

WELS Membership Losses:
Especially From the Parish Pastor's Perspective

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I. Opening Remarks

The seed that germinates into a church history paper can come from any one of a number of areas, and can appear in a multitude of fashions. The seed for this paper originated in the home of Professor Wendland, during the 1983 Post Mission Seminar Co-ordinating Committee Meeting (and social gathering). There Pastor Norm Berg, while discussing various thoughts as to why certain individuals might drop out of WELS membership and go their separate ways, commented on Lutheranism's occasionally being referred to as a "transition" period in the religious evolution of some Americans. With that comment as the catalyst, this writer's appetite was sufficiently whetted, and this paper has resulted.

Why do some people join the church, and why do others stay away? Why do still others aimlessly wander through the maze of denominations that typifies the American religious scene, listlessly searching for that perfect parochial paradise on earth? Why do some in their spiritual quest come to the WELS through the church's front door, only to later run from the WELS via the back door? How should one account for these back door losses, and perhaps of equal importance (at least from this aspiring pastor's point of view), how does the local WELS parish pastor view

these losses as they inevitably occur within his flock? Indeed, what is the WELS parish pastor's perspective on membership losses? That we shall consider in this paper.

II. The Issue of "Dropouts"

In a general way, nearly 2000 years ago, the Apostle Paul addressed the issue of such membership losses in his second letter to Timothy, warning the young pastor that "the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." Our society and our synod are experiencing that time today.

A number of denominational studies have dealt with the issue of "dropouts" (inactives, defections, "back door losses"). Picard (1968) found that few losses were the result of doctrinal conflicts (2.1%) or personal immorality (6.7%). Thirty-seven percent were removed from congregation rosters because they moved and did not transfer membership. Approximately one in seven (14.5%) joined another church—non-Lutheran, Also, one in five (22.0%) were removed due to manifest lack of interest. Although the pattern was not perfectly linear, the rate of losses (number per 1,000 members) was generally inversely related to size: the highest rates were exhibited by congregations of 50 communicants or less. There appeared to be regional and community type variances as well. Loss rates were lowest in the North Central (both East and West) and highest in the South Atlantic, Mountain, and Pacific states in that order. Rates of

were higher in metropolitan areas than non-metropolitan, and were higher for suburban than central city congregations, especially for "moving without transfer." Not surprisingly, losses were concentrated among college-age single persons and young married couples.

A United Presbyterian study (1976) involving telephone interviews with 225 "dropouts" found that, compared with "active" Presbyterians, they (1) less often said their church was warm and friendly, (2) less often felt the pastor was effective, (3) were less orthodox doctrinally, (4) agreed much more than "an individual should arrive at his own beliefs quite independent of the church." As with the Picard study, the Presbyterian dropouts tended to be younger than the active.

In view of the aforementioned, consider The Gallup Opinion Index, Religion in America 1977-78, which records the following critiques and comments on Lutheranism from various individuals polled (p. 72):

"I am Lutheran and feel it is too easy—not enough drive to become involved...Close to Catholic beliefs...Stagnant...Liturgy out of the dark ages...Male-dominated church and dogma...Leaves me cold—no feeling in their services—just repeating words...Bible believing but formalistic...Ceremonial Protestant service...Not very religious...Little friendship in congregations and clannish... Divided by the intolerance and rigidity of conservatives."

Those comments came both from members of the Lutheran church, and from individuals acquainted with Lutheranism. Such comments could just as easily have come from WELS Lutherans, possibly listless, and perhaps dissatisfied with their church. These are the WELS members who are prime candidates for the back door loss fraternity.

Granted, synodical membership has consistently increased over the past 20 years (up .6% according to 1982 statistics). Nevertheless, people do leave the WELS; this is an undeniable fact, especially to the local parish pastor whose God-given charge it is to care for the spiritual needs of his flock, and, to the best of his abilities, to keep its members from wandering off onto pathways of potential spiritual peril.

How do membership losses affect the parish pastor? Does he take each loss "personally," or does he become hopelessly resigned to their inevitability? Why does he feel his members leave, and what has he done to reduce his membership losses? Questions like these, and others, are what we hope to answer here.

III. The Survey: Procedure and Purpose

To best ascertain the local parish pastor's perspective on the membership losses which he encounters, this writer chose to initiate a survey entitled "Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Study of Clergy Opinions on Membership Losses." The information recorded in this paper consists of the results of a preliminary test survey, conducted during April and early May 1983. The survey incorporated the use of both mailed questionnaires and follow-up phone calls to the pastors of 21 representative parishes (29.2%) from the Milwaukee Metro North and Metro South Conferences, which consist of 72 congregations.

To place things into their proper perspective, The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is comprised of 1,159

congregations, 413,503 baptized souls, and 312,917 confirmed members. In comparison, the Metro North and Metro South Conferences (collectively referred to in this paper as the "study area") field 72 congregations (6.2% of the Synod) with 49,171 baptized souls (11.9%), and 37,514 confirmed members (12%). From the study area, the sample group has been drawn, consisting of 21 congregations (1.8% of the Synod/29.2% of the study area), having 10,788 baptized souls (2.6%/21.9%) and 8,362 confirmed members (2.7%/22.2%).

The Milwaukee Metro Conferences were selected as the study area because of their proximity to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, which facilitated this writer's research, and because of known WELS membership losses in the past decade, perhaps most notably those to Elmbrook non-denominational Church, headed by D. Stuart Briscoe.

The choice to survey 21 congregations was an arbitrary one. The churches were not, however, arbitrarily selected. Each of the 21 congregations in question was chosen on the basis of the following criteria: geographic location within the Milwaukee area; and, the size of its membership. Special effort was made to choose a cross-section of congregations whose collected statistics would approximate the averaged statistics for the study area.

The purposes of this survey were multi-faceted. In particular it was intended to record and analyze the perceptions of the local parish pastor regarding reasons for membership losses in his congregation. Additionally it

was intended to delineate the number of households that left the church, their level of activity, the specific reasons for their departure, and what activities the pastor carried out upon learning they contemplated leaving. As of the writing of this paper, such information had not previously been officially gathered for synodical records.

Of particular relevance to this study were the questions pertaining to professional pastoral services, whether direct or indirect. Included were questions regarding the following: the size and frequency of Bible classes; the types and number of organizations operated by the local congregation; a listing of typical congregation-wide fellowship opportunities in a given 12 month period; ascertaining the existence of a Christian Day School and its size; and determining the existence, level of activity, and effectiveness of the congregation's Evangelism group. These questions were to assist in determining if membership losses rose or fell in relation to the number of Christian education, service, and fellowship opportunities a congregation offered.

Furthermore, questions were asked relevant to the pastor himself, specifically his age, years of service in the public ministry, and years of service for the congregation to which he was presently called. These questions were asked to determine if the individual pastor's age, ministerial experience, and/or personal familiarity with the congregation encouraged or discouraged membership losses.

IV. The Survey: Results and Brief Analyses

Under the heading "Background Information," the questionnaire's first three questions sought information on the pastor himself. 22 pastors, representing/serving 21 congregations, participated in the study.

The first question asked was "How old are the pastor(s) of your congregation?" For the 22 pastors surveyed, the average age was 44.6 years old. The range extended from 28 years to 71 years old. The mean age of the respondents, nearly identical to their average age, was 45 years old.

In the 1981 study Profiles of WELS Lutherans, conducted through joint co-operation of our synod and AAL, it was noted regarding the age of ordained WELS clergy that, synod-wide, "The median (average) age for pastors, all of whom are 26 or older, is 38 years." (p.26)

Although precise statistical information is not available which provides the average age for the 85 parish pastors belonging to the combined Metro North and South Conferences, the results of this survey indicate that a fair representative sample was achieved.

Consequently, one can infer from this information that the average age of pastors in the sample group (45 years) exceeds the synod-wide average by 7 years.

The second and third questions sought information on the pastor's total years of ministerial experience and his length of tenure at his present parish.

To the question "How many years have you served as an ordained minister?" the 22 pastors surveyed responded with a range of from 2 to 46 years of service. The average was

17.6 years . The mean (17 years), as was the case in the first question, was very close to the study average.

"How many years has each been pastor at this congregation?" was the third question. The average answer was 9.0 years, with a mean of 8.0 years and a range of 2 to 24 years.

Accurate statistics representing the clergy of the entire synod, or from the study area itself were not available for comparison to the data gathered. The results, nevertheless, indicate that 17.6 years of experience, and 9.0 years of service to the present congregation are sufficient to suggest that the parish pastors questioned are, on the average, well enough acquainted with the ministry proper, and with their members to provide this writer with important information for this study, based on their years of practical experience in the parish ministry.

It could also indicate that a long period of time away from organized, formal education (i.e., the Seminary environment, et al.) might either serve as a hindrance (not being able to learn new techniques of membership conservation) or an asset to membership conservation (learning to successfully handle losses through acquired experience). All in all, however, data collected from the survey showed no specific correlation between the rate of membership losses and either pastoral age, experience, or tenure.

The next category of questions looked at the local congregation, particularly its geographic location, size, and various services.

Ascertaining baptized and confirmed membership was the objective of the fourth question. The 21 congregations that participated in the survey represented (as has been previously noted in this paper) 29.1% of the 72 congregations in the study area. Their baptized membership totals 10,788, or 21.9% of the area's 49,171 souls. Confirmed membership is 8,362 (22% of 37,514 souls). Additional information acquired through consulting the WELS 1982 statistical report shows the selected congregations of the area had an average 5,098 members attend regular Sunday services (47.3% of their membership). The combined study area's attendance total was 22,163/Sunday—or 45% of its membership. According to the 1982 WELS Statistical Report, throughout the synod, average attendance was 47% of total membership. In the Southeastern Wisconsin District, it was 45.8% of total membership. When the preceding figures were compared it was determined that the sample area contributed 23.8% of the study area's over all attendance. It might also be noted that the 21 congregations under study represent 1.8% of synod's total congregations, 2.6% of its baptized membership, and 2.7% of its confirmed membership.

11 of the 21 congregations approached (52.3%) answered the fifth question, "If you have a Christian Day School, which grades are taught and how many students are enrolled?"

All respondents offered grades K-8. The enrollments ranged from 69-166 students, with a mean of 94. The average size of each school was 115.7 (in comparison to an average of 123.6 children for the Metro area's 44 Christian Day Schools). The sample group represented 2.7% of the WELS'

371 Christian Day Schools; the study area contained 11.9% of that total. Average CDS enrollment throughout the synod was 82.4 students per school.

In addition, each congregation held Sunday School, with a total attendance of 712 students and an average of 33.9 per congregation. The mean was 29, with the range extending from 12-73.

Christian education, especially at the elementary level, has always been viewed as an area of utmost importance in Lutheranism, especially in our Wisconsin Synod. Indeed, it may be one of the best, if not THE best solution to membership losses in the coming years. To be sure, a decrease in, or lack of Christian education has a telling effect on membership losses. Churches without Christian Day Schools suffer 3.0% member losses per year. Those with a CDS suffer an average 2.3% losses per year. That .7% difference may not seem like much until one realizes that .7% of the total membership in synod is 2,821 souls.

Profiles of WELS Lutherans (1981) notes, (p.35), "only approximately one third (36%) of the lay communicant members of the WELS have had any Lutheran elementary educational experience, and only 12% have completed all 8 grades." When one keeps in mind the fact that only 371 (32%) of 1,159 WELS congregations have a CDS, especially mindful of the current synodical "teacher glut," it suggests we ask our Lord for additional conviction and dedication to make Christian education a reality in more of our WELS congregations. It has the potential, on paper, to provide nearly a 20% reduction in member losses.

Questions 6 and 7 discussed general geographic area, and specific congregational location in relation to population.

Question 6 asked for a community population description, given in multiple choice form (10 choices), having a range descending from "Metropolis (larger than 1,000,000)" to "Rural or Farm (open country)." 17 respondents chose either "large city (250,000 to 1,000,000)" or "suburb of a large city." One chose "Small city (10,000 to 50,000)" and three selected "Town of 2,500 to 10,000."

All 21 congregations answered "Southeastern Wisconsin District" to question 7, "In which synodical district is your congregation?"

These two questions are especially intended for the larger, synod-wide survey of 250 congregations, which should be concluded by mid-July. They will help in determining if membership losses are consistent in the synod, or if they vary in relation to geographic area and size of community.

To the eighth question, "How many worship services per week are regularly scheduled (exclude festival seasons of Advent or Lent)?" answers ranged from 1 to 4 services per week. The average per congregation was 1.8. Through consulting the synod yearbook it was learned that 14 of the 21 churches under study changed their regular schedule of services each summer. Additionally, it should be noted that, of the 38 worship services offered by these 21 congregations, 33 were offered on Sunday mornings, 4 on Monday evenings, and 1 on Wednesday evenings. Also, summer schedules offered 4 Thursday evening services and three more

The amount of services a congregation offered, as well as the days on which they were offered, seemed to have no bearing on membership losses, according to the data gathered.

"How many adult Bible classes or other study groups for adults were running in April of 1983?" was the ninth question. Each congregation offered an adult information/membership/doctrinal review course, open especially to incoming members, but also to any current member interested in reviewing basic Lutheran doctrine. 28 "pure" Bible classes were also offered. This averaged out to 1.3 per congregation. The range was from 0 to 3; most churches offered one. The breakdown is as follows:

Sunday	18	classes	
Tuesday	5	"	(3 in the morning)
Wednesday	3	"	
Thursday	1	"	
Friday	1	"	(every other week)

From the follow-up phone call, it was learned that the 28 Bible classes had an average attendance of 19.6 individuals. The mean was 18, with the range spanning from 8 to 35. The average per congregation was 26.1 individuals. This represents a difference of 11.4% from statistics on the 21 congregations as published in the 1982 statistical report, which indicated an attendance of 29.5/congregation. The 72 congregations of the study area averaged 38.7 individuals per congregation in Bible class attendance. Allowing for a comparable "error factor" of 11.4%, this adjusts to 34.3 per congregation.

Bible classes are a facet of Christian education within the local parish. Thus, as was previously noted

in the remarks of this paper regarding Christian Day Schools, their presence has a positive impact on reducing membership losses.

The survey results indicated that the congregations which suffered the highest percentages of member losses (the range was from .9% to 6.2%) had only one Bible class per week. The 5 congregations at 2.0% losses or below all had 2 Bible classes. Is this significant? This writer thinks so. Perhaps an increase in the number of Bible classes offered will aid in member retention.

Question 10 dealt with the topic of congregation-wide fellowship opportunities. Specifically it asked, "Other than worship services, approximately how many congregation-wide activities (picnics, potlucks, etc.) were held in the past 12 months?"

The replies ranged from a low of 3 events to a high of 15 per year. The mean was 7, and the average per church was 7.5.

The following are some of the activities offered by congregations of the sample group: church and school picnics, potlucks, an annual stewardship dinner, new member dinners, Mother-Daughter/Father-Son banquets, Easter breakfasts, work days, AAL gatherings, and Rally Day.

The frequency of fellowship opportunities per congregation could not be consistently compared to high or low membership losses. This, however, should in no way be regarded as a reflection of their value to the local congregation, for these activities provide unique and essential opportunities for members to engage in Christ-centered ser-

vice and fellowship activities, as well as to become better acquainted with one another.

Evangelism work was the central focus of questions 11 through 13. They shall be considered in the order in which they were found on the survey form.

"Do you have any formal Evangelism group?" 62% of the respondents (13 congregations) answered "Yes." 38% (8 churches) answered "No." It should be noted, however, that one pastor who responded "no," informed this writer that his entire congregation served as the church's evangelism committee, receiving their instruction via the pulpit, and through periodical evangelism training sessions. He rated his people as "very effective."

Questions 12 and 13 existed for those congregations which had formal evangelism groups.

"Would you rate your evangelism group as _____?" The three possible answers were "very active, active", and "inactive." Of the 13 respondents, 3 rated their groups as very active (23%); 5 as active (38%); and, 5 as inactive (38%).

"Concerning bringing new members into your congregation, would you rate your evangelism group as _____?" Possible answers are "very effective, effective," or "ineffective." 3/23% received a very effective rating. 5 groups (38%) were regarded as effective. The other 5/38% were considered ineffective.

Survey results indicated that the congregations with evangelism groups suffered member losses of 3.1%. Congregations with no evangelism groups suffered losses of 2.6%,

and congregations with active or very active groups had 2.3% member losses. These figures suggest the existence of an ^{active} evangelism group aids in member retention.

Through follow-up phone calls to the pastors surveyed, it was learned that only 4 of the 13 affirmative respondents in this area have what they considered to be "trained" evangelists in their congregations. Those 4 respondents were also the only 4 to carry out evangelism work in its purest sense—i.e., reaching out to the community's unchurched. The others (9 churches) utilized their groups for delinquent calls, new member visitations, and new prospect calls. Perhaps devoting some of the group's time to delinquent calls reduces member losses.

The final question regarding congregational services to its members, and service, worship, or education opportunities for its members, asked the pastors to check off any of the following services/activities they offered: Men's Club, Ladies Aid, LWMS, Youth Group, Boy Pioneers, Girl Pioneers, Couples' Group, Parents' Group, Senior Citizens' Group, or Other (please specify).

These are the results and percentages:

Mens' Club	4 congs	19%	
Ladies' Aid	15 congs	71%	
LWMS	10 congs	48%	
(it should be noted that 5 congregations, or 24%, have combined Ladies' Aid/LWMS groups.)			
Youth Group	14 congs	67%	(av 13.9/meeting)
Boy Pioneers	6 congs	29%	
Girl Pioneers	6 congs	29%	
(one congregation has a combined pioneer group, 5%)			
Parents' Group	11 congs	52%	
Couples' Group	11 congs	52%	
Senior Citizens'	4 congs	19%	

No obvious pattern relating to membership losses could be established from the data gathered, although those congregations with lower member loss percentages generally offered slightly more service/fellowship groups than those with higher loss percentages. The range went from 2 groups to 7 per congregation. The average was 4.6 and the mean was 4.

The final division of the questionnaire considered the lost members themselves.

Question 15 asked the pastor "How many families and singles have left your congregation in the past 12 months?" The period of time was to extend from May, 1982 to April 1983. The results are as follows:

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Average</u>
Families-193	0-25	9.2/church
<u>Singles-125</u>	0-30	5.9/church
Households-318	3-55	15.1/church

The next question asked the pastor to rate the congregational participation of those households. His choices were: "active, attenders," or "inactive." This is the way the data was broken down:

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Active-124	5.9/church	39%
Attenders-47	2.2/church	14.8%
<u>Inactive-147</u>	7/church	46.2%
Total-318	15.1/church	100%

Combining active members with those who were attenders, the percentages were 53.8% who came to church, versus 46.2% who were inactive before leaving the parish.

Question 17 concentrated on the distribution and disposition of those 318 members who left the 21 congregations surveyed.

<u>Disposition</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Average</u>
Other WELS congs within 50 miles	105	33%	5/cong
Other WELS congs beyond 50 miles	39	12%	1.9/cong
Non-WELS Lutheran congs	34	10.7%	1.6/cong
Misc (mainline) Christian denominations	24	7.5%	1.1/cong
Other established denom- inations	1	.3%	---
Cults, sects, and other "fringe" groups	6	1.9%	.3/cong
Did not join any religious group	37	11.6%	1.8/cong
Do not know	72	22.6%	3.4/cong
	318	99.6%	15.1/cong

To begin with, this question shows that approximately 45% of the member losses experienced by WELS congregations are the result of TRANSFERS to other WELS congregations, a situation for which we thank our Lord. 20.4% were known to have joined other religious groups, ranging from Non-WELS Lutherans to cults, sects, etc. In the phone follow-up these are some of the groups to which pastors knew their former members now belonged: LCMS; ALC; Baptist; Catholic; Presbyterian; Episcopal; Assemblies of God; Methodist; Elm-brook Church; The Unification Church; and the Church of Scientology. Finally, 34.2% either dropped out of the religious scene, or had whereabouts that were unknown.

Question 18: People leave congregations for a variety of reasons. Some are for understandable reasons, and others are due to misunderstanding. Where possible please indicate how many households left for each of the reasons listed below. Try to use the reason(s) which the household used (whether rightly or not). A single household might be included more than once.

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
Moved out of the community	172	41.4%
Household related reasons (marriage et al.)	19	4.6%
Doctrinal differences	40	9.7%
Unhappy with congregation's professional staff	29	7.0%
Personal differences with members	43	10.4%
Dissatisfied with worship	22	5.3%
Dissatisfied with congregation's educational programs	26	6.3%
Unknown	63	15.2%
	<u>414</u>	<u>100%</u>

Before beginning an analysis of this information, it is essential to note that the reasons for leaving which are provided here (414) do not correspond exactly to the total number of households (318) who departed the 21 congregations surveyed. In some instances, 2 reasons or more were listed for each household's departure. This is obvious when one recognizes that 45% of the member losses (cf question 17) resulted in households transferring from one WELS congregation to another WELS congregation when moving out of the community. Yet, only 41.7% of the reasons are attributed to moving out of the community, and such reasons include not only WELS transfers, but also those who joined another fellowship.

One reason not provided for this question, but which must nevertheless be a factor in member losses, is avoiding church discipline. It was not included because these reasons were to be from the departed members' viewpoints as the parish pastor was aware of them. Certainly, a significant portion of those who either joined other fellowships or dropped out of religion altogether did so to escape the enactment of church discipline against them. Perhaps some of those who left to avoid discipline are accounted for in

the reasons: doctrinal differences (9.7%); unhappiness with the congregation's professional staff (7%); and personal differences with members (10.4%).

Profiles of WELS Lutherans (1981, p.49) provides figures that state 85% of WELS Lutherans were reared Lutheran, while 15% (the majority now in their 30's and 40's) were reared in non-Lutheran homes. It may be that the reasons "doctrinal differences" and "dissatisfaction with worship" come from a portion of this group, brought up outside of Lutheranism and unfamiliar with our Lutheran teachings and heritage. Often they may have joined our fellowship for household related reasons, such as marriage, or because they were searching for a spiritual home, and eventually came to the conclusion that WELS was not that haven.

Certain data recorded in "Profiles" discussed the doctrinal beliefs of WELS Lutherans. 96% viewed the Bible as God's actual, inspired Word. There was also general agreement that children are sinful at birth, and that only belief in Jesus saves. However, there was not complete harmony and unanimity on other issues—the statement, for example, that while there are many religions, most lead to the same God. WELS Lutherans as an entity took a moderate view on this. Proper Scriptural conviction was also less than obvious in regard to the statement that God is satisfied with a person living the best life he can. A significant segment of WELS Lutherans agreed with this erroneous statement.

Individuals who espouse such views, contrary to WELS and Scriptural teaching, may indeed find themselves in doctrinal disagreement with their local congregation and parish pastor, and thus may leave the parish for a group which offers them the teachings they personally seek to follow. One is reminded of the warning Paul gave, which is incorporated into the beginning of this paper, about those who seek after other teachers, having itching ears.

It should be noted also, that the profiles study indicated 16% of WELS Lutherans recognize little or no difference between us and other Lutherans. 21% view the differences as merely moderate. Only 36% describe us as "very different" from other Lutherans. 27% were not sufficiently informed to make a decision. (p. 72). Coupled with this is the statement in the same study that only one in three WELS Lutherans rated a move into a non-WELS, but Lutheran, area as either moderately or very upsetting.

Such views, held by significant groups within our synod, certainly must contribute to member losses to other Lutheran bodies, especially when our people move into other communities.

Dissatisfaction with the congregation's worship process accounts of 5.3% of the reasons for member losses. As this often results from a matter of taste and personal preference, it seems little can be done to prevent such losses, save to continue to be receptive to the feelings of others, to continue instructing the saints about proper worship, and to make whatever allowances can be correctly made to accommodate the weak.

Dissatisfaction with congregational education programs (6.3%) generally receives impetus from the reasons that one is unhappy with the professional staff especially, and the other members, possibly. This can take a number of different avenues. Either the individual departing is unhappy with the congregation's present school operation and/or teaching staff, or the individual is attracted to another church because of its more acceptable education programs. Such is the case especially where the congregation from which the member is leaving lacks a Christian day school ("it's the pastor's, teachers', or congregation's fault") and/or has an insufficient number of Bible classes, in the opinion of the one leaving.

The final choice provided as a reason for a member's leaving is "unknown." It accounted for 15.2% of the total. This group (as the writer learned through the follow-up calls) almost exclusively represents those members who have "dropped out" of the church, and the religious world. Again, these generally were the individuals who had been considered delinquent members; some were in the initial stages of church discipline. All felt it unnecessary to inform their pastor and fellow Christians of their intention to leave, and their reason for leaving the fellowship.

Finally, Question 19 deals with the activity of the parish pastor once he has been made aware a member is planning to leave the question reads:

There is little which can be done when a member leaves first and then notifies the congregation. However, when the pastor or elders hear that a

person is thinking of leaving, they sometimes undertake one or more of the following activities. Please select all of the activities which you employ.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Pastors</u>	<u>%</u>
Visit member <u>within</u> two weeks of hearing about contemplated departure	19	86.7%
Visit member more than two weeks of hearing about contemplated departure	4	18.2%
Contact member by telephone before departure	12	54.5%
Contact member by letter before departure	6	27.3%
Give member the name of a WELS congregation in the area where he/she is moving	22	100%
Send the member's name to a WELS congregation in the area where he/she is moving	6	27.3%
Utilize Synod's Soul Conservation methods and tools for a departing member	8	36.7%

Most gratifying is the statement that all pastors polled (22) inform departing members of available WELS churches. No doubt this statistic applies almost exclusively to the 45% of members who depart congregations because of moves to other communities.

Also significant is the fact that 86.7% of the pastors surveyed made personal visits to departing members within two weeks of learning of their intentions.

81.8% utilize phone and/or mail to contact members. Indeed some use the church newsletter as a way of discovering member losses. When those members change their addresses, the newsletter generally is returned to the church, making the pastor aware of the potential problem situation.

Unfortunately, only 36.7% of the pastors surveyed utilize the Synod's Soul Conservation program. However,

the data acquired through this survey did not indicate whether such use aided in the conservation of members once they moved, although one almost certainly can assume it is of value. Consequently no valid judgement, as it pertains to our study data, can be rendered.

V. Summarization, Recommendation, and Conclusion

The preceding 17 pages have been filled with averages, percentages, means, ranges, and other statistics—all of which are merely numbers, unless they are unified and given some direction.

This paper's purpose was to view membership losses from the parish pastor's perspective, and in order to do that, surveyed 22 pastors, from 21 congregations in the Milwaukee area.

Great effort was made to make the survey a representative sampling of especially the Milwaukee Metro North and Metro South Conferences, and to a lesser extent, representative of the entire Synod (although cultural, socio-economic, geographic, and other factors do limit its objectivity).

As with all research of this nature, data received and analyzed never provides the last word on the issue. That is particularly true in this case, as the writer/surveyor admittedly could have been more precise in his questioning. Important information was missed, as a result. Also, in any analysis, a certain amount of subjectivism enters in; it did in the formulation of this paper.

The writer wondered if a pastor's age (i.e. "too young to be respected" or "too old to be in touch with his people") was a contributing factor in member losses. It was not. Indeed, ministerial experience and length of tenure also were not factors. With no apparent rhyme or reason, and in no pattern, pastors of all ages, of varying experience, and of different lengths of tenure all experienced membership losses.

Are member losses/dropouts influenced by the existence of, or lack of particular congregational services? Here some rather definite conclusions can be drawn. Christian Education, both for children and adults is an important plus in the battle to stem the tide of member losses. Congregations with Christian day schools statistically lose fewer members. Also, the congregations surveyed with had more than one Bible class suffered a lower percentage of losses than those who had one or no Bible classes.

The existence of a Christian day school, which provides the congregation's children with a Christian education, obviously guides them to a more complete love for their Savior, and a better understanding of His Word. This encourages sanctified living, and strengthens their faith against the false teaching, rationalism, and humanism of other church bodies, and against their old adam, which struggles to reject God altogether. The more often our children are exposed to the Word of the Lord, the more faithful they will be as children of God. The same holds true for adults. The more Bible classes that are available to them, the more they will be immersed in the word, and the better members and Christians they will be.

Congregations surveyed which had "active" or "very active" Evangelism groups also suffered a lower percentage of member losses. Two reasons for this may be that the groups themselves aid in the recovery of delinquent members, or that they provide members with a special opportunity for service to God that they might otherwise have to seek from another fellowship.

This survey also showed (contrary to the preconceived notions of this writer) that the availability of social activities and church organizations in and of themselves is not a contributing factor in member losses.

An enjoyable statistic to report is that 45% of the members who leave any given WELS church, on the average, show up in another WELS church through transfer. Also, though one is not joyous over it, 10.7% do (at least) join another Lutheran church. 9.7% join other Christian denominations or other religious groups, and sadly, 34.2% are lost or unaccountable.

Regarding pastoral activity upon hearing of a member's intent to leave, 100% of our pastors tell members of WELS churches in the areas to which they are moving. A high percentage visit their members within two weeks of hearing they plan to leave, and a large segment contact their members by phone or letter. Unfortunately, only one in three makes use of the Soul Conservation program.

Specific solutions or aids to recovering members already have been stated in this paper. Generally, though, specific training in member recovery might be included in a pastor's Seminary instruction, preferably prior to his vicar year. Workshops might also be offered at Synod,

District, and Pastoral Conferences. Such education might also be offered at Pastor's Institutes and in programs during the Seminary's Summer Quarter.

Decreasing the member per pastor ratio would also be of help, as it would allow the pastor the opportunity to become better acquainted with his members, their needs, and their problems. This could be done by splitting large congregations, (a rather impractical suggestion), by generating more dual and triple pastorates, or by adding a DMLC graduate to the church staff whose duties could include teaching, but also assistance in heading up Bible classes, and various church organizations. This would serve the members better, and also allow the pastor more free time to deal with such matters as member losses and subsequent recovery of the same.

In conclusion, this paper/survey did not produce for the writer the earth shattering information he might have hoped would appear. It did, however, dispel some false notions he held. People are not leaving us for social reasons, exclusively. Some leave because of disenchantment and doctrinal reasons. Many are lost because they don't seem to care. The survey showed that the best way to keep members "caring" is to provide them with the opportunities to hear, ^{share,} and study God's Word. The more that is done, the less members we will lose, and the more souls the Lord will claim for heaven, for eternity.