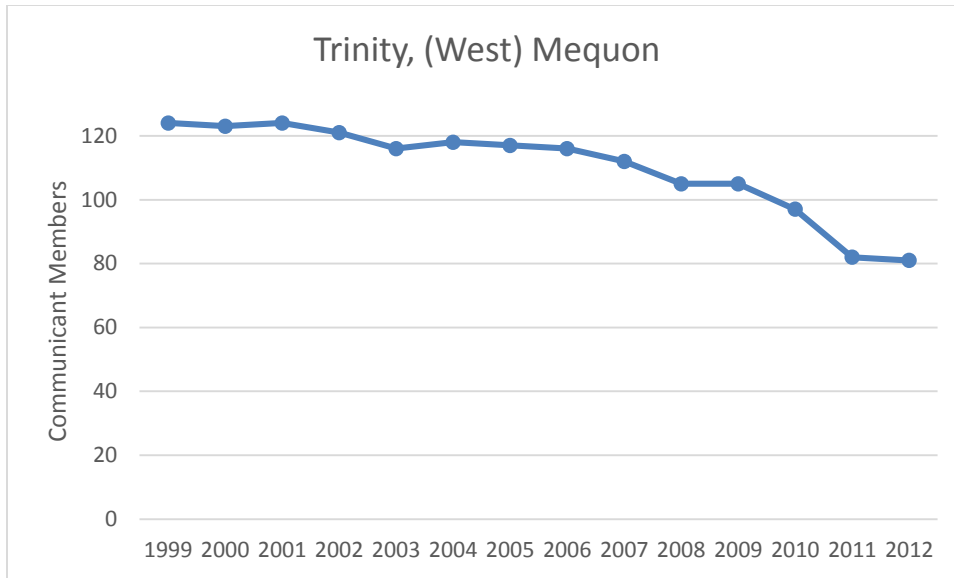
St. John in East Mequon had its beginnings as a preaching station in 1861. By 1881, the 16 members banded together to make St. John an official church organization. It too began as a church that could serve the local farmers of the area on the East side of the river. As mentioned above, they served as a dual parish with Trinity (south) for several years until 1932 when they became self-supporting.

### **HOW THESE CHURCHES LOOK TODAY**

As of 2012, Trinity (West) had 91 baptized members and 81 communicant members. Its average weekly attendance is about 37 people per week.<sup>31</sup> The best way to describe this church would be “aged.” The majority of its members are 65 and older. The congregation has not seen much new growth at all over the past thirteen years.

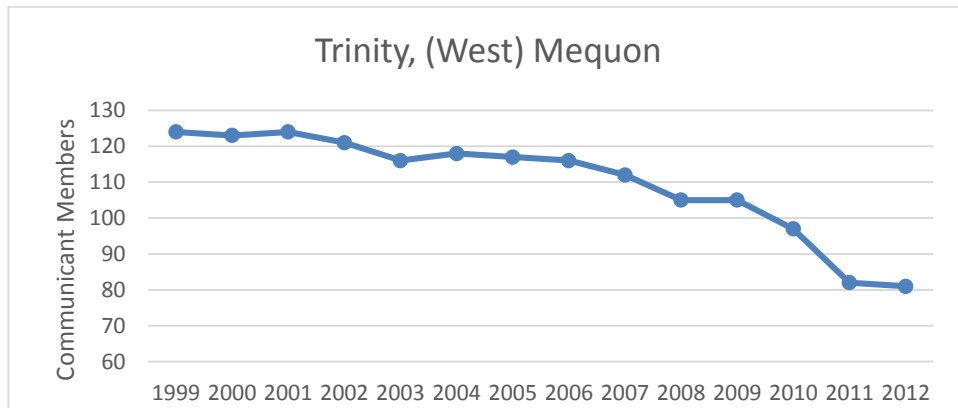
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<sup>31</sup> 2012 Congregational Statistics from WELS Connect



That is a 35% decrease.

Trinity (South) has about 207 baptized members and 168 communicant members. Its average attendance is about 75 people per week.<sup>32</sup> This congregation is also a very gray congregation.



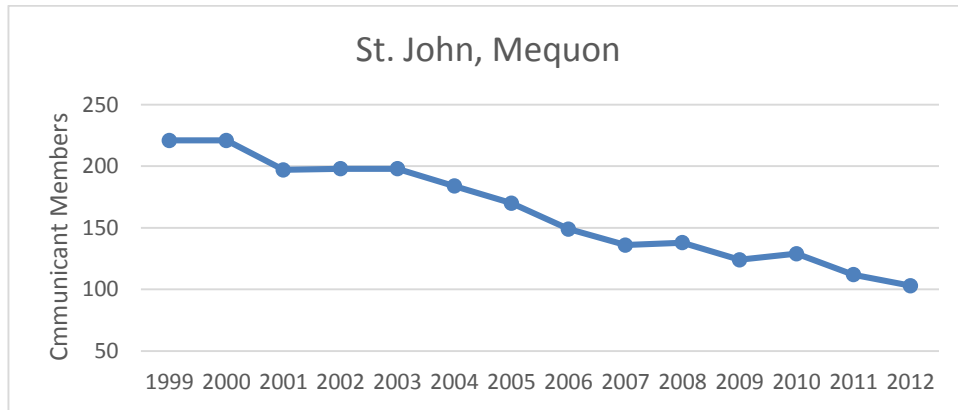
That is a 35% decrease.

St. John in East Mequon has roughly 127 baptized members and about 103 communicant members today. Its average weekly attendance is about 60 people per week.<sup>33</sup> This is also an elderly congregation. Back in the early 1980's this church used to have over 300 members. While this congregation once had many more members, it too has seen a decline in numbers

<sup>32</sup> 2012 Congregational Statistics from WELS Connect

<sup>33</sup> 2012 Congregational Statistics from WELS Connect

from where it once was and, like the others, has not been able to gain as many as have left its doors. It once had a school that was opened in the 1960's and lasted for 25 years serving primarily the children of its own members. However, when there were no more children to go through the school, they had no choice but to close it.

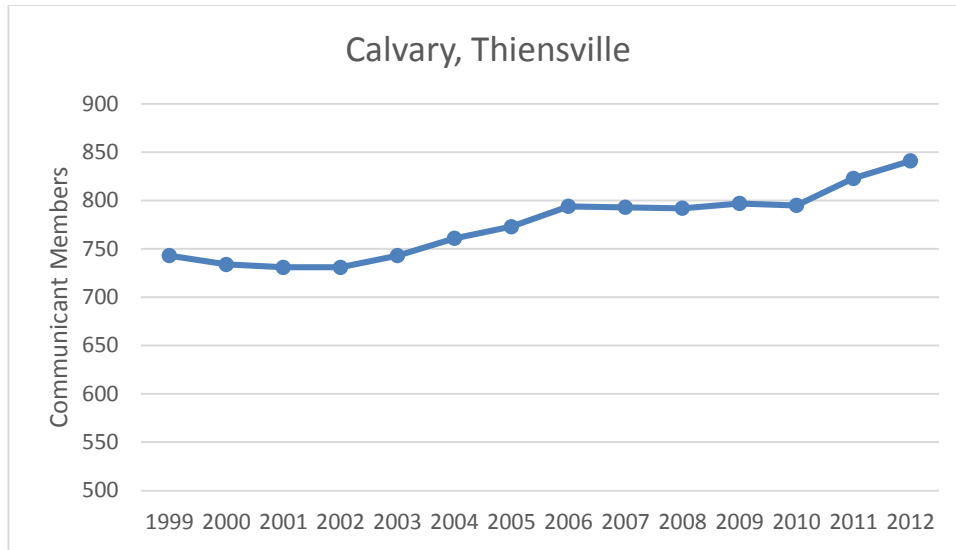


That is a 53% decrease.

Calvary has about 1,024 baptized members and 841 communicant members. Its average weekly attendance is about 442 people per week.<sup>34</sup> Obviously compared to the other three churches, Calvary stands out from among the pack in large portion due to its school. Currently their enrollment is about 111 students from k-8<sup>th</sup> grade. They also have about 17 enrolled in their preschool program. They also have gone on record of saying they will always have room for any student coming from one of the other Mequon churches. The demographics of this congregation are much more evenly spread out than the other three churches.

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<sup>34</sup> 2012 Congregational Statistics from WELS Connect



This represents a 13% increase.

Does this mean that Calvary has done something right that the other churches have not done? Or is it that the other churches have done something wrong in their ministry that accounts for their declining numbers? Numbers do not tell the full story. One cannot gauge success based on size and numbers. Success, frankly, is not in our control, but it is God who blesses his ministry how he sees fit (which means we are his tools that he uses to carry out his plan; a ministerial cause of salvation). The reality is that you simply cannot diagnose and solve these apparent differences among these churches based on a few simple questions, nor is that the purpose of this paper. God blesses ministry at various times and in his own unique way, a way that only he can understand.

As one can analyze from the information given above, most of these churches have been in a steady decline in membership for several years now. There has been little outward growth. There has also been a steady loss of members due to deaths and members moving to different WELS churches. These churches simply have not grown at the same rate as they did in the past. But it's more than just a pattern in numbers that these churches primarily share. One common characteristic all of these churches share is their devotion to treasuring their history and heritage. Many of these members have grown up in the church their whole lives. It is the only church home they have ever known, and they cherish it (and rightly so).

## **EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE COMBINED MINISTRY PLAN**

All of these congregations have a long history characterized by rugged individualism. While three of these churches did share a pastor at one time, history has shown that they did not associate or connect with each other much beyond this. There was little to no interaction between the members of the churches. One person put it this way.

When we first started what we called our shared ministry back about 15 years ago, the first couple years we had a reformation service on the [seminary] campus in the auditorium. And then after a couple of years we said, “Why should we rent that building? We really don’t have a place for any mingling/fellowship of the people other than for worship. So we moved to Calvary with an early and a late service with a brunch in between. So at least we can mingle some of the people together. But anyhow it was at that point that some of the life-long [individuals], some in their 50’s, who said, “Now that’s the first time I’ve even been in Calvary!” And I go, “You got to be kidding me!”<sup>35</sup>

I think that quote speaks for itself. It was just something that these people did not do. You have four WELS churches within five miles of one another, yet some of the people have not even set foot into another one of those churches. Their mentality was that they had their church, and that was all that was needed.

There is a mentality unlike I have seen anywhere...I come here and there was this isolationism, for lack of a better term. It was a competition because we were all after the same people, we all had the same target area, basically, and there was just so much competition and so much, I wouldn’t say anxiety but it brought anxiety to the pastors<sup>36</sup>. One might ask how in the world could four such congregations so close together be “isolated,” but I believe this person to have used a good term to describe the situation. Their closeness of proximity did not translate to a closeness of fellowship. It actually became more of a struggle for them because of this spirit of competition that arose amongst the people. How could the members be competing against each other when they were all playing for the same team? Yet, that’s how the people saw it, and how some of them still see it today.

Again, I can only see that as stemming from the rugged individualism that permeated from generation to generation, going all the way back to when these churches began. Perhaps it made sense back then when times were tougher, when the distance seemed greater, and when you couldn’t rely on one another as much as. However, that is in the past. It does not need to be that way anymore. And the leaders of these churches realized this.

[The pastors were talking] and they said, “You know, we need to do something to get these congregations together.” And the idea hatched and it grew and it became [that] we

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<sup>35</sup> Anonymous interview 4.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous interview 4.

are going to do some ministry things together and that then has led to where we are now. It's been a long slow process.<sup>37</sup>

After seeing some of the positive reactions that came from getting all the churches together, it only made sense to continue to seek other opportunities to do so. This led them to come up with a plan to do joint ministry in a more organized way. You can read more about this in the *Articles of Shared Ministry* in Appendix A. This was helpful for all the congregations and provided a way for the members to be exposed to other brothers and sisters they were in fellowship with who were not from their church. While they were doing this for years, discussions amongst the leaders of these churches did not stop here. They were basically asking the question, "Is there more that we can do?" This is a great question to ask, but it's important to keep the vision in mind. This led me to ask the question:

### **WHAT DID THE VISION OF THESE CHURCHES LOOK LIKE BEFORE THIS PLAN?**

When I asked this question, I noticed a pattern among the churches in Mequon and Thiensville. One person said, "The vision has been to keep going; not just to maintain but to reach out, but realizing it's a struggle and it's limited as far as outreach [is concerned]. It is very much dependent on members inviting their friends and neighbors."<sup>38</sup> Another individual said, "[When I got here], no one could answer that question ["Does this church have a vision?"]...So far they still have not been able to answer that...the congregation still doesn't see outreach as important, honestly speaking."<sup>39</sup> Another said:

Our people here, over the years, have been mostly farmers, not professional people where you start looking down the road, so [the vision] is kind of day to day. And it's not that over the last number of years we haven't tried to go in that direction, but [the people] seem to be [of the mentality], we'll take care of this right now; tomorrow comes, we'll take care of that tomorrow.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, there was no vision for these churches. They were very much looking at keeping the status quo where it was and were not looking at changing in their individual congregations. They go to church, they know some people at church, they worship, they come

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<sup>37</sup> Anonymous interview 4.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous interview 5.

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous interview 3.

home, and do it all again next week. That is not a vision. One person said about the vision of his church:

They want someone to pick it up and do it for them honestly. I have some very loving people and a whole lot of very real and honest believers and wonderful people that I'm going to look forward to spending eternity with someday. But when it comes to our mission here, [our church] does not have the desire and leadership.<sup>41</sup>

There was nothing driving these churches to strive for more; there was nothing that was pushing them to make an impression in their community. As one man put it, "What we have now is, for lack of a better term, old fashioned ministry...I really feel the congregations need to revamp what we're doing because there's just too much time spent on duplication of things to maintain a ministry rather than to expand a ministry."<sup>42</sup> Nothing new was being done within these churches for a long time and it was showing as demonstrated by the statistics presented above. When looking ahead to the future and the plan for a combined ministry plan, this same man said:

In essence, what we're talking about with consolidation is going to happen, whether we do it or the Lord does it. It will happen either with us or without us. These congregations; we're all going to just shrivel up and die if we don't do something...what a waste of time and resources if we let everything die on the vine.<sup>43</sup>

Harsh words on the surface but this comes from a man whose heart is for the ministry, a man who is looking ahead and seeing what the current trends of these area congregations are facing. Nothing has changed and with nothing new on the table for change to be made, the best solution seems to be proactive in doing something rather than let these churches slowly disappear. As another put it, "Rather than having a burial for a church, why not have a transformation and say, 'Hey, why not start working together and do this better?'"<sup>44</sup> Still another said,

Would you rather close the doors now, sell the property, take those monies and stick it into a ministry that really is flourishing, or, will you die on the vine and hold on till the last person locks the door on their way out and eventually the same thing still happens: you sell the building, sell the property, all the assets are gone, all the funds are gone, if you will, all the memorials are gone – which one served its purpose? Well they both did, I suppose, but if the way to avoid [the latter choice] is to make sure our ministry is working and enhancing the ministry that we are doing, and if that means that we have to join with another church to do it [so be it].<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Anonymous Interview 5.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous interview 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Anonymous Interview 2

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous Interview 6.

Why not make use of the resources, time, and talents of these individuals now? And so came about this new proposed ministry plan for the Mequon-Thiensville churches.

### **A NEW VISION: THE COMBINED MINISTRY PLAN OF THE MEQUON-THIENSVILLE CHURCHES**

The new proposal for ministry in the Mequon and Thiensville area calls for a consolidation of all of the churches into the Calvary campus. It makes sense. It is the largest church building, able to support hundreds of worshipers at a time. Also it has the school right on site. Of course this begs the question. What will happen to the other three church locations? Two of those properties are not ADA accessible. They all have a cemetery. Currently the plan is to hold onto all the sites and make use of them. St. John would serve as the pre-school center. Trinity (South) would serve as a daycare center. The use of Trinity West is still being decided. It may not be wise to hold onto all the sites if there is no use for them. Whether or not the decision would be made to sell a site depends on the future and certainly is not a decision that can be rushed.<sup>46</sup>

The plan also calls for the keeping of all five pastors on staff. So far these churches have been able to maintain a self-supporting status. If the members combined into one church, the financial status should not change, necessitating a cut one or two of the pastors.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps this is the most intriguing part of this plan and certainly one that those I interviewed are looking forward to seeing how it works out. In theory it would allow the pastors to focus on a specialized field of ministry. One of those I interviewed explained further:

This sounds fairly business-like but we recognized that we could do better with our time. We have four pastors preparing sermons for each week, most of the time on the same texts...what would happen if we'd only have one pastor spending those 20 some hours a week doing the sermons and freeing up some 60 hours a week for outreach, youth, seniors, visitation and others, so that we could focus on our other ministries; so that we could go deeper in what we do. We recognize that it frees up pastoral time to do more pastoral work.<sup>48</sup>

Think of all the practical applications that could be made for the purpose of enhancing gospel ministry! Any pastor knows how much more time he has to focus on other areas of

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<sup>46</sup> Additional information can be found in Appendix B as far as how these properties would be maintained, how the cemeteries would be handled, the legal ramifications, etc.

<sup>47</sup> More information about the financial overview of this plan can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>48</sup> Anonymous Interview 1.



ministry when he has someone who is able to preach in his place on Sunday morning. It could also apply for things like Bible classes and catechism lessons too. With only one church and only one pastor at a time focusing on those specific areas of ministry, so much more could be done with the time. In talking about this topic, one person said:

[The freeing up of time in this manner] excites us probably more than anything. It's a weird look at ministry because we are trained to be generalists where you're preaching every week, you're teaching every week, you are the evangelist, you are the counselor...you are basically wearing all the hats in a lone congregation... even if you're a small church you still have to preach every Sunday, you still have to prepare stuff that people expect from a pastoral ministry and it keeps you from being effective on a lot of other fronts. If I had my way, I'd like to have at least two pastors in every congregation out there.<sup>49</sup>

There is so much that a single pastor does in any given week and his time is very precious. With all the duties and areas of ministries a pastor needs to focus on, it is no wonder that many pastors often suffer from burnout.<sup>50</sup> It is even worse when some consider this burnout as a badge of honor because it shows that one's time is being spent faithfully.<sup>51</sup> However, this is not primarily an issue of making more free time, but rather an issue of using time more efficiently.

With five pastors on staff, instead of having them all do the same things day after day, they could each have their own area of specialization. As the current proposal stands, it would make one or two pastors primarily focus on worship and preaching while another focuses on the administration and education, another focuses on youth, another focus on visitation and mercy ministry and another could focus on evangelism.<sup>52</sup>

Every pastor knows the frustration he has when he simply does not have the time to put into a youth ministry. He knows how much better his evangelism program and efforts could have been if he only had more time to do research and implement other ideas. But because of other pressing ministries, his time is taken away from other aspects of ministry that are less urgent. He knows how much better things could be. He knows that when you do something, you do it to the best of your ability because nobody wants second-rate anything. Pastors find themselves frustrated with settling for second-rate programs.

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<sup>49</sup> Anonymous Interview 2.

<sup>50</sup> Anonymous Interview 2

<sup>51</sup> Osborne, Larry W. *Accidental Pharisees: Avoiding Pride, Exclusivity, and the Other Dangers of Overzealous Faith*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 30.

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix B for a more detailed description of *possible* areas of specialization.

But with this new proposed idea, you could theoretically have each pastor give the time and effort needed to make his area of specialization the best it can be. A youth pastor could put so much more of his time and effort into youth ministry. He could actually get to know all children on an individual level, know their interests, know their personal life and struggles. He could actually have the time needed to be a part of their lives without having to worry about other aspects of ministry taking his time away.

But could there be a problem with letting those other, neglected pastoral skills get dull instead of keeping them sharp? This plan in no way is intended to keep the other pastors away from preaching or doing Bible studies and so forth. Certainly all the pastors would be able to remain active in all aspects of ministry, just not as often. This way they could remain apt in all areas of ministry while at the same time digging deeper into specific areas of ministry to a degree that would be impossible if they remained individual pastors at individual churches.

That's not to say that everyone sees this plan as perfect and without problems. Whenever there is change on this magnitude, some sort of frustration will come along with it.

There's some changes that [pastors] are not going to like either. It's different going from single [pastor] to associate because you were pretty much in charge of everything and now you have to give up some of that [responsibility]; you give up some of the things that you like...but the goal is ministry...it's always about ministry - it's about reaching out; greater nurturing of souls. So we go back [and say], I'm willing to make a change." You know, Paul says, "I'm willing to do anything for anyone. To the Jew I'll be a Jew, to the Gentile I'll be a Gentile so that in *some way* (his emphasis, not mine) I might save some."<sup>53</sup>

Certainly with a structure change as big as this plan proposes, it will not be a simple transition. It will take some getting used to and there may be some area of ministry that a pastor has to give up (though not completely) in order to carry this plan out. But that is tolerable in light of the larger goal: it is for the benefit of the ministry. As this man said, it is all about God's kingdom; it's all about reaching out and caring for more souls. When the bigger picture is kept in mind, it makes these sacrifices easier to deal with.

Along with this consolidated idea, it leaves open the possibilities for churches to do parts of ministry that they perhaps would have never been able to do on their own.

As this all started going, [there was a prospect lady at a congregation who] had not grown up in the church. We were talking about this stuff and she goes, "Wait you guys are WELS right...but isn't that [church] WELS and isn't that [church] WELS?" And I said,

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<sup>53</sup> Anonymous Interview 1

yeah they all are...and she coming from a managerial [point of view], said, "This is as inefficient, in my business world, as it gets." And when you're talking in churches about efficiency and you're talking about, we don't have enough people to do this...you don't have enough funds to do this; you're spread thin the way it is.<sup>54</sup>

Imagine if a church wanted to start a new program but lacked the proper funds or manpower to do so. With this proposal, the people would be able to combine all of those resources to come together and do things together that they would not be able to do by themselves. Fellowship opportunities suddenly exist between members where there had not been any before; ministry and outreach is able to be enhanced where it once was lacking. As one man put it, "Our ladies group is around four. We could be in a ladies group that has around 30 some or 40 some [people]. Or a choir...it's hard to have a choir with three but you can have one with 20 or 30."<sup>55</sup> These are only just a few examples of what could happen.

At the present time and given the current circumstances, this seems to be the best option for these congregations. The goal of this was never to shut down "lesser" churches or ministries. This plan is not meant to be a way to keep struggling churches from ultimately closing their doors. It all goes back to the basic question: is there a better way for the WELS churches to do ministry in the area of Mequon and Thiensville? It all goes back to the ministry, and it is where every idea has to start. These congregations have gotten together and have come up with an unprecedented plan to answer that question. *Yes, we think we can do ministry better here; not just for our members but for all those whom we are able to reach out to.*

### **RECEPTION OF THE PLAN BY THE MEMBERS**

Coming up with a plan is one thing, but getting people to follow a plan is what really will determine if the plan can succeed or not. Just because the leaders may be on board with this plan does not necessarily mean that the other members will be in agreement. "It is extremely difficult to know when to move or to wait. If church growth leaders waited on everyone in the church to buy the vision, the vision would never become a reality. Nevertheless, pastors can get too far ahead of their people."<sup>56</sup> If you move too fast with a vision, you risk getting too far out in front of your people and then instead of being seen as a leader you are seen as a target. But how do you know if you have moved too fast?

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<sup>54</sup> Anonymous Interview 5

<sup>55</sup> Anonymous Interview 3

<sup>56</sup> Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1993., 190.

Visionaries can envision more ministry and programs than there are people to fill those ministries and programs. Visionaries tend to get so far out in front of their people that the people often mistake them for the enemy. Visionaries are willing to take risks. When they do take risks, they leave themselves vulnerable to be misunderstood, criticized, or undercut by members of their staff, leadership, or congregation.<sup>57</sup>

Know the people you are serving and listen to those people. Communicate the goals clearly to them. This will help clear up a lot of confusion so that someone is not seen as forcing something upon a group. Taking risks is what being a visionary is all about, but leading requires listening and communicating. This is something that these four churches have been doing for many years now. In fact, this proposal is not something that has been started spur of the moment but has taken already over a year to craft. Even at this point the final proposal has not yet been made, but the leaders are being careful to include the congregations and keep them informed throughout the process.

But there were certainly those who felt that this idea was being forced upon the members by the leadership of the churches.

What we've come across so far is that people think [the pastors] are pushing this. That's been an opposition so far. And we've tried to say it in a way that it says, "Listen, I'm not trying to push this, I'm not trying to jam this down your throat. What I'm trying to tell you is this: *we* can do better (his emphasis, not mine)." That's the heart of it; we can do better. And you know, when we sit there and talk about stewardship of our time and our talents and our treasures and all the different [blessings we get from God], why is it that when we say we should give our best to God, our ministry right now isn't at its best? Shouldn't it be something that we're proud of; something that we can have joy in, because I'm not very joyful about the fact that we don't have much going for outreach right now. It doesn't make me happy; it doesn't make our church happy and I know it doesn't make our Lord happy that we're not doing our best.

He went on to say:

[One opposition people said was] this kind of feels top-down driven. This should be bottom-up driven. And I said, if we're going to wait for all of our 4 congregations to come up with an idea to enhance ministry, it's still going to be self-focused...focused on self as in each church rather than the bigger picture of what we're here to do.<sup>58</sup>

It is the pastor's goal to use time and talents (his and the congregation's) to serve God as best as possible. In my interview there was no sense of wanting to force such a plan on the people; but rather, there is an emphasis on opening the eyes of their members to look beyond the walls of their congregations, seeing not only their other brothers and sisters in the faith but also reaching

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<sup>57</sup> Carolyn Weese, *Eagles in Tall Steeples* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1991), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous Interview 5

everyone as a whole. This man's belief is that there is opportunity to do more collectively rather than as an individual congregation. And lastly, the leadership is not trying in any way to pull the wool over anyone's eyes. As the called leaders of the congregation, they are trying to lead them in a way that benefits God's Kingdom as a whole: the people, the churches and the area of Mequon-Thiensville.

For not a small number of people there was a bit of fear with this plan. Some believed they would lose out on what they already have. That is to say that some are afraid they will lose their church building, their location; basically everything they have known as worship. This might be especially true for the elderly members, due to the fact that for many of them, their church is what they have grown up with and known for their whole life. They were born and baptized in church "x", they were married in church "x", they have gone to church "x" for their entire life and now they are afraid of losing what they have known. With so much attachment comes great emotion, and this issue has to be handled delicately and with a loving heart. But to really get to the bottom of this issue, I have come to find out that there are two main causes for this fear: one is a fear of losing identity and the other is a fear of changing one's comfort zone.

The idea that people see their identity as being found in their history is no different in the Mequon-Thiensville churches than it is in the Dodge County churches that I interviewed.

What people see in their identity is their history...especially in those long term families. They see this as where their families have worshiped and this is where I need to worship. And to me, we're one lightning strike away, one tornado away, one [natural disaster] away from losing this historic building and it's not going to change a thing...their identity is attached to a location and a building and that's the danger of it.<sup>59</sup>

Much like I saw with the other group of churches, so also these members have a misplaced identity. They feel like everything they know as church has to do with the building and the location that they are in. They don't understand that if they lost their building or their church property that they would still be the same group of believers. As seen earlier in the other part of this paper, this belief is really a misunderstanding of the Christian calling and a misunderstanding of ministry.

This is not to say that their love for their generational history is completely a bad thing. On the contrary, the history and heritage of the church should be honored. What a blessing that such people have taken great pride and ownership of their church up to this point throughout the

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<sup>59</sup> Anonymous Interview 4.

different generations. But again, the danger lies in people relating their church identity to their history and heritage – when they equate their identity to a specific building. Instead of focusing on the need for the mission of the church, people begin to identify with the existence of their own church building.

What would we want our new identity to be? Well, I'd like it to say we have history, we have longevity, but our longevity can't be based in "just because we're here (history)." Our longevity should be based in, "how are we serving the needs of people when it comes to what they need to hear; that they need to know their savior."<sup>60</sup>

History and heritage -- longevity, as this man puts it -- is a wonderful thing if it is seen from the proper perspective. What I mean by that is that people need to understand there is always a need for the Holy Christian Church to exist – to tell more and more people about a God who loves them and a Savior who died for their sins. So it is good for an individual church to be in a particular area and serve out that mission and always see the need to be there.

But this is different than equating one's identity with a specific building or location. It's understanding the need for the Invisible Church to exist in Mequon and Thiensville is always there. This new plan is not changing that fact at all but rather is trying to transform it into something that can be done in a better way – by joining together with the other Christians in the area and still serve the same area.

The identity of this congregation should be, "We are here doing the Lord's ministry [serving him for many years] and we're going to continue doing that even if we change our name; even if we join brothers and sisters in Christ it doesn't change our ministry and purpose; our mission statement stays the same."<sup>61</sup>

The ministry is not about a building. It is not about history. It's about people. This entire plan is emphasizing the identity of these Christians is not found in any particular building but rather it is found in being a member of the larger Holy Christian Church on earth.

If nothing else, this talk of church identity shows how easy it is to let our sinful hearts corrupt the blessings that God gives us. Every single one of these churches is a blessing that God has given and throughout many years. By his grace, he has allowed them to share the saving word with others. But when the love for the building or the love for a particular location goes beyond a love for souls or a love for the greater Christian calling and ministry in God's

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<sup>60</sup> Anonymous Interview 5.

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous Interview 4.

kingdom, then even these good things are abused. One man summarizes these thoughts well with a rather lengthy quote, but certainly one worth pondering:

It's not where we are; it's not the building in which we are serving or worshipping that's important – it's word and sacrament; it's that Jesus is there where two or three come together in his name. And I'm not sure our people grasp that. They fall in love with the externals. And not to get it wrong – it's a great blessing when people have a place where they can go and escape all the trouble out in the world and sit quietly and meditate on God's Word and receive his sacrament and be assured of forgiveness – it's a little relief from the day to day hassle. And a place that they're comfortable with and familiar with, it's great. It's great when they see their pastor as their shepherd and they love him dearly and have a relationship with him...will some of that be lost in this merger? Maybe to some extent at first. But I think what they will find is a new identity with four or five pastors (shepherds).<sup>62</sup>

This plan still calls for keeping their shepherd and maintaining the bond of unity with one another. No one's pastor is leaving right away. The relationship the sheep have with their shepherd will not change. The building may change in form but the purpose of the Church and the Christian calling will not change.

The other cause for concern is understanding that some people do not like change. This has reigned true especially in the WELS culture. There is even a joke about it that I'm sure many readers of this have even heard before. How many WELS members does it take to change a light bulb? The answer: change...*change*? If nothing else this highlights just how difficult it is for some people to alter their understanding of the way things have been done so far. One man put it this way:

I can't really say we are facing opposition to the concept more than we are facing opposition to the concept of change. I don't think there's one of the people who isn't interested in souls, who isn't interested in outreach, but the concept of change scares them; it's out of their comfort zone. It's not my pew, not my service, not my pastor.<sup>63</sup>

I certainly think he hit the nail right on the head here. First of all, these people do care about ministry and have a love for souls. So far in my research, I have not come across an instance of anyone who refuses to change the way ministry is done because they simply do not want to reach out with the gospel. These people love their Savior and his message, and they want to support the mission of saving souls. And the people love their pastors. I can understand reasons why they would not want to lose out on their shepherd. But with this plan, they would not lose out on

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<sup>62</sup> Anonymous Interview 4.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous Interview 1.

him. And the people would learn to understand that all pastors are gifts to God's Church. People would come to learn that instead of having a "my pastor and only my pastor" approach, they would learn to love them all and even learn to call them all "my pastor."

Another difficult thing with change is that it is a huge unknown, even if the method has been tried once before already, because there is no guarantee of the outcome. In other words, just because one church has made a change somewhere else and it turned out well does not mean that it will turn out well for every church that makes that change. What do I mean by this? Say, for example, church "A" went to a more contemporary style of worship, and it was a large success. Church "B" heard about how well it went and decided it would adopt the same thing as church "A," but the change is met with discontent and unrest and the whole move is a huge failure.

How much more *could* that be true of something that has never been done before i.e. this new ministry plan? From my research, this is really the first time something like this has ever been attempted. Of course there is a fear of the unknown because this is completely uncharted territory. People are afraid of what they do not know, and that is certainly understandable, but the question becomes: is the fear of the unknown enough reason to keep this plan from getting off the ground and becoming a reality? If every inventor of a new product was afraid to create something new because they were not sure of the outcome, think of how much we would not have today. If every minister was afraid of taking a chance, then would there ever be a new mission? In other words, the answer to this question is a resounding no.

Besides being afraid of the unknown, the previous speaker made the point that people do not want to change because that means getting out of one's own comfort zone. Now there is nothing wrong with being comfortable. We like what we know, but there is a point when the comfort zone is abused. When "I am not comfortable with that" becomes the only excuse not to try something new, then it is not to be seen as a legitimate reason for halting a plan project. There needs to be rationale behind the discomfort. Again just think of how fewer missions there would be in this world if people did not do things because it was out of their comfort zone.

The opposition to a major change is so deeply rooted in some people's attitudes that they simply cannot be a part of it. One person told me that he knew of some people who are willing to leave the church over such a change.



There are people who have said, “Well if you’re going to go with this [new plan], I’m just going to leave.” And you ask them well, where will you go, and they say, “Well we’ll just go [to a different WELS church].” It’s that deep... you kind of get used to the fact that there will be some fallout from this, there always is. Whenever you make a major change, it just is too hard for some people.<sup>64</sup>

I could understand a person leaving because of doctrinal reasons or even because the respect for the leaders in the church was completely lost. But I cannot understand the notion that people would leave over something that is meant to enhance the ministry.

So what is behind such a comment; such a strong opposition to change? Besides what was already mentioned, I also believe that there is too much of an attachment of a person’s identity to history and a building. As I have said, attachment to a building is not a bad thing. It is wonderful to take ownership of something; to be proud of what you have and the generations that have long served there. But is that a legitimate reason to threaten leaving everything because of change? The ironic thing is that such a person would be doing exactly the thing he is so against – change.

When people say or for lack of a better term, threaten, “Well then I’ll leave,” because they don’t want change, they are willing to change to spite it. It’s kind of an oddity. “Ok, I don’t like what you’re doing, I don’t like the changes, so I’m going to change and go to a different church.” You know, they’re trying to fight the same thing they’re fighting against.<sup>65</sup>

It really does not make any sense. Is protesting a decision really worth leaving your brothers and sisters that you have known for so long? Instead of wasting energy fighting this plan tooth and nail, imagine how much more energy could be spent on enhancing God’s ministry and seeing the bigger picture.

## CONCLUSION

We can praise God for all the wonderful blessings that he has given all these churches for the many years they have been around. His word has been taught from generation to generation (in some churches for over 150 years), and that is something to be proud of. When you look at the history of these churches, you can understand why so many churches are right next to each other. What a blessing it is for people to move to an area and realize the need for someone to feed their spirits the soul-saving food of God’s Word. Much can be learned from these ancestors who taught their children the importance of God in their life and for many, the importance of a

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<sup>64</sup> Anonymous Interview 2.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous Interview 1.

good Christian education. Certainly the history of these people and these churches should be honored.

But the historical circumstances and contexts of those initial days are long in the past. That history does not exist anymore. Communities, people, demographics – it all has changed. And I believe it is time that these churches look at doing ministry in a way that could better serve not only the needs of the church members but also the needs of the people in the communities that they serve. And we can serve this changing world with the one thing that never changes: God's Word.

The Mequon-Thiensville churches are still putting together a new plan that will change the look of their churches to better serve the ministry in God's Kingdom. From what I can tell, I believe it is a wise change, one that carries with it so many benefits and has the capability to leave a large impression on the community. The fact that it has taken so long to come up with a plan is not a criticism of the leadership but rather evidence of wisdom on their part. No one is rushing into this decision. The communication lines are open. Voices are being heard. Issues are being addressed in loving ways. A plan of this magnitude is not something to be rushed, nor is it one that is without emotions. Effectively working through those emotions will be a crucial part of guiding this process along.

The northeastern Dodge County churches are still doing ministry the way it has been done for quite some time now. God has blessed it and there is no reason to think that God will not continue to bless it. But some of the leaders do realize that the time for change is at hand, and perhaps has been at hand for a decade or more already. At various churches there were talks of consolidating schools, but it was vehemently opposed by members because no one wanted to lose out on what they had. No one wanted to "be defeated". The fallacy of this is thinking that there is a winner and a loser to begin with. That is not how ministry works. And this kind of thinking is one that carries over into conversations about consolidating churches.

In both geographical areas, the biggest common thread of thinking, or lack of thinking, was that there are a lot of people who do not see the bigger picture. They have forgotten what the ministry is all about. They have forgotten, in a sense, why the church exists in the first place. Is it a country club meant to serve my social needs? Some people have a hard time seeing, or at least grasping ministry outside their church's walls. In both cases this is a problem that the leaders need to address by educating the people, showing them the bigger picture. Of course no

one ever said this change of attitude would take place overnight. The leaders will need to address their members patiently and the members will need to understand who their leaders are: they are shepherds who mean no harm but have the best intentions for God's ministry.

I believe any area that fits this particular description (multiple congregations, primarily rural, in a relatively concentrated geographical location) should begin, if they have not already, to looking into the plan of consolidation, or at the very least, combining ministry together. Whether that means joint youth groups, worship services, or catechism classes, I believe it all to be beneficial in today's world. But in no way am I going to make judgments that a consolidation style ministry would be the best thing for all churches that fit this category. Each area has its own context and culture that needs to be thoroughly examined and understood.

When these conversations are presented and discussed, people cannot shut down every single talk without seriously thinking it through. In order to have a healthy conversation about it, the bigger picture always needs to be kept in mind and certain attitudes need to be removed from discussion: remove pride of your church; remove thoughts of competition; remove any attitude that believes in things like defeat or loss and focus on the bigger picture. Do not let selfishness, control, history, or identity with a plot of land or a building keep you from enhancing the ministry.

Perhaps this means the leaders need to take more of a role in teaching their members about the ministry to help reshape their attitudes. Certainly they cannot afford to take a back seat in these conversations or be content with letting this kind of attitude guide people's decisions. It is understandable that this kind of attitude comes about because of the "Generational Inertia" already described. But if the attitude has not been addressed for years now already, and it is not going to be addressed now, the when will it be addressed? Now is the time.

It will happen that congregations decide not to consolidate with each other or do ministry together. If it happens for good reasons, praise God for the wisdom of everyone involved that came to such a decision. But when that happens, all I ask is that they would constantly ask this question and seek to sincerely answer it – are we doing ministry in the best way possible? Are we holding ourselves back? Is there a better way for us to do ministry in God's kingdom?



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## APPENDIX A – Articles of Shared Ministry

### ARTICLES OF SHARED MINISTRY

The purpose of a shared ministry is to utilize the available resources (manpower) within our congregations to better serve ur membership and to reach out to our community with the Gospel.

While maintaining each congregations’s independence, Calvary, Thiensville, St. John’s, East Mequon, Trinity, South Mequon, and Trinity, West Mequon agree to the following:

- To grant permission to their called pastor to seek the assistance of the other pastors to carry out shared ministry. (Shared ministry = areas classified as shared ministry, see list below).
- To grant permission to their called pastor to assist the other pastors in carrying out shared ministry of sister congregation.
- To respect the assisting pastors as called servants of Christ serving under the direction and at the request of their pastor.
- To be supportive of the efforts and ministries of sister congregations.
- To provide regular communication between the congregations.
- To share costs of mutually beneficial programs by those directly benefited (e.g. Evangelism – all, pre-school – Calvary and St. John’s, grade school – Calvary, Cost of VBS and other similar projects will be left to the discretion of the non-participating congregations).
- Advice and issues for the local congregations will be submitted to the appropriate council, board, committee, etc. of the local congregation.
- No pastor may initiate any ministry within a congregation of which he is not the administrative pastor without the permission of the administrative pastor and in consultation with the other pastors.
- The entire shared ministry program will be reviewed after two years.
- Organizations within the churches are to be reminded to include the other churches whenever possible – in particular for unique fellowship opportunities – i.e. bowling, ball games, outings, etc.
- To establish a coordinating council composed of the pastor and equal lay representation from each congregation.

#### Current list for shared ministry

1. BIC Classes
2. Catechism – public school
3. Catechism – grade school
4. Bible Classes
5. School Devotions
6. Evangelism
7. Joint Worship Services
8. Limited pulpit exchange
9. Coverage during absences (vacation, conference, emergencies, etc.)

With coordinating council approval more shared ministries may be added to the above list as the program progresses.

## APPENDIX B – Consolidation Report of Mequon-Thiensville WELS Churches

### TOWARD THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE MEQUON/THIENSVILLE WELS CHURCHES

The churches of the Mequon /Thiensville areas have a long and rich history. Three of them were founded over 150 years ago and one was founded during the Great Depression. The churches were founded to provide God's people a place to worship, to encourage one another and to combine resources for doing the work of the kingdom of God. Their goals were good and they were willing to sacrifice to accomplish those goals.

To have churches in such close proximity was not out of the ordinary. Like-minded people with similar backgrounds and similar heritage and genealogy would build churches close to their homes. Transportation and communication was not what it is today and distance was considered a factor in the building and placement of churches.

Churches, however, at this time were built for the believers – those that already knew of Jesus as their Savior. They were built so that the families of these believers would not only have a place to worship but also a place for their children to be baptized, confirmed, and married. If others from the area wished to join, that was okay – though because of the close-knit community of the church and the family connections among most of the members, it was at times difficult for an “outsider” to meld into the church family.

The concept of a church serving as the base camp for going out into the world with the gospel and striving to bring others in through evangelism was not the driving force for their existence. Sadly, our churches became somewhat like exclusive clubs with mission work being that which the synod did in faraway places like Japan and Africa.

We know full well that the Lord's directive to his followers was to go and make disciples. His directive was not to go and build churches and buildings. The early Christian church would meet in people's homes to pray, to worship and then to go and share the good news *“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” (Acts 5:42)*

Ministry in the Christian church has always been two-fold. Ministry has been about feeding and caring for the saints (maintenance) and seeking the lost (mission).

Even in this setting so richly blessed by the Holy Spirit there was room for improvement. When some of the “maintenance” ministry was consuming too much of the apostles' time and was not being done as efficiently as it should have been, the apostles arranged for a *change* in the way things were done. Realizing, *“it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn the responsibilities over to them and will*

*give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” (Acts 6:2-4). Not only did this change work, we are also told, “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7)*

With this goal in mind, “to do what we are currently doing better and to make a concerted effort to reach out with the ministry of the Word”: we propose like the apostles of old to make a *change* and *consolidate* the efforts of our four churches.

When the apostles made their change to the ways things were done, we are told that “*this proposal pleased the whole group.*” (Acts 6:5) What a joy that would be if our change could have that same response. Yet we are well aware that change means moving from one’s “comfort zone.” No one likes to leave their comfort zone, but will when the motivation to do so is strong and compelling. We believe that the ministry of the Word of God is that strong and compelling reason to move from the familiar to do something great for the kingdom. We pray that the “whole group” will see it the same way.

To accomplish the change the Apostles wanted to do, they set out a plan and brought it to the group as a whole. They neither dictated the plan – though they probably could have – nor asked for someone else to come up with something. With a great deal of forethought, understanding of the situation and prayer they went about their change. That is also the plan before us.

Yet our plan is different in that what the apostles proposed was something that was new and additional. The proposal for consolidation, while new, also means a retooling of what is already being done in an effort to do it better. That means a greater degree of change for our congregations. That to which we have become accustomed will be different. But we ask for a mindset that appreciates the importance of what we do in the kingdom. We ask for a mindset that considers souls of others of greatest importance. We ask for a mindset that says “Whatever we can do to more effectively bring Jesus to the people, count me in.” We ask for a mindset that (shamelessly borrowing from President Kennedy) says, “Ask not what my church can do for me – but what I can do for my church and for the saving of souls.” A plan for consolidation of our four churches is a plan that asks for a mindset of understanding and love. Who among us would not agree that that is exactly what it should always be? Is there any among us who say “That’s not me.”?

## **CONSOLIDATION PROPOSALS**

Since the proposal for consolidation of our churches was first presented in October of 2013, questions were flying, assumptions both positive and negative were being made and people were asking for details. Details were not available, however, since the concept of



consolidation had yet to be approved. Now since all four congregations have voted to proceed in the planning process it is time to put down some details. What follows is neither Spirit inspired nor the way it will be regardless of what anyone might think or say. They are merely proposals from those you have called to serve as your shepherds and who daily live and are involved in the ministry of our Savior. They are proposals of what could be and how it all might work. They are proposals which are up for debate and consideration, but at least provide us with things to consider and targets to aim at.

## **PROPERTIES**

Our congregations have been blessed with wonderful parcels of land and buildings.

- *With a congregation of @1300 souls will all of them be needed?* Probably not. Maintenance of 4 properties would be expensive, especially those which need some repairs currently. Two of the church facilities are not ADA accessible which makes future use for new ministries less tenable or at least calls for more consideration.
- *Should one or more of the properties be sold immediately?* Probably not. When the minds of God's people are put together to consider what we can do for our community and in our community it would be prudent to hold on to all the properties until such a time that our future work and plans can be more clearly defined. Though it would be prudent if such decisions could be rendered within the first two years of the consolidated congregation. Any money received from the sale of a campus would be used to advance the ministry of the congregation.
- *What will be done with the cemeteries?* Cemeteries provide an important history of a congregation. While it might be possible for the city or the county to take them over (research will need to be done on this) it is believed that there should be a separate cemetery corporation, with its own board of directors. This board will be responsible to oversee the work of the cemeteries. The rules and regulations currently in place for the cemeteries will need to be combined and revised. The congregation will be the sole stockholder in the corporation and will therefore maintain control. All decisions by the Cemetery Board of Directors regarding finances will need to be approved by the church council.

Additionally, current members of the congregations owning cemeteries will be asked to make arrangements for plots prior to the establishment of the corporation at the current fees being charged by the individual churches. After the establishment of the cemetery corporation, cemetery plots will become available for purchase by all members of the congregation.

Furthermore, the cemeteries will maintain the names of their current congregation and a plaque of history and explanation will be provided for each cemetery.

- *What are the legal ramifications of consolidation?* We will seek legal counsel as to the ownership of the property, transfer of ownership, amount of land available to a congregation prior to property tax consequences and the incorporation of the new congregation. There may be a need to dissolve our congregations as they are currently constituted or simply unite as one body. Applications for 501c status would need to be considered.
- *What purposes will be assigned to the various campuses?*  
As currently being considered – St. John’s will serve as our pre-school center, Trinity South will serve as our day care center, and Calvary will serve as our education center. Designation for Trinity West will need to be decided.
- *How will the properties be maintained?* As is currently done in all four congregation a board of trustees will be elected to oversee the maintenance of the properties. Since the combined campuses will make for a larger job list than the individual campuses had, it would be prudent that the new congregation hire a part-time property manager to oversee everything.

## **FINANCES**

Many have been concerned about the finances of the new congregation. Currently, though in some areas on a diminishing basis, the individual congregations have been maintaining their own budgets. Since most line items on the various budgets are similar:

- The simplest solution will be to establish a congregational budget for the new entity. This would not be different from what has been done on an individual basis.
- The new congregation will assume all debts and liabilities of the individual congregations. In no way is this to be considered any different than if companies were to merge in the secular world.
- Contributions which have been given for a designated purpose such as a building fund, cemetery fund, etc. will be maintained for those purposes as long as the purpose exists. Money given for purposes which no longer exist will be placed in a church ministry fund to be used at the discretion of the church council and voting members.
- Recognizing the size of the budget, the amount of time necessary to do the work and maintain the records, it would be prudent for the congregation to hire a part-time business manager to take care of the accounting. This position may be combined to also include the role of property manager as well.
- Salaries as currently established by the congregations for their called workers will be maintained and consideration for changes can be made either at budget times (if there is a large disparity) or upon the addition of new called staff.

- While at the start of the consolidation, there may not appear to be any great savings – especially if we take on paid staff for property and finances and also maintain all four campuses. But it is anticipated that there will be savings in a variety of areas such as utilities and even possibly in salaries as we “right-size” our manpower. One cannot truly account for the savings of eliminating the duplication of work and services.

## **EDUCATION**

As currently being done, the grade school will remain on the Calvary campus and St. John’s pre-school will remain on its campus. However, since there is now only one congregation, the usual fees and tuitions as done in current practice by Calvary will apply to the entire new congregation.

At such a time as deemed prudent the pre-schools may be combined and if financially feasible, possibly through the sale of a campus, or through special gifts, the pre-school facility at St. John’s will be updated and expanded and the two pre-schools combined on the one campus. Such a move would make good use of St. John’s excellent location for a pre-school and make additional room at Calvary school.

## **WORSHIP**

When consolidation was first proposed there was some concern about service times and locations. Some were even so bold as to threaten to leave rather than give up their time, their building or their pew. For the apostles of old, ministry was always about souls not self. Doing the same thing at the same time just in different locations is not good stewardship of time or resources. We recognize that there will be changes for everyone, pastors included. With that in mind, and to provide a starting point, the following services times are being recommended for each week.

Thursday – 6:30 p.m. – St. John’s campus  
 Saturday – 5:30 p.m. – Trinity West campus  
 Sunday – 8:00 a.m. – Calvary campus  
 Sunday – 9:30 a.m. – Trinity South campus  
 Sunday – 10:45 a.m. – Calvary campus

Depending on the number of campuses available, and the attendance numbers these locations and times are subject to change.

Available resources and space will lead us to conduct Sunday morning Bible classes and Sunday School on the Calvary campus between services.

One preacher will cover all five services with liturgy assistance on Sunday.

Mid-week worship services during Advent and Lent will be held at the Calvary campus at 3:15 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Holy week services will also be at Calvary as well as Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter worship services. (Christmas may need to be multiple services.)

## **STAFFING**

Of the many concerns and questions voiced about consolidation, the question that seemingly gets asked quite often, “Do we need five pastors?” Simple answer, “Yes.” But not in the way we have considered pastors before. As is currently the case, the pastors serve as generalists for ministry. They do everything involving ministry. They prepare worship services and sermons, visit the sick and shut-in, arrange for meetings and organizations, usually oversee property situations prior to the trustees, monitor finances, do the administrative work, plan for outreach and make the visits, do the counseling of those in need, prepare for Bible classes and catechism instruction. They strive to do it all and do it well. But as one person said, “They are spread a mile wide but only an inch deep.” Often times valuable ministry time is consumed by the urgent instead of the important. How much greater impact could our ministries have if pastors were allowed to focus on specific aspects of ministries rather than all of them?

Think back to Acts where the Apostles knew that taking care of the widows and the hungry was important work, but if they devoted their attention there, they would have to take away from the vital work of sharing the gospel. As a result they had the seven deacons selected to do the working of caring for the needy so the Apostles could “focus” on their ministry. In the early stages of our consolidation it is important that the five pastors be maintained to assist in the merger and help one another understand the nuances of their flock; to provide continuity for the flock during the transition, to focus on important areas of ministry which until now had been one of many rather than one of focus and importance.

After a period of time a change in the number and make-up of our called staff may need to take place whether by addition or subtraction. Over the next ten years there will be some natural attrition by way of retirements. At those times the congregation may consider if that pastor should be replaced, the staff down-sized or possibly a staff minister could take his position as well.

Keeping all five pastors we submit the following division of duties.

### **Worship and preaching – Pastor Ebert**

- Responsible for arranging for all worship services, and those items involved in worship such as choirs, instrumentalists, music, service folders, etc.
- Responsible for being one of the regularly scheduled preachers and arranging of the preaching rotation.

### **Administration and teaching - Pastor Scheuerlein**

- Responsible for all administration work involving membership. (I.e. transfers, releases, etc.)
- Responsible for all scheduling of meetings and calendar events
- Arrange for regular meetings of the pastoral staff
- Oversee the administration of the finances
- Oversee communications with the congregation and reports for the congregation as well as publishing of weekly bulletins,
- Responsible for congregation's correspondence and mailing.
- Oversee the scheduling of Bible classes and serving as one of the main teachers of classes.

### **Organizations and preaching – Pastor Weinrich**

- Responsible for coordination and scheduling of groups within the congregation, including but not limited to: ladies groups, men's groups, FROGS, softball, etc.
- One of the regularly scheduled preachers
- Keeping congregation apprised of synodical groups such as Kingdom Workers, Missions, LWMS, etc.

### **Outreach and youth – Pastor Koehler**

- Responsible for advertising of mission of congregation to our community.
- Responsible for arranging for prospect visits, new resident visits and follow-ups to visitors in church.
- Arrange for new member classes and follow-ups.
- Pastoral liaison to the school, principal and school board
- Coordinate and oversee ministry to teens.

### **Visitation and mercy ministry – Pastor Kolberg**

- Responsible for coordinating the regular visitation of members who are homebound or institutionalized.
- Responsible for coordinating and follow-up on those who are hospitalized and/or recuperating at home or in a physical therapy situation
- Schedules and coordinates opportunities for seniors to remain involved in active ministry such as OWLS, Single Again, volunteer opportunities.
- Monitors member attendance in worship and sacrament and arranges for visits with those who have strayed.

A second similar approach to the division of duties could be as follows:

**Worship – Pastor Ebert**

- Worship planning
- Coordination of preaching
- Choral oversight
- Enlisting/training of musicians

**Gospel Outreach – Pastor Koehler**

- Seeking local opportunities: advertising, community awareness, events
- Lead congregational witness areas
- BIC/Discovery ministry (new member classes)
- WELS missions and CMO champion
- Cradle roll
- School and pre-school

**Youth and Family Ministry – Pastor Weinrich**

- Sunday School
- Catechism instruction
- High school ministries , KML, WISCO
- College-age ministries
- Parenting courses
- Member retention

**Adult nurture – Pastor Scheuerlein**

- Education
  - Introductory courses
  - Ongoing Bible classes
  - Small groups
  - Leadership training
  -
- Administration
- Fellowship groups and opportunities

**Mercy Ministry – Pastor Kolberg**

- Sick and hospitalized
- Shut-in
- Disabled inc. sight and hearing impaired

- Poor – shelters, food pantries, etc.
- Elder care
- Absent – armed forces, moved away
- Support groups – grief, addictions, widows/widowers
- Prison and institutional ministries.
- CCCW

All pastors will continue to serve as called upon and needed. Members will be able to counsel and consult with the pastor of their choice. While funerals and weddings will be done on a rotating basis, families may request the services of a specific pastor. All pastors will serve as associates in ministry and be called as such with the specific details of their call to be determined by needs. The various responsibilities can be altered and exchanged with the consent of the church council. The pastoral responsibilities may also be altered and added to as ministry needs of the congregation dictate.

As noted in the details above, there will be two regular preachers whom members can expect to see regularly for weekly worship. The others will be included for mid-week services and special festival services. The preaching rotation and preachers can be changed and altered as schedules and gifts might direct.

To this point nothing has been noted about the school and the called workers involved with the school. Since the consolidation does not directly affect the school in the same way it does the ministries of the congregation and its pastors, the school will remain unchanged in that it will be one of the ministries carried out by the congregation coordinated under a school board, which is responsible to the church council and ultimately the voters of the congregation.

## **Governance**

The newly formed congregation will establish and operate under a non-binding constitution. This is not different from what is currently being done in the four churches, though a new constitution will need to be drawn up to cover the changes and after time be voted to be binding.

By constitution, the church will operate with a church council of at least 12 men with representation from all current churches. (The representation does not need to be equal for the four.) Representation from all churches will be a requirement only for the first two years after which as one congregation we will operate as one congregation – backgrounds laid to rest.

There will need to be a board of trustees to oversee the properties; a board of elders to monitor the care of souls and worship; a board of education specifically to monitor the school; and other committees as will be deemed necessary to effectively carry out the ministry of the church.

The pastors will serve as ad hoc members of all boards and council.

## **Other Things**

The central office for the church will be in the school with the Thiensville address becoming the main mailing address.

A name will be selected for the new church. The congregation will be solicited and called on to make that decision. The name should be significant and inviting to the community, (No Latin or Greek phrases) and convey the purpose for our existence. The campus will be designated by direction. (West, East, South, and Central)

A logo or symbol will be designed. Such a logo may capture our heritage yet again should convey our reason for existence.

A coordinated communication system will be put in place so as to be able to reach each pastor or campus.

## **Thoughts for the future**

- Building a ministry center which will have offices, counseling areas, fireside room, small kitchen and open fellowship area to seat @ 200. Location to be Main Street north of Calvary. With potential of adding on site counseling from Christian Family Solutions.
- Building a state-of-the-art preschool on the St. John's campus and combine pre-schools.
- Outreach to Jewish neighbors
- English as second language reaching out to Asian and Hispanic population.
- Adding different styles of worship to be included every week
- Grow our membership basis each year by a focused effort on outreach.

## **Time frame / schedule**

A committee of 16 members (four from each congregation) is to be appointed and will meet on Wednesday, November 5. Each congregational president is also to be in attendance as well as the pastors.

A chairman and secretary will need to be appointed at that meeting

The committee will be assigned the task of developing the blueprint for consolidation. Sub - committees will need to be formed and the work above will need to be divided accordingly. Each sub-committee will need to elect a chairman and secretary.

A follow-up meeting will be held on January 6 (Ephipany) for reports and updates. Future meetings will be scheduled as necessary.

Success will be dependent on the committees being sure to accomplish their work in a timely fashion. If a committee is unable to fulfill its responsibility it should delegate its work to someone who can.

Meetings of the whole, inviting the congregations to discuss and hear the progress will be scheduled at regular intervals following the January 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.



Congregations at their discretion may have separate meetings to discuss the impact of consolidation on them personally and to offer their insights. Leaders from the consolidation committee will be willing to serve as resource people for such meetings.

A finished proposal for consolidation will be ready to present to the congregations by June 1.

Each congregation will be asked to hold a special voters' meeting during the summer to decide on participating in the consolidation. Consolidation will be made with whatever churches agree.