

Sharing God's Promises:

The Work of Evangelism in the WELLS

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The Work of Evangelism in the WELS**

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"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".¹ These were the final words and the last command that Jesus Christ spoke to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. With this final command, Jesus wanted to impress upon them the great and urgent importance of going to all nations, a.k.a. telling everyone, and sharing the good news of what Jesus had done with people all over the world. Jesus wanted his disciples to tell everyone about what he had done for them. He wanted his disciples to share all of the precious promises of God's Word with people from every nation, tribe, and race. We know from the book of Acts, that this is exactly what they did. On Pentecost, just 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples preached the Word to a multitude of people from all over the world, who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks (Harvest). They went to Samaria and preached the Gospel. Christianity expanded to the city of Antioch. Paul went all over Macadonia proclaiming God's promises to all people. The disciples did go and they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ to many tribes, nations, and people.

Jesus' command to "Go and make disciples of all nations" has not changed over the last 2,000 years. Since Jesus ascended into heaven, his followers and disciples have continued to proclaim God's grace to others. Today, this sharing

of God's Gospel promises with others and proclaiming the message of what he has done is known as evangelism. In the history of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), this work has been done since the time it was founded in 1850 in Milwaukee. Evangelism work has always been done in the WELS, and in this paper we will look at how this work has taken place over the years. Yet during these years, the work of evangelism has changed many times, both in the way in which it was done and also how it was accomplished.

This is also true from the time those disciples proclaimed the message of forgiveness that first Pentecost Sunday to the day when the Apostle John died. The methods they used to proclaim the good news to all nations varied because of where they were and with whom they shared the Gospel message. However, the means the disciples used, namely the Word of God, was always and will always be the tool that is and must be used in evangelism. That will never change. They used different preaching styles just as Jesus had done. They used different approaches from place to place to do evangelism. We can see this when we look at the ministries of Peter, Paul, James, and John. All of them had different styles and used different methods to proclaim God's promises to others.

The same can be said about evangelism work in the WELS. Over the history of the Wisconsin Synod, it has done evangelism in different ways and has reached out by focusing on different groups. This paper will look at how the WELS has shared God's promises with others. In order to do this, this paper will focus its attention on 5 different areas of WELS evangelism, areas which will

¹ Matthew 28:19, NIV.

cover the history of evangelism work in the WELS and how it has grown, changed and developed over the last 150 years. We will see how the WELS has shared God's promises by focusing on the following;

1. WELS target outreach audiences throughout its history,
2. History of the WELS Commission on Evangelism,
3. History of WELS Mass Media Ministry (MMM),
4. Different WELS evangelism resources,
5. WELS personal evangelism approaches.

By looking at all of these areas, this paper will show how the Wisconsin Synod has shared God's promises and what it has done to accomplish this with God's help.

WELS Evangelism: Target Outreach Audiences

The best way to begin to look at the history of evangelism work in the WELS is by focusing on the target outreach audiences throughout the Wisconsin Synod's history. These groups will show how evangelism has developed and changed in the WELS over the last 150 years. Now when the word "target audience" is used, it refers to a major group of people that is the focus of a particular publicity campaign being done. In evangelism work, this group is the main group of people that you want to especially reach with the Word of God. Throughout the history of the Wisconsin Synod, there have been 3 distinct, significant groups that stand out as WELS target outreach audiences. These groups can easily be set aside by their dates. We can look at these 3 distinct

groups and their time periods to see how they have influenced evangelism in the WELS, and what their impact upon that evangelism work has been.

The first distinct period of WELS history that stands out as far as evangelism goes is the longest period of the three. For almost the first 100 years (the "early years"), Wisconsin Synod evangelism had the same basic target audience, German immigrants. During this period of time in the history of the Wisconsin Synod, it was joined in its work and fellowship with two other State Synods, Minnesota and Michigan. "The primary emphasis of these 3 state synods in the early years was the searching out of settlements of German Lutheran immigrants and the gathering of such people into Christian congregations."² Finding German immigrants was a major task to accomplish at this time in our country's history, because there was a large number of German people who were coming to the United States during the mid-19th Century. Reaching out to German Lutherans thus became the key and basically only evangelism thrust the Wisconsin Synod had for a very long time. In his 1883 report to the synod, President Bading summed this up when he said, serving "our own" is our greatest priority.³

The Wisconsin Synod's focus on serving "their own people" does not mean that mission work or outreach was unimportant to them, because that was not true. A majority of the early pastors in these 3 State Synods had a strong desire to do mission work since that was what most of them had trained to do when

² Berg. "History of WELS Home Missions", p. 1.

³ Berg. "Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 years in WELS", p. 265.

they had studied at the mission societies in Germany. They trained to do mission work and desired to do it with all their heart. However, the problem, as it all too often was with new synods and church bodies of that time, was manpower. During those early years of the Wisconsin Synod, there were not even enough pastors to fill the positions for all of the founded churches, let alone enough to be able to send several of them out to do mission work exclusively.

In spite of these manpower shortages, there were 2 important positions established by the Wisconsin Synod in the later half of the 19th Century that proved important to the mission work (evangelism) that was being done. Individuals who were sent out as missionaries were accomplishing the majority of the mission work that was done at this time (the first home missionary who was sent out by the Wisconsin Synod was Pastor Fachtman).⁴ In 1861, the Wisconsin Synod established the position of the "Reiseprediger", which means the traveling preacher and was also often called the circuit rider. It was his job to go from town to town in search of German immigrants and establish congregations in those areas where a group of German people were living. The first man who held this position was Pastor Mohldenke who started his work in 1861 and served and founded over 22 churches in just 2 short years of service.⁵

The problem still remained in all 3 of the state synods that there just were not enough men to send out to accomplish all of the work that could have been done. The Reiseprediger program continued to be used as the main source of

⁴ WELS Centennial Committee. Continuing in His Word, p. 220.

⁵ Berg, "Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 Years in WELS", p. 254.

finding and gathering people to establish congregations, albeit in very limited numbers, throughout the rest of the 19th Century. Another position of note that was established during this time period was that which was called "the superintendent of missions". From 1879 – 1894, Pastor E. Mayerhoff held this position in the Wisconsin Synod. This position was much like that of our mission counselor today.⁶ This position ceased to exist in 1894 when Pastor Mayerhoff passed away.

The 2 main methods that were used in the early years to establish congregations was done mostly by the work of the traveling preachers, the Reisedigern, that we talked about in the previous paragraph. They were responsible for establishing congregations once they gathered the German immigrants together. This was the most popular way of establishing churches in the Wisconsin Synod for about 50 years. A second way that a great number of congregations were started is very similar to what we call "daughtering" congregations today. Larger congregations mothered missions by providing them with places to worship.⁷ Many large churches, like St. John's in Milwaukee, were responsible for starting schools for educating their children and as a result of those schools new congregations were formed. Other congregations just grew to large and were forced by necessity to start new congregations in nearby locations.

⁶ Hartman. "The Growth of the WELS", p.1.

⁷ Program for the Convention of the Joint Synods. 1941, p.6.

If you wanted to sum up the target audience of the Wisconsin Synod during these first 50 years, you could simply say that "the mood of the synods obviously was to follow the German immigrants ever more widely and vigorously".⁸ Except for the occasional appeal or request from existing congregations for help, Wisconsin Synod evangelism was targeted at German speaking immigrants. This main focus of WELS evangelism work was basically being done in the Midwestern and northwestern states of the U.S. by concentrating on bringing the Gospel to rural areas.⁹

This trend began to change a little bit during the early years of the 20th Century. Yes, the focus of outreach target audiences in the Wisconsin Synod was still on reaching out to German immigrants. Yes, the majority of mission work was still rural in nature. Yes, the language that was used for church services was still mainly German, but this was slowly coming under question. At the turn of the century the Wisconsin Synod already had received requests for English speaking congregations. During the Synod Convention in 1900, it was stated that "the need is apparent to call to life English speaking congregations".¹⁰ Response to this call for a change in language was slow in coming and the response to this matter at the 1902 Synod Convention was only "to keep eyes on the English matter".¹¹

⁸ Berg. "Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 years in WELS", p. 256.

⁹ WELS Centennial Committee. Continuing in His Word, p. 224.

¹⁰ Berg. "Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 Years in WELS", p.257.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 257.

"The 20's saw the beginning of the change from German to English and from working in rural areas to working in cities."¹² At the time of WWI, people began to move to the cities as America became industrialized. The area and language of the Wisconsin Synod focus might have started to change, but the target outreach audience was still aimed primarily at German immigrants. The Joint Synods of Wisconsin and Other States also began to expand to other nearby states in the Midwest. This expansion came about because of a large number of requests and pleas for general missionaries that were sent to the Wisconsin Synod by Wisconsin Synod members who had moved there.

At this time of outside requests, there was also the opportunity to begin to reach out to others who were in those areas that were calling for help. After almost 75 years of focusing on reaching out to German immigrants, the Wisconsin Synod seemed to begin to reach out to the unchurched in those areas from which those requests for help were received.¹³ Most of this evangelism work was done by what we know as "FRAN" evangelism (Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, Neighbors). In this way, WELS members shared the Savior with people they knew very well. The target audience of this outreach was still German immigrants, but their focus was beginning to shift, which went along with the changes in language and location.

Evangelism work in the Wisconsin Synod from the end of WWI to WWII was one of many ups and downs. As was just stated, there were many changes

¹² Berg, "History of WELS Home Missions", p.3.

¹³ Berg, "Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 Years in WELS, p. 260.

taking place in how church work was being done in the 1920's. The focus of a church that was a German speaking one was changing for many reasons, a main one was the fear of being labeled as "German" traitors because of WWI. In 1929, all of these changes ceased to be important because of the Great Depression and the only thing that mattered to everyone, including the Wisconsin Synod, was surviving. "The mode of operation almost forced on the Synod was 'to hang on'."¹⁴ During the Great Depression, there was no real evangelism target audience because there was no real evangelism work being done at all in the Wisconsin Synod. The goal was just to hang on and maintain what we had if that was even possible to attain.

When WWII arrived in 1941 things began to change again as far as evangelism was concerned in the Wisconsin Synod. The Board for Home Missions report to the 1941 Synod convention said that there were new missions started in all of the Synod's districts and that some of this work was now being done among those who were not a part of "the household of faith".¹⁵ Outreach was now expanding in new areas, and this expansion and growth signaled that the target outreach audience in the WELS was about to change from reaching out to German mainly immigrants.

At the end of WWII, America was in the middle of a time when many changes were taking place. Women were hard at work outside of the home. Soldiers were returning home from the war. People were moving all over the

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 260.

¹⁵ Program for the Convention of the Joint Synods. 1941, p. 6.

country and spreading out to all the corners of the United States. As people began to move to the outlying areas of the U.S., the Wisconsin Synod also began to expand by sending missionaries to Colorado and Arizona in 1939.¹⁶ This change in expansion is what issued in the era of the next target outreach audience of the Wisconsin Synod. The focus of nearly the last 100 years on reaching out to German immigrants had changed to maintaining and conserving the WELS membership that was moving out of the Midwest. This conserving began in 1950, when a congregation was founded in Florida to meet the spiritual needs of a large number of WELS members who had moved to the South.

During the 1950's, the Wisconsin Synod's mission policy was greatly influenced and drastically changed because of the shifting of the U.S. population from rural areas and from the inner-city to the suburbs.¹⁷ This new focus on maintaining our membership fell under the responsibilities and supervision of the Board for Home Missions (BHM). For nearly the next 40 years, the work of evangelism in the WELS was under the supervision and direction of the Home Mission Board.

Not only did the target audience shift to maintaining and conserving the members of the Wisconsin Synod, but it was also just as greatly focused on bringing in other Lutherans because of confessional reasons. This shift was due greatly to the doctrinal issues and problems that arose with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the 1950's. "The suspension of fellowship with the

¹⁶ Berg. "Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 Years in WELS, p. 261.

¹⁷ Berg, "A Brief History of Our Home Mission Policy", p. 3.

LCMS was destined to have a tremendous impact”¹⁸ because of the way in which our relationship worked. From the beginning of the Wisconsin Synod’s fellowship with the LCMS, the Wisconsin Synod had left the work of reaching out to the cities of America to the LCMS, and it focused on the rural areas of the Midwest. During this decade, the doctrinal problems that arose caused a great number of other Lutherans to join the Wisconsin Synod for confessional reasons. This also was the case of many other church bodies, which at this time in Lutheranism were growing less and less conservative. “In 1961 the WELS broke with Missouri. This kicked off unprecedented growth in Home Mission activity.”¹⁹ The outward movement of people and the confessional issues of these 15 years were the 2 factors that guided the WELS target outreach audiences of this time period.

In the Board for Home Missions report to the 1951 Synod Convention, we are told that “it is now largely people who are converts, or who never belonged to the church” that were being told about God’s promises.²⁰ This stat is backed up by earlier information, from 1943, which shows that there were more adult confirmations than children confirmed in our churches by this time.²¹ The change in the WELS outreach target audience was gradually building to the point of a third change. When the confessional issues of the 50’s had been dealt with and calmed down, the time had come for the WELS target audience to be focused upon the unchurched, namely, to reach out to the lost.

¹⁸ Berg, “Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 Years in WELS”, p. 263.

¹⁹ Lawrenz. “A Synod for the ‘90s – The 1990’s”, p. 15.

²⁰ BoRaM. 1951, p. 5.

²¹ Berg. “Home Mission Moods and Modes – 125 Years in WELS”, p. 262.

In 1960 the Wisconsin Synod had congregations in only 16 of the 50 United States. The time and the opportunity for expansion had come and both were knocking at the WELS door. The change in the target outreach audience of the Wisconsin Synod was evident by the large number of new mission congregations that were opened during the 60's and 70's; 136 in the 60's, and 203 in the 70's.²² In 1965, the WELS Home Mission Program's stated purpose was "to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people within the limits of the domestic mission fields of the WELS".²³ In that same program, listed in priority order, were the BHM's objectives to achieve this goal. The objectives were and still are;

1. to reach the unchurched primarily by the establishment of mission congregations,
2. to conserve membership in the WELS,
3. to serve on request people who share our confessional concerns.²⁴

The BHM now had a "clear and unified focus...Start new churches and start them all over the country".²⁵ The unchurched has now been the main target outreach audience of our Synod for the last 40 years. Taking the promises of God to those who don't know what he has done for them has been the focus of evangelism in the WELS for 40 years. The reason for this final shift in target outreach audiences is greatly due to what took place at the 1957 WELS Synod Convention. The unchurched continue to be the prime outreach target

²² Berg. "History of WELS Home Missions", p. 6.

²³ "WELS Home Mission Program", 1965.

²⁴ Ibid

audience because of the establishment of the WELS Commission on Evangelism (COE) in 1957. The reason why the unchurched to this day remain the prime target outreach audience is due greatly to the guidance and hard work of the COE since that time. It is this Commission on Evangelism that we want to take a look at next so that we can see how it played such a vital role in WELS evangelism in reaching out to the unchurched from 1957 until today.

WELS EVANGELISM: The Commission on Evangelism

The idea for a synod organized Commission on Evangelism originated in a memorial sent from the Milwaukee City Pastoral Conference of the Southeastern Wisconsin District to the Synod stating that,

The 1957 Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States create an Evangelism committee whose specific duties would be to develop such a program consistent with our doctrine and practice; and to authorize and empower this committee to conduct and supervise evangelism workshops, conferences, and any other similar activity by which interest and methods might be more fully developed.²⁶

This memorial was then referred to the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM) for further study and recommendations. At that same convention, the GBHM recommend this to the convention, "we request the 1957 Convention to create an Evangelism Committee...and that the President appoint the committee".²⁷

²⁵ Berg. "History of WELS Home Missions", p. 6.

²⁶ 1957 WELS Synod Proceedings, p.72.

²⁷ Ibid, p.73.

WELS President Oscar J. Naumann appointed the first Evangelism Committee (it would later be named the Commission on Evangelism), that was originally made up of 2 pastors, 1 professor, 2 teachers, and 1 laymen. The first chairman of the Commission was Pastor Erhard Pankow from Milwaukee. The newly appointed committee realized early on that the work of the Commission would take time to blossom, but with an enthusiastic introduction from President Naumann they presented their first report to the 1959 Synod Convention.²⁸ In that first report, they reported the work that their main accomplishment during the COE's first 2 years of existence. Their main accomplishment during this time was the production of an Evangelism Manual, which would soon thereafter be mailed to all pastors in the Wisconsin Synod. This manual contained 4 specific areas of evangelism information; 1) the aims and purposes of evangelism, 2) the scriptural basis for evangelism, 3) practical suggestions, and 4) a listing of evangelism materials.²⁹ With this report it was obvious that the Commission on Evangelism's work was off and running into the 1960's. It was at this time that evangelism work began to come to the forefront of our Synod's attention, attention which was greatly responsible to the work of Michigan District.

The most aggressive district in the WELS in doing evangelism work at this time was definitely the Michigan District. In fact, it was several years ahead of the Synod as a whole when it comes down to it. In 1959, several WELS churches in Michigan participated in the nationwide evangelism program being

²⁸ "Evangelism Chronicles", p. 1.

²⁹ BoRaM. 1959, p. 34,35.

used by the Missouri Synod, which was called PTR (Preaching, Teaching, Reaching).³⁰ In 1960, in a letter written by Pastor Wilmer Valleskey to a fellow pastor in Michigan, he said, "I wonder if we of the Wisconsin Synod could organize our own evangelism program".³¹ So in 1960, the Michigan District organized and established its own District Evangelism Commission. This group, on average about 6 men, began to meet once a month at various churches in Michigan. They worked without any financial support from the synod, which made Pastor Valleskey and the other members very upset because they couldn't get financial support from the Synod until District commissions were established by the Synod.³²

Because this was the case, the Michigan District Evangelism Commission in 1961 recommended to the Synod Convention that it resolve to "1) urge WELS to authorize the establishment of District Commissions on Evangelism throughout the Synod; and 2) District Presidents appoint District Commissions on Evangelism to work with the COE".³³ Therefore, in 1961 the Wisconsin Synod in convention approved the creation of District evangelism committees because of "the necessity of intensifying and expanding our efforts in the area of evangelism".³⁴ After the 1961 Convention, the newly revised WELS Synod Constitution laid the guidelines for the COE and the District Commissions. Section 6.03 of the

³⁰ Based on letters from the files of Pastor Wilmer Valleskey.

³¹ Wilmer Valleskey's personal letters. This one was written on January 20, 1960.

³² Michigan District Commission on Evangelism minutes. Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's personal files.

³³ BoRaM. 1961, p. 131.

³⁴ 1961 Synod Proceedings, p. 233.

constitution established how the Synod's Commission on Evangelism would be made up.

There shall be a Commission on evangelism composed of an executive committee and the chairmen of the District Commissions on Evangelism. The executive Committee, composed of a chairman, vice-chairman, and a secretary, shall be appointed by the president of the Synod for a term of 6 years. The term of one shall expire every 2 years.

The groundwork had been laid for WELS evangelism so that the COE could begin to further the cause of evangelism in the WELS through the cooperation of the District Commissions helping them.

Behind Pastor Wilmer Valleskey, the Michigan District was the early driving force in WELS evangelism work. The Michigan District even started producing its own materials out of Pastor Valleskey's church in Detroit. The district called it "The Evangelism Bookshop". They took their own initiative and began producing materials that could be used to train lay people for doing evangelism calls. This training of lay witnesses was the main focus of the COE in every report that they made to Synod in the 60's. The COE had resolved itself to tapping into the reservoir of lay people to allow them to use their God given gifts and share their Savior with others.³⁵ By 1963, the Evangelism Bookshop produced 3 helpful manuals, "Study/Train/Organize to be Witnesses unto Me", which were written by the Michigan District Evangelism Commission to help train lay people for witnessing. The work of the COE has continued to serve the Wisconsin Synod up

³⁵ BoRaM. 1961, p. 131.

to the present day by following the objectives for which it was specifically established;

1. To promote evangelism materials consistent with the doctrine and practice of the WELS.
2. To promote organized personal witnessing.
3. To conserve for the Lord and His Church those believers whom He has already called into our fellowship.³⁶

Throughout the 60's, 70's, and on into the early 80's, the COE was under the supervision of the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM). "The COE was part of the General Board for Home Missions and all plans went through their hands."³⁷ The COE served under the GBHM from its creation in 1957 until 1985 when the Synod created a new Board for Evangelism, which was made up of 4 pastors, 1 teacher, and 2 laymen.³⁸ At this time, the establishment of an executive secretary made one of the major advancements in WELS evangelism history. Today, this position is known as the Administrator of Evangelism in the WELS. In 1991, the Board for Evangelism once again became the Commission on Evangelism when the Synod did some reconstructing and formed the Board for Parish Services, which has supervised the COE since that time.

In order to best understand the work and history of the Commission on Evangelism, we should take a look at how things were run and see what made up the operation and administration of the COE. After the Synod Convention of 1961, there were chairmen in each district of the Synod who were responsible

³⁶ "The Purpose, Objectives, & Policies of the Commission on Evangelism". Found in the files of Pastor Reuel Schulz.

³⁷ Interview with Pastor David Witte (p. 1).

for the evangelism work that was taking place in their own districts. The administration of the COE during its first decade was basically run at these district levels with each District COE doing its own thing. In turn, these districts were watched over by the Synod's COE who tried their best to tie everything together.

Each District Commission was responsible for planning, preparing, and publishing its own material. That means that some districts did a lot, and other districts did very little. Michigan, with its energetic chairman Wilmer Valleskey, did the bulk of the work, and was just about the source and strategist for evangelism material for the Synod. The Synod Commission, i.e., the district chairman, tried to supervise and coordinate, but once a year meetings are hardly effective.³⁹

During the 60's, it is easy to see why evangelism in some districts was going great while in others it was just the opposite. Simply put, there was no real over-all governing group in the 1960's that was bringing every District up to the same level of evangelism focus and work.

Things changed in the early 1970's, 1972 to be exact, when Synod President O.J. Naumann appointed a group of three men to the executive committee of the Evangelism Commission. These were the three pastors that were appointed that year; Reuel Schulz, Dave Witte, and Paul Kolander.⁴⁰ These three men would make up the executive committee of the COE that became the driving force behind evangelism work in the WELS for the next 15 years. In 1972, Pastor Reuel Schulz of Woodlawn Lutheran Church in Milwaukee became

³⁸ "Evangelism Chronicles", p. 6.

³⁹ Interview with Pastor David Witte (p.1.).

⁴⁰ Interview with Pastor Paul Kolander (p.2).

the chairman of the COE, and in the words of Pastor Witte "things began to change".⁴¹ These three men met once a month at Woodlawn to talk, discuss, and brainstorm about evangelism work in the WELS. Pastor Kolander gave this as an example of what an average meeting would involve:

Discussed job descriptions for the positions of Bookshop manager and TELL editor; studied our Commission's program budget statement; assigned a review of several tracts that were submitted by District Commissions; discussed possibility of appearing at District Conventions to show the need for an executive secretary; heard a report from the Bookshop manager.⁴²

Along with these monthly meetings of the executive committee, there was also an annual plenary meeting of the entire WELS Commission on Evangelism, which lasted a few days. According to Pastor Kolander, at these meetings the executive committee together with the district evangelism chairmen would; review plans for the coming year, discuss the budget, have a report/paper, and encourage each other.⁴³ With and because of the hard work of these men much advancement in WELS evangelism was made. The publication of a personal evangelism witnessing method (TAS), as well as and the establishing of a full-time executive in charge of WELS evangelism were both greatly due to their commitment to evangelism.

In the late 70's and the early 80's things did not change much as far as the administration of the Commission was concerned, in spite of the COE wanting it to. The WELS Commission on Evangelism had been encouraging the

⁴¹ Interview with Pastor David Witte (p.1).

⁴² Interview with Pastor Paul Kolander (p. 2).

Synod since 1973 to get a full-time executive secretary that would be in charge of evangelism work in the Wisconsin Synod. In the COE's report to the Synod in 1973, their first reference and plea for an evangelism coordinator is recorded.

Because it is increasingly more apparent that part-time men cannot plan, prepare, and publish as much evangelism material as is being requested and needed, and cannot give sufficient assistance to congregations in their evangelism efforts, a full-time Synod Evangelist is needed.⁴⁴

Every year after that, the plea was continually brought up in the Commission's report to the Synod in Convention. They even made a job description for the position they wanted filled so that everyone could see what he would do and accomplish for WELS evangelism. They felt like it would be the responsibility of that one position to oversee and coordinate all of the Synod's evangelism work. The COE saw his responsibilities as focusing on the following duties; 1) organizing and familiarizing himself with all available evangelism materials, 2) develop needed materials, 3) aid Districts in their work, 4) supervise Seminary evangelism training, and 5) correspondence with districts.⁴⁵ The many repeated pleas of the COE fell on deaf ears for a long time. The reasons for the reluctance and hesitation in establishing the executive secretary of evangelism were many; costs too much, shortage of manpower, questions about the need of such a person, and the fear of too much administration all played a role in the long awaited establishing of this position.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ BoRaM. 1973, p.57.

⁴⁵ "Evangelism Counselor: A Job Description". Found in Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's personal files.

⁴⁶ Interviews with Pastors Kolander, Schulz, and Witte.

Finally after nearly 10 years of hard work, the position of the executive secretary for evangelism was authorized by the Synod Convention in 1981.⁴⁷ "The position was established in 1984, with Pastor Paul Kelm the first person to fill it".⁴⁸ After over four years of service as the executive secretary, Pastor Kelm took a call to be the WELS spiritual renewal director. Pastor Robert Hartman, who entered into the newly entitled office of Administrator for Evangelism on April 1, 1989, replaced Pastor Kelm as the 2nd full-time WELS evangelism coordinator.⁴⁹ During this period, these men have overseen the growth of the WELS evangelism program. They have placed evangelism before the WELS as a #1 priority right along side its other #1 priority as a Synod, to nurture its members. They have given the Wisconsin Synod the ability to do more evangelism workshops, to use as well as produce skillful marketing, and have provided and produced new evangelism information for pastors to use in their congregations.

The real breakthrough/blessing has come from having a full-time administrator for evangelism in the Synod office. Paul Kelm was an excellent choice, being a sound theologian, well read, imaginative, innovative, and having good communication skills. Bob Hartman has continued to gain everyone's confidence. Under the direction of these two we have produced a lot of evangelism material and gotten it into the hand of pastors.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ BoRaM. 1983, p. 75.

⁴⁸ "The Chronicles of Evangelism", p. 6. Collected by Pastor Bob Hartman, WELS Evangelism Administrator.

⁴⁹ BoRaM. 1989, p. 124.

⁵⁰ Interview with Pastor David Witte, (p. 2).

These two men have worked with the Board for Evangelism (1984-1991) and the Board for Parish Services (1991-Present) and have successfully led the COE to where it stands today.

Over the past 40 years of the COE's existence, God has richly blessed the Wisconsin Synod with some very talented men who have guided the COE with their strong leadership and sincere love for evangelism. The following is a list of the men who have played an intrigal role in the growth and development of the Commission on Evangelism in the WELS.

1. Erhard Pankow – Chairman of the COE – (1959-1967)
2. Herbert Kruschel – Chairman of the COE – (1967-1969)
3. Lyle Lindloff – Vice-Chairman & Chairman of COE – (1969-1972)
4. Reuel Schulz – Chairman of COE – (1972-1983)
5. David Witte – Vice-Chairman & Chairman of COE – (1972-present)
6. Paul Kolander – Secretary of COE– (1972-1985)
7. Dave Rutschow – Vice-Chairman & Chairman of BOE - (1985-1992)
8. Jim Huebner – Chairman of COE – (1993-present)
9. Paul Kelm – Executive Secretary for Evangelism – (1984-1988)
10. Robert Hartman – Administrator for Evangelism – (1989-present)⁵¹

For this paper to display the great impact that the COE had on Evangelism in the WELS, it would be a disservice to the Commission and the work of its leaders to leave out the milestones that have taken place under the COE's supervision. The following list is a chronological listing of the milestones and major developments/accomplishments throughout the history of the WELS Commission on Evangelism.

1. The establishment of the WELS Commission on Evangelism (1957) – This event marked the beginning of when evangelism in the WELS

⁵¹ All information is taken from various sources; 1)BoRaM's, 2)Evangelism Chronicles of Bob Hartman.

came to the attention of many lay people. The great need and desire was felt to use the vast amounts of lay members and the Commission's job was to come up with ways to train them.⁵²

2. The Michigan District establishes its own District Evangelism Commission (1960) – This was the beginning of the Michigan District's work in the area of evangelism, work that would guide and set the pace for the 1st 15 years of Evangelism coordinated efforts in the Wisconsin Synod.
3. The Evangelism Bookshop is established in Detroit by the Michigan District (1960) – Pastor Wilmer Valleskey, through the 1 time initial funding of his congregation, starts to produce evangelism materials to help in training lay people. (More on the Evangelism Bookshop later in this paper.)⁵³
4. District Commissions on Evangelism are established by the Wisconsin Synod (1961) – These District Commissions opened the doors for more material production as well as a greater focus on the need for more evangelism in the WELS.⁵⁴
5. The WELS Membership Conservation Program is inaugurated (March 1, 1963) – This program was established because of the great need to keep track of the large number of Wisconsin Synod members who were moving to the outlying areas of the U.S. The purpose of this program was stated by the COE in its' report to the 1973 Synod Convention; 1) to serve families who move away, 2) to keep track of areas moving out of WELS territory that leads to the awareness of other new areas to serve, and 3) to help the home pastor in conserving WELS members.⁵⁵ This also was initiated by the work of the Michigan District COE and Pastor Wilmer Valleskey, and it has continued to serve the Wisconsin Synod today in keeping track of WELS members who are moving. (See enclosure #1 – Original letter of Pastor Naumann and Conservation cards, which were to be used in the program.)
6. "Catalogue of Evangelism Materials" is produced by the Michigan District (Aug 1, 1965) – This booklet which could be ordered from the Evangelism Bookshop contained a listing of all of the materials which were available at that time. Along with this listing, descriptions of the materials were given, as well as and an order form to send in if supplies were desired. The booklet continued to be produced until 1977 when the Bookshop moved. (Enclosed sample catalogue from 1971).⁵⁶

⁵² Synod Proceedings. 1957, p.52.

⁵³ "History of the Evangelism Bookshop". Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's files.

⁵⁴ Synod Proceedings. 1961, p. 131.

⁵⁵ BoRaM. 1963, p. 48. Also taken from the program sheet sent out by President Naumann initiated this program.

⁵⁶ "Evangelism Chronicles", p.3.

7. A 37 page Evangelism program for Christian Day Schools is published (1966) – This study was to be used during the Lenten season of the church year to teach children about evangelism.⁵⁷
8. The WELS Synodical Convention's theme has an evangelism focus, it is called "We Believe...Therefore We Speak" (1971) – Obviously this played a very important role in opening the eyes of Wisconsin Synod members, teachers, and pastors to the great opportunities that were out there for evangelism.⁵⁸
9. "Talk About the Savior (TAS)" is completed by Pastor Wilmer Valleskey (July 1972) and adopted by the WELS (September 21, 1972)⁵⁹ – This was one of the first WELS personal evangelism manuals produced for training of lay people to do witnessing. Following the production of the manual, seminars were held nationwide to train pastors in their use of TAS from 1972 -1981.
10. Pastors' Kolander, Schulz, and Witte are appointed to the executive Committee of the COE by President Naumann (1972) – These men would be the guiding force in WELS evangelism for the next 10 years.⁶⁰
11. The requests for a synod executive secretary of evangelism begin to be made by the COE (1973) – This would take place and be a hot topic discussed among the COE and the Synod for nearly the next 10 years.⁶¹
12. Training of Seminary students about the TAS manual, including evangelism visits, is begun (1973) – The COE saw and felt the need to educate the future pastors of the Wisconsin Synod by having a 1-day seminar about evangelism. This training also included the opportunity to make visits on unchurched people in the Milwaukee area.⁶² This training continued every year until Pastor David Valleskey was called as the first professor to teach evangelism at the Seminary in 1982.
13. The Evangelism Bookshop moves to Milwaukee (1977)⁶³ – Pastor Wilmer Valleskey turns the Bookshop over to COE supervision.
14. "*The Evangelism Life Line*" (TELL) is produced by the Wisconsin Synod and the COE (April 1977) – This periodical about evangelism was sent out 3 times a year to pastors and congregations free of charge to motivate and guide them in their work of evangelism.⁶⁴ (More information about TELL is in part IV.)

⁵⁷ "Catalogue of Evangelism Materials", 1966. The Evangelism Bookshop.

⁵⁸ BoRaM. 1971, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Michigan District COE notes from their 1074 District Convention. Found in Wilmer Valleskey's files.

⁶⁰ Interview with Pastor Paul Kolander, p.2.

⁶¹ BoRaM. 1973, p. 57.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ BoRaM. 1977, p.76

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.75.

15. Evangelism Convocation is held at Wisconsin Lutheran College (August 15-17, 1978) – Pastor Paul Kolander listed this at the top of the major evangelism developments in the Wisconsin Synod’s history in his opinion.⁶⁵ At this gathering all of the District Evangelism chairmen were brought together with others to discuss and talk about evangelism in the WELS and what they felt as needs in the WELS were concerning evangelism work. Various essays were presented including “A Biblical Basis for Evangelism” by David Witte.⁶⁶
16. WELS Mass Media Ministry is established by the Synod in Convention (1979) – The use of radio ministry was begun because of the great opportunity and desire to do work in other mediums (more to come in part III).⁶⁷
17. The COE (1981) starts inner-city vicar program– Students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary begin to have the opportunity to do work among the underclass in the inner-city of Milwaukee.⁶⁸
18. “God’s Great Exchange” (GGE) is produced by Pastor David Valleskey in San Jose, California (November 1981)⁶⁹ – This personal evangelism approach to lay witnessing would later take over for as the one taught at the Seminary and used by a majority of WELS pastors.
19. The WELS Convention establishes the position of an executive secretary for evangelism (1981) – “The position was approved at the 191 Synod Convention”.⁷⁰
20. Pastor Paul Kelm becomes the first executive secretary for evangelism in the Wisconsin Synod (1984).
21. The Commission on Evangelism (COE) is dissolved by the Synod Convention of 1985, which established the Board for Evangelism (November 12, 1985)⁷¹ - This board would have the same role as the COE did in past years.
22. “Precious is the Child” becomes a mass evangelism focus for (1986) – It was a promotional program for child-oriented ministry that was used for evangelism outreach.
23. “Gospel Outreach (G.O.)” (1986-1990) – This evangelism program was a joint outreach effort in larger WELS metropolitan areas centering around the work of the WELS MMM. The one in the

⁶⁵ Interview with Pastor Paul Kolander, p.3.

⁶⁶ “Evangelism Chronicles”, p. 5. Collected by Bob Hartman.

⁶⁷ BoRaM. 1979, p. 72.

⁶⁸ BoRaM. 1981, p. 67.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.5.

⁷⁰ BoRaM. 1983, p. 75.

⁷¹ “Evangelism Chronicles”, p. 6.

Milwaukee area culminated in a church service downtown at the MECCA on October 25.⁷²

24. The pilot (1st) School of Outreach was held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (July 6-11, 1987)⁷³ – The School of Outreach was a training workshop to help congregations focus in on their evangelism work, how it could be improved, and to help them plan specific strategies and evangelism needs for their own congregations. The School of Outreach was held every summer at the Seminary until 1993.
25. The 1st Synod wide Evangelism Sunday in the WELS (Epiphany, 1989) – The service and promotion was prepared by the SEW District COE.⁷⁴
26. Pastor Robert Hartman is installed as the Administrator for Evangelism (April 30, 1989) – Pastor Hartman becomes the 2nd full-time worker for WELS evangelism as of April 1st.⁷⁵
27. Satellite School's of Outreach are begun (1993)⁷⁶ – The School of Outreach was taken on the road for the first time. By 1997, over 25 different satellite School's of Outreach have been held, which have been attended by over 250 congregations.⁷⁷

This is just a glimpse, the **major** historical highlights and accomplishments, of the work that has been done by the WELS COE and the Board for Evangelism.

WELS EVANGELISM: The Mass Media Ministry

It could be debated what the greatest advancement in WELS evangelism history has been throughout the years. Some would say that it was the establishment of the COE. Some might think that the establishing of a full-time evangelism coordinator was the greatest advancement. Others will say that it was the work of the Michigan District in the 1960's. Yet, you would be hard

⁷² "Evangelism Chronicles", p. 8. BoRaM. 1987, p. 105.

⁷³ BoRaM. 1987, p. 63.

⁷⁴ BoRaM. 1987, p. 104.

⁷⁵ BoRaM. 1989, p. 124.

⁷⁶ BoRaM. 1993, p.266.

⁷⁷ BoRaM. 1997, p. 69.

pressed to argue against anyone who said that it was the establishment and development of the WELS Mass Media Ministry (MMM). The MMM has made major contributions to the way evangelism has been done in the WELS. There may be nothing in all of our evangelism history and its work that has had a more distinct affect on how God's promises have been and are being shared in WELS circles today. As we look at the basic history of the MMM, we will see its relationship to the history of WELS evangelism and its role in WELS outreach.

If we want to establish the initial use of any mass media work in the WELS, we need to go back beyond 1977 when the Synod Convention passed a resolution to look into this form of outreach. Already during the mid-60's, there were a number of areas in the Wisconsin Synod (New Ulm, Milwaukee, the Fox River Valley, the Quad Cities in Iowa, and Owosso, MI) where worship services or devotions were broadcast over the radio.⁷⁸ In May of 1966, Pastor Gary Baumler had the idea to use the radio for outreach in his congregation's neighborhood.⁷⁹ There were also new pilot radio programs in Milwaukee, "Music for the Master" & "Message from the Master", started in the early 1970's. Media outlets were being used in the WELS for quite a while before the WELS MMM department was founded, and it was even being used for the work of outreach.

At the 1977 WELS Synod Convention in New Ulm, the voting assembly passed a motion to look at and investigate the feasibility of the Wisconsin Synod

⁷⁸ Burger. "History of the WELS Mass Media Ministry", p.2.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.3.

going on the radio.⁸⁰ Once the first committee was brought together, they agreed that the thrust of the Synod's radio program should not just be for our own people, but with an emphasis on reaching others. They also decided that it was needed to have a full-time coordinator to spearhead the research that needed to be done. The person who was chosen for this position was Mr. Craig Halverson, a director of communications for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, who was also a member at Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Lansing, MI.⁸¹ He began his work by surveying all WELS pastors on their current use of radio ministry (if that was the case), and then proceeded to find out what they would like to see done. Test spots were run and several initial pilots were tested in certain chosen markets in 1979 to see what the response would be like.

In the 1979 BoRaM, a history of the committee's work and its' evaluation of the outcome of their study was prepared for the Synod Convention.⁸² Their report was so well received at the 1979 WELS Convention that it was "resolved that the synod establish a Mass Media Ministry".⁸³ Six months after the inception of the program, it became very apparent to the committee that they were going to need some help in producing new programs and to also fill the incoming orders and requests.⁸⁴ In early February of 1980, Mike and Dee Fronck,

⁸⁰ Synod Proceedings. 1977, p. 152,153.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 8. A summary of information.

⁸² BoRaM. 1979, p. 69-71.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 72.

⁸⁴ Burger. "The History of the WELS Mass Media Ministry", p. 18.

members of a WELS mission congregation in Ramsey, New Jersey, were hired to be in charge of this new outreach arm of the Wisconsin Synod.⁸⁵

After about a year of working as the producer/coordinator of the WELS Mass Media Ministry, the Fronek's realized that "they were not equipped educationally, creatively, or professionally to create, formulate, direct or execute a mass media campaign".⁸⁶ The MMM program was advancing and changing so rapidly that a trained and educated person was needed for the position of the MMM director. It was no longer just a job of producing simple radio spots. The Mass Media Ministry now involved everything from making coordinating door hangers, to producing billboards and TV spots. The Fronek's departed the MMM office on February 1, 1982, and their position was temporarily filled by Marion Brandau (who stepped down later that same year).⁸⁷

That is where Mr. John Barber, an adult convert and WELS member, came into the picture. Mr. Barber had experience in producing media materials through work that he had done for Oregon State University, as well as work producing, directing, and writing commercials in Hollywood. Mr. Barber filled the position of Mass Media Director in November of 1982 where his wife, who served, joined him as his secretary.⁸⁸ At the time of this paper's writing, Mr. John Barber has now been serving as the WELS Mass Media director for the last

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.20.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.20 & 21.

⁸⁸ "Evangelism Chronicles". Collected by Pastor Robert Hartman.

15 1/2 years. The blessings that he has brought in furthering the work of WELS evangelism are greatly appreciated and dare not ever be overlooked.

That WELS has a Mass Media director with John Barber's skills and devotion to his Savior is a blessing other church bodies envy...No other department of Synod has a communications specialist whose major responsibility is informing members and non-members about the Lord's work.⁸⁹

In order to see the growth and development of the WELS MMM and in what way it affected the work of WELS evangelism, we can look at the major productions that they produced for the Evangelism Commission to use in outreach. What follows is a historical listing of the major impact productions of the MMM, the date it was produced, and what it was about. These major productions will show us the great impact and role that the MMM has played in WELS evangelism work.

1. "Come to the WELS" theme song is written by J.C. Meyer (January 22, 1979) – This production was the first material that was produced for radio testing by the MMM research committee. It was a 60-second contemporary song, which was written to express the main theme of outreach to the unchurched and also to build identification of WELS congregations.⁹⁰
2. 3 other early test programs (1979) – a) "Points to Ponder", a 60 second spot written by Bob Sewall relating religion to everyday life, b) "Belief and unbelief", a 2 minute rational basis for religious beliefs, and c) "Lifeline", a 5 minute video applying the gospel to everyday life (which would later become the "Come to the WELS" video).⁹¹
3. Travel Canvass Witness, otherwise know as "TCW" (1983) – This was started in 1983 and has continued as a way for groups of young men and women who are studying to be pastors or teachers to gain evangelism experience as well as helping with canvassing and follow up work at a WELS congregation during their Spring break.⁹²

⁸⁹ Interview with Pastor David Witte, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Burger, "The History of the WELS Mass Media Ministry", p.13.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 14.

⁹² Ibid, p. 22.

4. Other early Video productions (1983) – a) “Travelling and Talking for Christ”, a video workshop on canvassing, and b) “The Heart of These”, a video of the special ministries programs of the WELS.⁹³
5. Widely used tracts (1985) – a) “We’re All in This Together”, and b) “Are You Getting the Most out of Life”.⁹⁴
6. Media Assisted Outreach Campaigns (1986-present) – The MMM would provide research, recommendations, materials, and media time to individual WELS congregations to use.⁹⁵
7. G.O., a.k.a. “Gospel Outreach”, (done in the late 80’s) – This was a group related effort where local WELS congregations would band together for a joint evangelism effort. Money was pooled to buy larger and better chunks of media time. Materials like door hangers, bumper stickers, and yard signs were all used in these campaigns.⁹⁶
8. New filmstrips for local congregations to use for witness training (1988) – a) “God’s Mission to People by People”, and b) “My Heart in my Mouth”.⁹⁷
9. Materials for WELS Evangelism Sunday – (late 1980’s-present).
10. “Soul Search” (1990/1991) – A 15 minute video which could be used as a personal witnessing method for lay people. During the 90’s, this video was produced in different forms and languages. (More to come later in part V).⁹⁸
11. “Precious is the Child” (1991) – A TV spot was created to air on major national stations for outreach emphasis.⁹⁹
12. “Life Talk” (February/March 1993) – A weekly radio series on life related issues. It was a 10-week spot used in WELS rural areas and was planned to conclude with the finale of Christmas or Easter.¹⁰⁰
13. “Minding the Message” (1993) – A communications skills presentation done on video for training lay evangelists in WELS congregations.¹⁰¹
14. “The Promise” (Fall 1993) – A motivational video for congregations to show their people to encourage personal evangelism.¹⁰²
15. “A Bakers Dozen” (1995) – Materials that included 13 newspaper ad mats for rural congregations to use in print mailings.¹⁰³

⁹³ Ibid, p. 23.

⁹⁴ BoRaM. 1985, p. 74.

⁹⁵ BoRaM. 1987, p. 104.

⁹⁶ BoRaM. 1987, p. 105, and 1989, p. 126.

⁹⁷ BoRaM. 1989, p. 126.

⁹⁸ BoRaM. 1991, p. 140.

⁹⁹ BoRaM. 1991, p. 141.

¹⁰⁰ BoRaM. 1993, p. 226.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ BoRaM. 1995, p. 71.

16. "We Can Do That" (1995) – A MMM production that guides and helps a congregation in the development of their own media productions.¹⁰⁴
17. "Share the Promise" (Easter 1997) – WELS MMM campaign for Easter in 1997. This was very similar to the uses of G.O. and Precious is the Child.¹⁰⁵
18. "Mr. Whistle" (Spring 1997) – A witness video for kids to use from the ages of 4-10.¹⁰⁶
19. The Internet (1997) – The WELS home page is created for the use of communicating resources to congregations and also to witness to browsers.¹⁰⁷

This list contains the highlights of the WELS Mass Media Ministry and it truly does show that it has had a great impact and role in the work and history of WELS evangelism since 1977.

WELS EVANGELISM: Individual Evangelism Resources

Before I started doing research for this paper, I was oblivious to the fact that there wasn't always a WELS evangelism administrator. Nor would I have known that there was never a great deal of focus on WELS evangelism to reach out to the unchurched people in our country until 1957. The reason why evangelism came to the forefront of our Synod's attention in the 1960's and the reason that it stands where it does today is greatly due to the work of one man, Pastor Wilmer Valleskey. This is not just the opinion of this writer. The truth of the matter is that I never met Pastor Valleskey in my life, nor did I really know that he was even instrumental in evangelism work before the writing of this

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ BoRaM. 1997, p. 70.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ BoRaM. 1997, p. 70.

paper, so there is no reason for me to be biased about his work. Pastor Reuel Schulz, former chairman of the COE, said this about Wilmer Valleskey, "I believe that Pastor Valleskey deserves to be known as 'Mr. Evangelism' of the WELS because of his energetic pioneering efforts to further the cause of personal lay-witnessing in our circles".¹⁰⁸ "His work was innovative. He was tireless in encouraging others to evangelize."¹⁰⁹

Pastor Schulz referred to Pastor Valleskey as a "lightening rod" for the Wisconsin Synod evangelism. Not only was he a lightening rod for focusing people's attention on the need for evangelism, but he also did something in order to meet that need. As great of a leader for the cause of evangelism as Wilmer Valleskey was, he was an even more influential player for the WELS in his role as a producer of evangelism materials. Without his work and the help of his congregation, the WELS would not have had the evangelism material that they did in the 1960's.¹¹⁰ He established and ran the "Evangelism Bookshop" from his church in Detroit, where he produced and sold evangelism materials. He also wrote one of the first personal evangelism methods, "TAS", which was used, accepted, and approved by the Wisconsin Synod for training lay witnesses. He was also the man who started the Soul Conservation Program of the Wisconsin Synod and "for years he ran it from his church office."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Schulz. "Evangelism in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod", p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Pastor Dave Witte, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

This is just a small glimpse of what he did for evangelism in the WELS. He served as the President of the Michigan District COE for countless years. He was also an often sought after speaker and presenter for evangelism related topics and motivational speeches. In a conference paper he wrote in 1974, Pastor Valleskey talked about his motivation to encourage others for witnessing, "1) our love for the Savior, 2) our desire to do his will, and 3) our concern for the souls of the dying".¹¹²

The major advance that Pastor Valleskey pushed for, encouraged, and hoped to see was that pastors would come to use the great resource of their lay people and train them to do evangelism. The heart and core of his message to pastors concerning their responsibilities as evangelism leaders in their congregations centered on two basic principles. First, that it was the pastor's responsibility to teach and help the laity to become good witnesses for Jesus. Secondly, that to this end pastors must devise methods and to plan progress consistent with the doctrine and practice for our laity.¹¹³ But above all of all the things that Pastor Valleskey did to further WELS evangelism, his greatest work, which the Wisconsin Synod is indebted to him for, is the Evangelism Bookshop that he created and ran in Detroit. This evangelism material production store was the source of the Wisconsin Synod's evangelism resources for 15 years.

The Evangelism Bookshop is worthy of looking at a little more deeply because of the unique relationship and role that it had upon the evangelism work

¹¹² Pastor Valleskey's personal files. A Conference paper from September 1964.

¹¹³ Ibid. A devotion for the COE in New Ulm, MN on Aug 1, 1977.

of the Wisconsin Synod in the 1960's. This was the place every pastor turned to for evangelism information and advice. "Everyone bought his material".¹¹⁴ This was the place to go to find out information on how to train lay people to witness about their Savior. It was this simple: If you wanted information or materials about evangelism you wrote to Pastor Valleskey. Everyone knew what address to write if they needed something about evangelism; all they had to do was write to:

Pastor Wilmer Valleskey
10729 Worden Street
Detroit, MI 48224

The Evangelism Bookshop was established in early 1960 when Pastor Valleskey was given \$1,000.00 from his congregation's budget to further the cause of evangelism.¹¹⁵ At that time, as we already discussed, there was not a real great interest in or need for evangelism materials in most people's eyes. In fact, Pastor Valleskey even said that evangelism "was considered a dirty word" in many WELS circles.¹¹⁶ "We realized that in order to promote evangelism in our circles, we would have to pioneer not only in the field of writing but also in the field of printing what was written."¹¹⁷ Some of the first materials that were produced were:

1. The Evangelism Manual
2. Study to be Witnesses unto Me
3. Organize to be Witness unto Me
4. Train to be Witnesses unto Me
5. Sharing the Savior – a lay witnessing manual.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Pastor David Witte, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's personal files. Letter to a fellow pastor.

¹¹⁷ "History of the Evangelism Bookshop" – Pastor Valleskey.

6. Our Lutheran Church invites you – a tract. The most popular item sold in the Bookshop over its history.¹¹⁸

Over the years, the numbers of materials began to grow, as did the number of requests for more materials. This led to the publishing of a yearly "Catalogue of Evangelism Materials" (see enclosure), which came out for the first time on August 1, 1965.¹¹⁹ From its beginning, the Bookshop was a non-profit organization built on a revolving fund from that first donation of his congregation. That money was continually turned over to make new productions and was replenished by incoming money from sold materials. As one could only imagine, being a pastor, running the bookshop, organizing the Soul Conservation program, and all of his other duties was quite exhausting for Pastor Valleskey. Because of this, Pastor Valleskey did get a great deal of help in the Bookshop from volunteers within his own congregation who freely gave of their time to organize and help send things out.¹²⁰

Finally after 17 years of devotion and hard work, Pastor Valleskey turned the job of running the Evangelism Bookshop over in May of 1977 to Rev. Robert Hoepner, who was the pastor of Centennial Lutheran Church in Milwaukee.¹²¹ Soon after this took place, the responsibility of managing the Bookshop fell on the shoulders of Pastor Gerald Meyer of Oak Creek, WI.¹²² He was in charge of running it, orders were sent to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH), and the

¹¹⁸ The Northwestern Lutheran. March 1972, p. 103.

¹¹⁹ "Evangelism Chronicles", p. 3. Collected by Bob Hartman.

¹²⁰ "History of the Evangelism Bookshop" – Pastor Valleskey.

¹²¹ TELL. Volume 1, #3, December 1977.

¹²² BoRaM. 1979, p. 98.

materials were stored and mailed out from the home Robert and Louise Kante (Pastor Valleskey's sister-in-law). In 1981, the Kante's no longer were able to manage the materials in their home because Robert passed away, so the materials were then moved to the house of Pastor Meyer.¹²³ To show just how successful and productive the Evangelism Bookshop was, one can look at how many items were sold in 2 of its later years; 1981 – 55,000 pieces sold, 1984 – 75,000 items sold. The Evangelism Bookshop was finally closed on October 20, 1986 when the COE consolidated distribution of all evangelism materials into the hands of NPH.¹²⁴

The other major resource for WELS evangelism material through the years premiered in April 1977. The COE felt that they needed to highlight evangelism for WELS pastors and their congregations. They felt that there was a need to communicate to the people of the Synod various ways in which they could involve members and give them encouragement in the area of evangelism.¹²⁵ The production that they came up with was called TELL, "*The Evangelism Life Line*". It was to be published 3 times a year and each issue had four areas of focus:

1. Articles of a motivational nature.
2. News of what is happening in evangelism.
3. Short features for congregations.
4. Information to help pastors and their congregations.¹²⁶

¹²³ BoRaM. 1981, p. 85.

¹²⁴ "Evangelism Chronicles", p. 7. BoRaM. 1987, p. 102.

¹²⁵ Interview with Pastor Ron Roth.

¹²⁶ BoRaM. 1977, p. 75.

Each and every WELS congregation was allowed to receive 20 free issues of each TELL publication if they were going to use it. The groups in charge of producing TELL were the executive committee of the COE, along with the appointed editor of the publication. The editor for a great deal of TELL's existence was Pastor Ron Roth, who was in charge of overseeing the publication from 1977 until 1984 when Paul Kelm took on the position as part of his duties as executive secretary. In 1984, TELL was reduced to being published two times a year because of monetary concerns in spite of its growing popularity.

In 1979, 200 congregations were receiving issues of TELL. By 1983, nearly 400 congregations were receiving issues of *The Evangelism Life Line*. In 1987, the last year that TELL was produced, over 15,000 copies were being sent out to WELS congregations.¹²⁷ TELL printed its final issue in the summer of 1987 and was then merged into the Wisconsin Synod publication that we have today, "*The Lutheran Leader*". The reason for this merger was that when evangelism came under the supervision of the Board for Parish Services, there was a concern about the proliferation of periodicals in the WELS, so Synodical leadership joined all of them together into one larger publication.¹²⁸

WELS EVANGELISM: Personal Evangelism Approaches

As we have heard time and time again in this paper, one of the main goals of the COE was to encourage and increase lay witnessing in Wisconsin Synod evangelism. To accomplish this goal materials needed to be prepared and

published so that pastors could give their people an evangelism approach that they could use. The first such instruction manual that was published and used was produced by the Michigan District COE in 1963.¹²⁹ It was called "Sharing the Savior". "Sharing the Savior" was an evangelism program made up of three different manuals, "Study/Train/Organize to be Witnesses unto Me" and was used to train lay members to witness about the Savior.

"Sharing the Savior" worked well for a long time, but it never really gained widespread use in the WELS. Pastor Wilmer Valleskey developed the next personal evangelism approach for lay witness training. In July of 1972, TAS, "Talk About the Savior", was presented to the COE to be used as a "method of witnessing" to be used in training lay people to be more effective witnesses.¹³⁰ After the approval of the COE was given, the TAS evangelism manual was adopted by the Wisconsin Synod on September 21, 1972.¹³¹ The TAS training manual, which included nearly 100 pages in a 3-ring binder, was very thorough in its training materials.

The TAS evangelism approach was a simple 6-step approach to witnessing that had a simple outline that could easily be memorized by lay people. This is what the basic outline of TAS looked like;

1. Introduce yourself
2. Get acquainted
3. Present Sin and Grace

¹²⁷ BoRaM reports from various years. 1979 – p. 97, 1983 – p. 74, 1987 – p. 103.

¹²⁸ Interview with Pastor Paul Kelm.

¹²⁹ Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's personal notes from Michigan COE.

¹³⁰ Personal files of Reuel Schulz. Taken from the minutes of the executive committee meeting from July 1972.

¹³¹ Michigan District COE notes from the 1974 District Convention. Found in Wilmer Valleskey's files.

4. Seek a confession
5. Seek commitment
6. Close the visit.¹³²

"The TAS manual fills the need for laymen by providing for study and on the job training."¹³³ Another other unique training opportunity and special aspect of TAS was that you had to attend a TAS seminar and go through it in a day long workshop in order to receive a TAS manual for your personal use with your people. This upset a great number of people who felt that it was wrong to expect this attendance of pastors.

However, that was not the only form of criticism that was received by Pastor Valleskey about the TAS personal approach to evangelism. In letters that Pastor Valleskey received, he was told that his method was "unscriptural, and it placed pressure on people for action".¹³⁴ Others complained that it was too similar to Kennedy's "Evangelism Explosion" method of evangelism. Pastor Valleskey responded in an evangelical manner to all whom questioned him, and he showed them that his method was scriptural and in line with God's Word. On the other hand some things were changed throughout the 70's, especially the "pressure" concerns that people had, and by August 1974 there had already been a third edition of the TAS manual published. The TAS method of witnessing was used by WELS pastors and lay people for nearly 10 years.

¹³² Taken from Page 1 of the TAS manual.

¹³³ The Northwestern Lutheran. "Something New – For All"; 1972, p. 392.

¹³⁴ Personal files of Pastor Valleskey. "TAS Responses".

In November of 1981, Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's son, David Valleskey (a pastor in San Jose, California), wrote a new evangelism approach for lay people to use. The title of his new approach was called "God's Great Exchange" (GGE). The basic outline and approach was very similar to his father's outline in TAS. It used the same introductory questions, a similar Law and Gospel presentation, and a simple of outline. However as can be seen, the basic outline of GGE does vary from that of TAS.

1. Introduction
2. Our problem
3. Man-made remedies
4. God's solution to the problem
5. God's gifts
6. God's blessings
7. Commitment¹³⁵

In 1987, "God's Great Exchange" had become the personal evangelism approach of choice in the Wisconsin Synod overtaking "Talk About the Savior".¹³⁶ The GGE approach is the one that is currently being taught to Middlers at the Seminary by President Valleskey. It is still the witness approach used by many WELS pastors because it is an approach that is very simple and is easy to use by all people, both pastors and lay people.

In April of 1985, Pastor Carl Leyrer produced a method that was different from its predecessors because of the way in which it was presented. This evangelism approach was an audio-visual one called R.S.V.P. (**R**each **S**creen **V**isual **P**resentation). This presentation contained 91 slides and could be used

¹³⁵ "The Great Exchange", NPH 1989.

¹³⁶ BoRaM. 1987, p. 106.

by untrained people by simply bringing people to see the presentation at church.¹³⁷

The newest WELS production in the line of personal evangelism approaches is a production of the WELS Mass Media Ministry department. In 1990, "Soul Search" was produced as a witness video for basic friendship evangelism. The unique thing about this personal evangelism method is that it is a video that can be played in the VCR at a prospect's home. "Soul Search" in video form gives a simple Law and Gospel presentation in the format of a drama.¹³⁸ It is different than all the previous WELS productions evangelism witness methods because it serves as a very good discussion starter by presenting a Law/Gospel presentation in a thought provoking real-life situation. Currently "Soul Search" has been produced in 6 different formats for witnessing; English, Spanish, Japanese, one for the hearing impaired, multi-cultural, and the new urban format, "Soul Survival".¹³⁹ "Soul Search" is just the latest personal evangelism approach that the WELS evangelism has produced and it continues to grow in use because of its capability to be adapted to different languages and cultures.

WELS EVANGELISM: The Future?

So where is the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod headed as it approach the 21st Century? Where will the WELS plant new congregations?

¹³⁷ "Evangelism Chronicles", p. 6. Collected by Bob Hartman.

¹³⁸ BoRaM. 1991, p. 140.

¹³⁹ BoRaM. 1997, p. 70.

What will the WELS target outreach audience be 50 years from now? What personal evangelism approaches will be used by the next generation of WELS pastors? The answer to all of these questions is the same, "We just don't know". The Wisconsin Synod's growth numerically or locally is known by only one person, and that is our heavenly Father. We must leave those things in the hands of the same Lord who has commanded us to "Go and make disciple of all nations" until he returns. What we can do is this: Preach the Word of God to whomever the Lord gives us the opportunity to speak with. We know that he will guide us in all things and that his "Word will not return to him empty".¹⁴⁰

Yet we can see the challenges that we will face in the future years to come. "By the year 2,000 a full 47% of Americans will be brown, black, or yellow...the road ahead will be multi-national."¹⁴¹ The WELS will be challenged to do multi-cultural work in a rapidly changing world in all kinds of new and unique situations. Not only will the Wisconsin Synod be challenged culturally, but it will also be challenged technologically. The WELS needs to "make the best use possible of the latest technology in telecommunications".¹⁴² The Wisconsin Synod is currently facing an ever growing and a rapidly changing computer world, and the WELS needs to keep pace and must continue to grow in learning how to best communicate Christ crucified across both cultures and through technology.

¹⁴⁰ NIV. Isaiah 55:11.

¹⁴¹ Lawrenz. "A Synod for the '90s – The 1990s", p. 14.

¹⁴² Interview with Pastor Paul Kolander, p. 3.

So what can we learn from the history of the evangelism in the Wisconsin Synod? What are the goals of WELS evangelism for the 21st Century? They probably can be summed up in these 3 points:

1. We have to take hold of the opportunities that God places before us as a Synod head on. We cannot always flee from the city as we have in the past by moving our congregations when different cultures collide. Rather, we can and must stay and share with the precious promises of what God has done with the lost in that community.
2. We must continue to place an emphasis on evangelism training at our worker training schools.¹⁴³ The future lies in the hands of the next generation, which is now being taken care of at our schools with evangelism courses preparing future WELS workers for the work of evangelism.
3. We must continue to face the challenge of getting individual Christians aware of the opportunities the Lord puts in front of them everyday for sharing their faith.¹⁴⁴ As a Synod, the WELS must continue to keep that same goal of the original COE in front of our eyes, always focusing on teaching WELS lay people to be evangelists.

A great amount of WELS evangelism history revolved around the life and ministry of Pastor Wilmer Valleskey. His love for the lost was a central theme of his ministry for many years. The Wisconsin Synod will forever be indebted to him because of his evangelism work and dedication to lay evangelism. He spent his life training others to share God's promises with the lost. Because of this, I can think of no better way to close this paper than with an evangelism prayer written by Pastor Wilmer Valleskey asking God for his blessing upon our future evangelism work in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

¹⁴³ Interview with Pastor Paul Kolander, p 3.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Pastor David Witte, p. 3.

Oh, Lord, thy harvest fields we see
Through eyes of faith opened by thee.
For thy commission we have heard
To speak to men thy saving Word.

Let not our flesh abhor the task,
Nor fail the Spirit's aid to ask;
While of the Savior's death we tell;
Of love that bought mankind from hell.

Thy willing servant may we be
That all the lost, thy love may see;
And joining us their voices raise
In thankful and eternal praise. Amen.¹⁴⁵

To God Be the Glory.

¹⁴⁵ An evangelism prayer. Pastor Wilmer Valleskey's personal files.

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