

The Church Growth Movement: An Explanation and Evaluation

by Paul E. Kelm

In many ways the Church Growth movement was inevitable. Sooner or later the analytical tools of social science would be addressed to churches for purposes other than academic reporting of statistical trends and sociological phenomena. Sooner or later the alarming facts of decline in American churches and the failure of Christianity to keep pace with global population growth would spur a reaction against self-satisfied traditions and “maintenance” strategies. The fundamentalist and evangelical revivals provided an answer to the universalism and social gospel that were responsible for spiritual decline and mission stagnation. The Church Growth movement provides a direction and strategy for the church-in-mission.

In many ways the Wisconsin Synod cannot relate to this “bigger picture” of Christendom. We never experienced the spiritual decline prompted by theological sell-out. For that reason and for the better reasons of confessional Lutheran theology we’ve been little more than curious observers of fundamental and evangelical revival. Neither statistical nor sociological self-appraisal have found a place in the structure and administration of our church. We have well preserved traditions. Ours has been a growing church, however modest the growth. A case could be built for sitting out or waiting out the Church Growth movement.

There is a better case for awareness and evaluation, perhaps even in our own confessional way— participation. The WELS Board for World Missions will not let us ignore either the alarming statistics of spiritual and eternal “lostness” in the world or the wide-ranging opportunities to do something about it now! And let us penitentially admit that “blissful ignorance” of the harvest fields beyond the relatively small yard of the WELS has been attempted. The WELS Board for Home Missions is wrestling with the problem of slow growth in the churches it has planted and (resulting) financial barriers to expanded church planting. Established churches in urban and rural settings are painfully aware of decline, if for no other reasons, by virtue of budgetary problems. The pluralistic age, the age of communications, the now in which we minister has meant that the cultural traditions of the WELS are not immune to change and the ideas of the Church Growth movement will not remain outside our ministerium. The recent self-studies of the Administration Survey Commission and new hymnal committee, more significantly the “Instrument for Congregational Self-Study” developed under the aegis of the Conference of Presidents, have demonstrated that we are much more aware of the need for, and value in serious self-appraisal. And I believe that the creation of an evangelism chair at the seminary and a synodical office of evangelism signal an awareness on the part of our church body that we have not responded to the Lord’s mission call in a way consistent with the opportunities, capabilities and preservation of Gospel truth He has given us.

If by “church growth movement” we mean a sweeping reawakening in Christian churches to the Lord’s will that His Church grow by winning the lost and confirming them in His truth, then it seems to me we have no real decision to make. If by “church growth movement” we mean a rapidly gathering body of data and resulting suggestions for improving the efficiency of our structures, tools and methods of Gospel outreach, then it seems to me we should eclectically choose what will serve our theological position and our field for ministry. If by “Church Growth Movement” (note the capital letters) we mean a religious entity with specific principles, then our association with it must be predicated on an absolute unanimity rooted in Scripture. It is possible to consider the “church growth movement” in the first two senses above and to heartily endorse such a call to mission and mission efficiency. In doing so, however, I recommend that we use a different title because honesty compels me to state that “The Church Growth Movement” has an identity (however ill-defined) that is not entirely neutral. I hope to point out much within the movement to commend, some basic premises to endorse, some practical ideas to adapt, but also some questionable principles of sociology and heterodox principles of theology. Just as there are pastoral libraries liberally sprinkled with publications from heterodox sources, just as there are administrative structures and principles adapted from the secular world of social theory, so also there should be judicious use of Church Growth literature among us and careful adaptation of appropriate principles

from Church Growth literature to our structure and strategy for mission. But to “buy into” the Church Growth movement would be to “sell out” truth we hold dear.

The very word “movement” suggests a difficulty in definition. From very specific origins it has evolved into an increasingly diverse concept, united by common objectives and principles. It is a marriage of theology and social science, yet it claims to be elastic enough for adaptation to nearly any theological tradition (within the evangelical realm of commitment to salvation alone through Jesus Christ and to an inspired, authoritative Bible) while virtually insisting that certain sociological principles are inviolable. While the original proponents and the majority of them today come from Reformed background, there is a thriving Lutheran Church Growth Center and an enthusiastic Lutheran audience, especially in the LC-MS. Unlike the ecumenical movement or charismatic movement, the church growth movement is neither inimical to historic Christianity nor divisive in its theological emphases. Refocusing the church on the Great Commission, re-emphasizing that the church is the Body of Christ and that all of its gifts are to be marshalled toward its mission, reaffirming an inspired Scripture and the serious study of it by all, renewing the conviction that apart from Jesus Christ people are condemned—these are welcome “organizing principles.” But buried within this package in all but the Lutheran contributions of Kent Hunter and Waldo Werning especially are such basic Reformed errors as: the elevation of reason alongside Scripture, the centrality of God’s sovereignty rather than His grace, the confusion of law and gospel (especially in understanding the movement’s central doctrine of the Great Commission), the degrading of the Means of Grace and the elevation of human will in conversion, and a propensity for substituting sociological pragmatism for the Gospel. Even “Lutheran Church Growth” has its slip showing on occasion, where the “Lutheranizing” of church growth principles seems incomplete. Lutheran church growth advocates also seem given to the same misstatements, overstatements, and curious applications of biblical parables as are their Reformed counterparts. And as you might expect, any theology of church fellowship is, at best, somewhat situational. Having said this, let me recommend Kent Hunter as the best source of church growth understanding available to us.

And there is a great deal available. Perhaps the greatest volume of material available is from Win Arn’s Institute for American Church Growth. Perhaps the most serious research and education is centered in Fuller Theological Seminary and its associated “schools,” where C. Peter Wagner is the most recognized authority in residence. Perhaps the most practical research and writing comes from Lyle Schaller, who heads the Yokefellow Institute. Kent Hunter and his Church Growth Analysis and Learning Center in Corunna, Indiana provide resources and consulting services retooled to incorporate a Lutheran theology and perspective. There are other sources. In fact, a whole genre of “experts” has surfaced among the pastors of rapidly growing churches. Books by them and about their ministries overshadow the earlier works of church growth pioneers in number. I’ve attended a seminar on church growth sponsored by St. Paul’s Lutheran Church of Trenton, Michigan and Pastor Wayne Pohl. I’ve listened to tapes of Rick Warren, a highly “successful” Southern Baptist church grower. But I have no doubt the leader in the field is Win Arn’s Institute, especially after attending a recent seminar for denominational executives in Pasadena.

American Church Growth and the current scene are the obvious focus of your interest. The Church Growth Movement actually began as a world mission strategy. Donald McGavran, now an octogenarian, developed church growth principles out of his frustration with slow growth in his Disciples of Christ mission in India in the thirties. During the next three decades he observed mission fields and applied his principles in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The “Institute for Church Growth” he founded in Eugene, Oregon moved to Fuller Theological Seminary where in 1970 McGavran published the foundational treatise *Understanding Church Growth*, an extension and revision of principles originally published in *The Bridges of God*.

The basic principle of church growth is that “it is God’s will that His Church grow, that His lost children are found.” Matthew 28:18-20 and John 17:18 are always adduced in support of the principle, together with a vast array of references from Acts and the kingdom parables of the Gospels. A.R. Tippett says that “church growth as a biblical concept is declarative, implicative (e.g. “You are the light of the world.”), precedential (cf. Acts), and, cumulative (incl. the prophetic assurances of the psalms and Isaiah).” While one could argue that

“lost children” misunderstands what happened at the fall, there can hardly be any argument against the statement that God wants His Church to grow.

Against the claims that church growth is merely a “numbers game,” proponents offer this definition of growth: Growing Up (spiritual maturity and sanctification), Growing Together (Christian fellowship and unity in faith), Growing Out (evangelism and resulting new converts), Growing More (church planting). “More churches, not bigger churches” represents a philosophy that interprets data showing new churches more effective in reaching their community. Others argue that “bigger churches” are necessary to provide the kind of programming which will meet people’s felt needs. While not exactly mutually exclusive, the different perspectives demonstrate one fatal flaw of sociology: turning IS into SHOULD BE, data into philosophy.

“Numbers represent people” is another refrain that should be taken at face value. And church growth practitioners can correctly point to the Bible’s use of numbers to describe the growth of the early church. There may be some validity to the charge that those who object to the use of numbers are rationalizing ineffective ministry. To that comes the counter-charge which says: “Scripture requires of us only faithfulness.” (I Corinthians 4:2) and, as you might guess, the church growth response is to use the parable of the talents to define the faithfulness of a “good and faithful servant.” While serious church growth adherents recognize that faithful ministry can occur without numerical growth (especially in churches characterized by the church growth “disease” called “old age”), theological faithfulness and love for God’s people won’t register high on church growth measurements of a church’s ministry. In fact, the conviction that God wants His church to grow is easily reduced to formulism the suggestion that failure to grow is simply failure to apply church growth principles. “God builds the church” (with reference to Matthew 16:18) is frequently stated by church growth people. Kent Hunter will add that this is a “supernatural” occurrence produced by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Such a Lutheran emphasis identifies the role of church growth research as “getting the church out of God’s way so He can build it “ by eliminating barriers to growth. But there is little room for a ministry such as Jeremiah’s to a society that has been “innoculated” (a good church growth illustration) against the Gospel and rejects it. Following the “Harvest Principle” (more on that later), church growth would move elsewhere. That may be good stewardship, but the pragmatic “either...or” approach must trouble anyone whose call places him in a difficult field. On the other hand, slow growth/no growth is frequently a failure to apply the biblical mission of the church in an aggressive and sensible way (yes, with some common sense methodology gleaned from church growth research). I have no sympathy for those who expect little growth and minister with such self-fulfilling prophecy, those who demean pure truth by suggesting that orthodoxy is synonymous with slow growth. Those who canonize customs, traditions, structures and methods which inhibit growth, those who hide behind misapplied statements about the power of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit as if an obligation to HEAR the Gospel rests entirely with the lost. There is some truth to the statement that the obstacles to church growth are *in* the church.

“Disciples, not merely decisions” is another rallying cry of church growth against the shallow evangelism of our age. Unfortunately “decisions” are still a part of the theology of non-Lutheran (the vast majority of all) church growth practitioners. “Man has to be brought to surrender his will to God’s. He has to respond, or to ‘second the motion of the Holy Spirit,’ as Wesley put it.” McGavran’s distinction between “discipling” and “perfecting,” a typical case of developing theology to fit a church growth principle, is seldom found in more recent literature. Both conversion and spiritual growth (with sanctified stewardship and a witnessing life-style) are included in the definition of a disciple.

“What business are you in?” is the challenge of every church growth lecturer and consultant, together with: “What is the scope of the business you’re in?” They are valid questions which need answers. Church growth focuses the answer on the Great Commission. It uses numbers to evaluate how well the church is doing in its business, numbers as goals toward which specific strategies can be developed and numbers from wide research to aid in the formulation of strategies. But it cannot be written off as merely a numbers game.

A second foundational principle of church growth McGavran entitled the “Harvest Principle.” It is reaffirmed and extrapolated by current church growth gurus. McGavran contrasted “harvest” theology with

“search” theology. Today it is more likely a contrast between “sowing” and “reaping.” Perhaps the best way to explain the difference is the classical “3 P’s” of church growth evangelism: Presence, Proclamation, Persuasion. *Presence* refers to the Christian witness of loving, joyful lives and works that attract others to Christianity. It refers also to the physical presence of Christian ministry in the community. *Proclamation* is the verbalizing of the Christian Gospel to the community by both individuals and the corporate ministry of the church. *Persuasion* is the concentrated effort of the church to nurture people with the Word, demonstrate or model Christian love, and persistently seek to bring people into a discipleship relationship with the Lord. Of course, while a Lutheran would point to the power of the Word and Spirit as the exclusive means of “persuasion,” others in the church growth movement will err—not only with decision theology but with an elevation of sociological principles to the level of conversion means (I recently heard Win Arn make the Great Commandment a “means” to fulfill the Great Commission).

There is a valid point to be learned from “harvest theology,” and not simply because the words “harvest” and “reap” originate with Jesus. It is an over-zealous defense of biblical conversion when, as occurred on the floor of the recent synod convention, people object to the use of the word “win” souls for Christ. St. Paul uses the word without apology in I Corinthians 9. It is frequently a misleading oversimplification when people in our circles say: “All we are to do is preach the Gospel.” The barriers to “hearing” the Gospel which we erect are inexcusable. Like Paul we are to be “all things to all men that we might by all possible means *save* some.” Failure to reach people where they are and return repeatedly with the Gospel is a distinct problem in much of our evangelism methodology. It may even be true on occasion that we lack the “passion for souls” to zealously pursue “harvesting.” God gives the increase, but both planting and watering are roles we are to assume (I Corinthians 3).

Another facet of the Harvest Principle is sometimes stated “pick ripe fruit” or “go where the fish are biting.” On a world mission scale that would mean concentrating our efforts on such fields as Africa and waiting for Japan to “ripen.” (although McGavran and others recognize the need to maintain a “Christian presence” in non-receptive fields, perhaps even to “till the soil” for more productive sowing and reaping when in God’s KAIROS the field will become receptive). In America what Kent Hunter calls “soil testing” means applying the market analysis tools of the business world to our mission. In Hunter’s words, “the church is not a business; it is not less than a business, it is more than a business.” There are legitimate issues of stewardship to commend “soil testing.” However, a mechanistic application of uninspired social principles and behavioral analysis will risk writing off souls and discouraging or excusing outreach in so-called non-receptive fields.

I’ve seen two different models of the “resistance/receptivity axis” used by church growth consultants, one measuring from -3 to +3 and another from 0-15. Some of the determinants are: 1) Have they visited your church (crossed the “stained glass threshold” for a wedding, a Sunday service, even to vote)? 2) Are they of the same cultural group as people in your congregation (the “Homogeneous Unit” principle will be elaborated later)? 3) Are they new arrivals in the community? 4) Do they have “felt needs” which your church can meet (counseling, fellowship, material needs, handicapped access, child care, etc)? 5) Are they friends or relatives of your members, especially new members (more later on the “oikos” principle)? There are a raft of other factors closely associated in the study of when the unchurched come to church where and why. Such research is a valuable tool and by itself devoid of theological bias. It would be senseless to ignore it in the formulation of an evangelism strategy. It would be mere pragmatism to assume that the Gospel works only according to such sociological principles.

Pragmatism is the watchword in church growth evangelism strategy. “What works” is the philosophy; “trial and error” is the way to determine what works. Church growth consultants warn against imposing a model that works elsewhere on your situation as though models were magic. I can understand such pragmatism within the parameters of Christian liberty Scripture allows. We employ pragmatic principles without labeling them already in our churches. Apart from sound theology, however, pragmatism becomes a threat to biblical integrity; and the lure of “successful” ministry is powerful. Not all church growth advocates offer a discriminating evaluation of what works. More troubling is the frequent repetition of “The end justifies the

means” of evangelism. Some are careful to explain that what is meant is that means dare not be made an end and that the statement is valid only when the means in no way conflict with Scripture. There is a lingering fear, however, that pragmatism is easily elevated to the status of Scripture in pursuit of God’s end.

Probably the most controversial axiom of the church growth movement is the “Homogeneous Unit Principle.” McGavran says: “Men like to become Christian without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers.” C. Peter Wagner in *Our Kind of People* reiterates the principle that we not ask people to jump barriers to become Christians. Kent Hunter says it this way: “People like to join churches with people like themselves.” He uses the expression “heart language” to describe the cultural nuances of communication that make it easier for people to hear the Gospel.

To many the homogeneous unit principle sounds somewhere between unchristian and unamerican. It smacks of exclusivity rather than spiritual unity. It seems the ultimate example of sociology dictating ecclesiology. Most of the criticism is unjust. Church growth adherents are not denying the gospel to anyone. They are attempting to bring the gospel to everyone with the least cultural encumbrances. They respect ethnicity and recognize it as a force in the church’s efforts to reach people. “Allow people to come to our church if they want to, but plant a church for them if they’re uncomfortable with us” is one disclaimer I’ve heard from church growth people. Perhaps the best response is: “The homogeneous unit principle is an evangelistic strategy not a membership policy!” Our own synod has applied this principle selectively in central city work and focused much attention on the subject in a recent “Hispanic Consultation.” As was presented there, “blended” neighborhoods will make blended congregations attractive. First generation ethnic groups will respond best to ministry in their language, their culture, with “their people.” Economics is frequently the primary issue rather than ethnicity. Our own synod, as well as many another American church body, was founded and nurtured around the homogeneous unit principle before such an axiom was expounded. Our own world mission philosophy recognizes the indigenous rather than acculturated church as the ideal.

It is possible to understand McGavran’s “multi-individual conversion” concept (not “mass conversion”) and “people movement” basis for harvesting greater numbers within a biblical context. Natural “bridges” across which the gospel can travel (extended families, clans, tribes or socio-economic people groups) were utilized by the New Testament Church as well as cross-cultural leaps to plant another incipient “people movement.” So long as this model remains a sociological principle rather than a quasi-theological norm, we should be pleased to have the research and conclusions available to us. What is a bit more disturbing is the propensity of church growth enthusiasts for trying to anchor a sociological principle in biblical concrete. TA ETHNE in Matthew 28:19 becomes “the ethnics” as proof positive that Jesus commanded the homogeneous unit principle, despite the fact that GENOS would have been a better choice of words had He so desired. Biblical examples are turned into proof passage norms (a tendency shared well beyond the church growth movement).

Church growth people have their own vocabulary. The best example of this is “church growth eyes,” which means an acute sensitivity to opportunities for growth and barriers to growth, or as one consultant defines: “A developed characteristic to see possibilities for church growth and apply appropriate strategies to gain maximum results.” Turning “church growth eyes” on the homogeneous unit principle as it applies to evangelism produces further church growth jargon. E-0 evangelism is internal growth, reclaiming inactive members and “discipling” members-in-name-only with the gospel. E-1 evangelism is expansion growth—claiming the unchurched in the community whose only cultural barrier is the “stained glass threshold”, or extension growth—starting a daughter congregation to reach people in the same cultural stratum. (An example of church growth specificity is the axiom that people will only travel 12½ minutes to become “churched.”) E-2 evangelism is bridging growth, reaching a somewhat different culture or lifestyle. A singles ministry to young professionals by a blue-collar, family-oriented congregation would be an example requiring either a daughter church or a “congregation” within the church that has its own identity (perhaps even its own staff and worship). E-3 evangelism is bridging growth to people of a radically different culture (e.g. a different language). Again, church growth gets very specific. Since 73% of the non-Christians in the world must be reached by E-3 evangelism. 73 % of our resources should be so allocated. No church growth consultant would look favorably

on our “unit giving” to synod approach for supporting missions, at least as an exclusive approach. As you’ve already concluded, the numbers used with E correspond to the cultural distance the Gospel must travel.

A related dimension of church growth analysis is that every congregation has its own personality, strengths, and identity. Thus it can best reach people whose needs match its strengths and whose cultural nature fit comfortably with the church. A congregation should identify its personality and strengths as well as the “people groups” in its area of ministry it can therefore best reach. Having more than one congregation of the same denomination in the same community is not redundant therefore. (Have these people analyzed the WELS?) And comity arrangements that came with ecumenism are a horrible disservice.

Another application of the homogeneous unit principle to evangelism is the OIKOS method of making disciples, or “relational evangelism.” The best program embodying the concept is Win Arn’s “The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples.” A researcher named Flavil Yeakley has statistically supported the far greater success of such “non-manipulative dialogue” evangelism over “information transmission” and “manipulative monologue” methods. (TAS would probably fit somewhere between the latter two.) Church growth proponents point to the failure of “confrontational evangelism” models (Kennedy et al.) in an age that has moved from the confrontational style of the 60’s to the relational style of the “high tech—high touch” ‘80s. They argue the need to involve more than the “gifted” few in witness and to “model” Christianity for a visually oriented society that has witnessed the breakdown of the nuclear family. Applying Elmer Towns’ “The only thing we learn by our failure is not to do that again” to evangelism, church growth explains why so few Christians seem willing to be involved in aggressive evangelism programs. Tom Wolf says: “People don’t become Christians because: a) they haven’t seen one; b) they have.” Christian love persistently applied to the “web” or “extended family” and combined with “proclamation” which is usually personal testimony and an invitation to something at church) is the “natural” way to do evangelism. It addresses “felt needs.” It is “church-centered.” It eases the process of assimilation. It increases “people movement.” It involves more of God’s people. It promotes pure motivation. It is a “process” not an “event” (important church growth distinction anywhere applied). And, as the bottom line must always be, it works! Between 75 and 90% of those who join the church in any survey do so through a friend or relative, we’re told.

OIKOS evangelism may be natural, but it isn’t necessarily easy. “The Master’s Plan” works well only if the “support groups” work well and—as you should expect—only if the church and pastor have a “church growth conscience.” (The shift from “consciousness” to “conscience” in the terminology of the Institute for American Church Growth is another hint of law/gospel confusion.)

So that I’m not misunderstood, I’m in favor of relational evangelism—though not as an either...or of visitation or “stranger” evangelism. I like most of “The Master’s Plan” and I agree with the rationale which supports it until—Win Arn appears on the scene to tell me that this model is the only one used in Acts. I think “church-centered” evangelism is a healthy balance to the “don’t talk about the church” paranoia that has existed, although there is little real evangelism in a program that is primarily relationalism. I even like the concept of people developing their own testimony (“telling my story”) as long as we understand that “telling God’s story,” objective truth, is what the Spirit uses. Maybe this demonstrates how I believe we can eclectically benefit from the church growth movement without buying into the whole package.

The importance of the local church to church growth methodology has already been introduced. Christianity apart from church is no more valid to their thinking than to ours. Church growth takes pains to define “church,” with greater emphasis (exclusive emphasis) on the “Body of Christ” analogy of Scripture. “It is a living organism” in Kent Hunter’s words. Few church growth authors would distinguish the Holy Christian Church from visible representations in the frequent references to Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. But that’s all part of organizing a “theology” around the Great Commission rather than objective justification, around pragmatism instead of grace. Nonetheless, the emphasis deserves our attention because we may have failed to give sufficient weight to the universal priesthood of believers and its practical application to lay ministry.

Lay ministry is a central emphasis of church growth thought. At the same time, strong pastoral leadership is also. There is real merit in the church growth assessment that an unbiblical model of ministry has made lay people ill-informed boards of approval/disapproval instead of “ministers,” and pastors into non-leading church workers. Some may cringe to hear Lyle Schaller discuss the necessity of a pastor becoming a “rancher” instead of a “shepherd” as the church and its staff grow; but in context the terminology should be little more offensive than the title “bishop” may be in our circles. “Equipping the saints” will be emphasized over “feeding” them in most church growth literature, but the imbalance can be understood in the light of the “correctional” over-emphasis that may be found in any movement. Remember, we’re being eclectic; and church growth consultants will even endorse theological eclecticism within limits. Wagner, in *Leading Your Church to Growth*, summarizes the issue by saying that as the pastor becomes more leader and lay people become more ministers, the church grows. Nearly all church growth proponents will point to Jesus as the model, investing His ministry in 12 disciples and their training.

Of course you would expect some specifics from the church growth movement. McGavran’s “Five Classes of Workers” is the answer to your expectation. (Win Arn adds a sixth to find a place for himself and other consultants in the model.) Class one workers are volunteers in maintenance ministry, nurture, support and internal growth. Class two workers are engaged in community outreach, again as volunteers. Class three workers are part-time professionals, such as bi-vocational ministers, organists, etc. Class four are full-time (called) ministers and lay workers. Class five is where denominational leaders, professors and assorted “bureaucrats” (sorry) fit. Research concludes that healthy church growth occurs when 40% of the membership is actively involved in class one work, 20% in class two, and no more than 36% passively observing the church at work. A rough estimate of average congregations, based on consulting graphs, is that 1/3 are actively involved, 1/3 worship but little else, and 1/3 need evangelizing. Oh yes, since you wanted to know, the church growth ratio of full-time staff members in ministry (not including secretaries) to the number of people in worship (not membership) is 1:150. Or is it 1:200? That depends on whom you read. Church growth isn’t entirely science yet. On one subject there is no disagreement among church growth authors—specialized ministries, not co-pastorates, is the way to go, grow. All of this tells us what we may have already suspected. WELS churches have too little lay ministry and too few class two workers (see how easy this is!); they’re understaffed and undiversified. What to do about it can be answered by a “two year growth process” (30 months by the latest calculations of the Institute for American Church Growth), which means bringing in a consultant usually. Save that for later in this paper. Read Lyle Schaller’s *Activating the Passive Church* if you aren’t ready to invest the dollars or risk some conflict.

Every church growth expert will insist that identifying spiritual gifts is an essential part of effective lay ministry. There are several books available, but most will refer to a version of a “spiritual gifts inventory” (very similar to a vocational interest inventory) and the 5-E process (Explore, Experiment, Evaluate, Examine, Expect) of discovery. Art Beyer is a full-time “spiritual gifts minister” at St. Paul’s Lutheran (LC-MS) in Trenton, Michigan. There is considerable diversity, not only of gifts (I Corinthians 12), but in determining how many gifts the Bible mentions. The range is from 19 to 27, I believe. Some add gifts not mentioned in Scripture but evident in the church and meeting needs. This is an obviously controversial subject, especially when the focus turns to such items as prophecy, tongues, interpretation, and healing. I have not found a charismatic emphasis in the literature I’ve read or seminars I’ve attended, though there is an openness to charismatic gifts among most church growth authors. On the whole the treatment is what I’d call “nervously balanced,” with Art Beyer’s “We don’t deny them; we just don’t see any application for them” a better-than-average example. In accord with church growth pragmatism, it is the application of gifts that is important; and assuring that the congregation has tasks or roles in which all available gifts can be used is essential. I might add that the church growth ratio of tasks and roles to membership is 60:100. That figure is critical to church growth principles of assimilation.

“Discipleship” is an oft-used word in any church growth literature. One dimension of its meaning is “commitment.” “Growing churches have high expectations of their members.” “You get what you require.”

Here evangelicalism gets stretched a bit; and law and gospel tend to be confused more than a bit. On the other hand, stewardship education and the legitimate first and third use of the law have been frequently slighted in our midst. The dimensions of discipleship, the privilege, excitement and challenge of our mission have been too little elaborated, with passive church membership as a result. I offer as example, not unqualified recommendation, the printed “expectations of members” in the fastest growing Lutheran church in America: 1. regular worship; 2. regular communion attendance; 3. service to the church, using spiritual gifts; 4. participation in cell or congregation Bible study; 5. tithing or striving toward a tithe or more; 6. participation in a fellowship group.

Structuring a congregation for church growth involves a number of principles that are nearly unanimous in the movement. To say that the church “must not have a terminal illness” will require some explanation later. For now, accept it as an axiom. “God grows people to grow His church” is more easily understood, even if critical assessment must ask for a statement about the means of grace. C. Peter Wagner in *Your Church Can Grow* lists the seven vital signs of a healthy church: 1. The pastor must want his church to grow and be willing to pay the price. 2. The people of the church must want the church to grow and be willing to pay the price (change, time, money). 3. The church must be large enough to provide the ministry needed by the community (facility, program, resources). 4. The church must be reaching one kind of people through E-0 and E-1 evangelism. 5. The church must have an evangelism program that works. 6. The church must have the right biblical priorities—to be and make disciples. 7. The church must have the proper structure to meet people’s needs (adequate fellowship groups). To these may be added such axioms as: The church must have a well articulated philosophy of ministry. The church must have a clear sense of vision. The church must have the long-term pastorate of a senior minister. The church must be open to new people, flexible and loving. In growing churches research suggests that one out of every four visitors who can come back will join. There should be seven “face-to-face” groups for every 100 members and one out of every five should have been created in the last two years. One of every five board members should have joined the church in the past two years.

Now these and other axioms of research are instructive, especially if we are willing to analyze our philosophy and structure of ministry. But one thing that especially the Institute for American Church growth has trouble recognizing is that such research cannot distinguish the CAUSE of growth from ATTENDANT CIRCUMSTANCE. A host of spiritual errors can result. For that reason especially I appreciate the distinction Kent Hunter offers Lutherans, however zealous he may become in certifying growth barriers with a computer. Restructuring for growth can occur without compromising Scripture.

David Womak’s “Pyramid Principle for Church Growth” is a simplified diagram of good common sense. Womak states that the base of a congregation’s ministry (personnel, program, activities, money, space) must be expanded to support the mass of growth. This simple axiom may be one we overlook. Church growth proponents often quote the “80% rule,” which says that when you’re 80% full (seating capacity, parking, etc.), you’re full. You won’t grow. Going from one service to two (or more) is an essential ingredient of a growing church, especially if the second service offers a format different enough to attract a different audience. So say the researchers.

When church growth people talk about the structure of the church, they inevitably refer to the three-tiered model of C. Peter Wagner: Celebration, Congregation and Cell. CELEBRATION is the word used to describe worship because it conveys a mood or atmosphere of uplifting excitement and encouragement. The focus is both worship, telling God what He’s worth to us, and identity—“seeing” the church at its best. Let me digress here to point out that positive self-image is one of the critical components of growth. The church growth perspective on worship is that people want help and healing, therefore the emphasis should be on grace rather than sin. One suspects that soft-pedaling the law in its primary use is a concession to pragmatism, especially since Robert Schuller is so frequently and fondly lionized. An equal suspicion is that grace can easily be turned into temporal promises of religious optimism. Understood rightly, there is a truth we should take to heart in the encouragement to emphasize God’s saving grace and loving promises. Up-beat music and clear, easy-to-follow

orders of service are hallmarks of celebration because they encourage participation. “Relevant” sermons are a *sine qua non*; and there is no reason to jump at the word “relevant.” It’s not meant to challenge the place of Scripture, only the boring sermons which every survey among the unchurched lists at the top of its criticisms of the church. Of course, faithfulness to Scripture *can* be sacrificed on the altar of relevancy. No doubt many church growth disciples wouldn’t notice.

Because corporate worship is so critical to growth, everything associated with it is scrutinized. For example, parking should be within 200 feet of the entrance and the places closest to the door should be reserved for visitors. Assume 2.4 worshipers or less per car in analyzing your capacity. Let members park down the street. Make sure your signs are attractive and visible and that once inside the church, a visitor can see signs directing him to sanctuary, cloak room, rest rooms and nursery. Yes, nursery—polls among the unchurched consistently rank a large, attractive and well-staffed nursery as a top priority. Greeters are a must, carefully chosen and trained. Their role is to establish the tone of friendliness, assure that no discomfort (e.g. not knowing where to go, what to do) will mar the experience of worship for the visitor, and introduce the guest to another member. Many growing churches have name tags for everyone, members and guests. In fact, a “permanent” name tag is created for every guest who may return, henceforth treated as a “friend” of the congregation. Passing an “attendance sheet” down each pew and back has a number of virtues, not the least of which is letting people know the names of those who share their pew without embarrassment. Knowing there’s a visitor in your pew is the first step to making him welcome. Do not identify visitors from the chancel or—terror of terrors—ask him to say something. And understand that the condition and cleanliness of your church speaks volumes. Even the lighting should bespeak “bright” worship. Pretty practical stuff!

Before we leave the subject of worship visitors, there is another practical tidbit of research. Optimum follow-up is to phone the visitor within 48 hours, send a letter Monday morning, and pay a visit before Friday. The statistics on visitors becoming members decline drastically when no follow-up occurs within a week. As you’ve discovered, no element of church growth strategy goes unresearched. Oh yes, you can’t follow up without a name and address, so post-worship warmth, introductions (the pastor must introduce the visitor to a member whose situation or address is similar at the door, if possible) and coffee hour are important.

By CONGREGATION is meant a fellowship group 40-120 people (the maximum number of first names a person can remember). A church of 200 members is in the awkward stage of growing out of a single “congregation,” but without the resources and program to meet needs with its “congregation” structure. The primary purpose of “congregation” is fellowship. Such a group may be task (e.g. choir) oriented or Bible study focused, but the emphasis is on fellowship. Frequently, “congregation” gathers people of similar age, need or interest. As the church grows and needs surface, more such fellowship groups must be created. Some groups must die as their significance wanes. Unless fellowship groups are open to newcomers, growth will wane. Music and food are the classic rallying points for ad hoc gatherings of “congregation.”

CELL groups are 8 to 12 people who meet regularly and are committed to each other. Their primary purpose is “accountability and intimacy”—the level at which peer counseling and the early detection of “inactivity” occur. Bible study and prayer are the staples of cell group structure. Cell structuring requires a high level of commitment on the part of pastor and congregation, together with administration. Books on the subject help, but the process of developing positive cell structure is painstaking and resistance to change should be expected. No church growth consultant will tell you that structuring for growth is easy.

In fact, they’ll all tell you that conflict is an unavoidable stage in the process...constructive conflict, of course. Illustrations make the rounds among church growth experts, so expect to hear that the only ship which makes waves is going forward. I expect there will be warnings about the danger of pietistic conventicles and schismatic disruption if cell groups are established, as well as fears of falsehood if the pastor isn’t present. I believe these dangers can be overcome, and in the process we will meet some very real needs (not just dangers) and problems that exist in the church.

Not the least of these is called “back door losses” by church growth. To quote the statistics once more, within seven years 40% of the people brought into the church are lost. Church growth’s answer is scientific

research into “assimilation” or “incorporation” of members. Everything from the method of evangelism used (OIKOS evangelism eases assimilation) to the number of friends in the church a new member has after six months (at least seven) fit into the equation. Analyzing the spiritual, psychological and sociological challenges to assimilation, especially by research among the drop-outs produces a number of conclusions. One of these is that if we can reach the inactive member within six weeks of his conscious or unconscious decision to disengage, the likelihood of reclaiming the person is quite high. Long-term inactivity means many visits and low returns. Incidentally, one virtue of church growth research may be that it teaches the church to listen, listen to delinquents and listen to unchurched prospects. Lest this become an entire paper on assimilation, let me focus the three critical components of incorporating a new member: involvement in Bible study, involvement in a fellowship group; involvement in a service task or role. Read Lyle Schaller’s *Assimilating New Members* for more.

“Pathology” is the church growth term for diagnostic evaluation of a church. Every church growth center and consultant has a process and instruments for the task. Questionnaires addressing the congregation for “spiritual health” and mission awareness and surveys addressing the community for demographics and felt needs are basic components. Statistical evaluation of membership, attendance at worship and Bible study, growth and losses, giving and anything else that can be reduced to numbers produces charts and graphs. “Faith cannot be measured. Fruits of faith can,” is the disclaimer. Take it at face value. There is no reason to run from numbers when the objective is building, not criticism. Church growth is interested especially in “composite membership” (church membership + average Sunday School and Bible class attendance + average Sunday worship attendance, divided by three) and decadal growth percentages. Waldo Werning’s *Vision and Strategy for Church Growth* offers sample questionnaires for self-study. Kent Hunter’s *Facing the Facts for Church Growth* explains the mysteries of statistical charting.

An irresistible urge of church growth people is to create a list of “barriers to church growth.” I’ll cull a few from a variety of sources to demonstrate. 1. Ignorance about the unchurched and why they don’t come. (Everyone should read J. Russel Hale’s *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*. Countless polls corroborate most of the conclusions.) 2. Insensitivity to people’s needs: felt needs and physical handicaps. 3. Lack of planning; no goals; resulting “survival” mentality. (Read Lyle Schaller’s *Growing Plans*.) 4. Poor corporate psyche...low morale in the church. 5. Pastors who fail to spend time shaping a vision for the church, who fail to delegate, who misplace priorities and lack both optimism and trust in God. 6. Churches unwilling to sacrifice customs, habits, and traditions which don’t communicate to the unchurched. 7. Selling programs instead of needs. 8. Discouraging diversity amid unity. 9. Focusing on the past...the “good old days.” 10. Sloppy administration. 11. The seven last words of the church: “We never did it that way before.” 12. Frequent changes in the pastorate. 13. Pitting quality against quantity. 14. Unfriendliness to visitors. 15. Inadequate staff and inadequate budget for outreach (including a whole range of “advertising” possibilities that would be the subject for another paper).

“Pathology” is specifically the study of disease. Church growth people have identified eight such “diseases” of the church. (cf. Wagner’s *Your Church Can Be Healthy*) Two of the diseases are considered terminal: “Ethnikitis” and “Old Age.” By “Ethnikitis” is meant an urban church in a changing neighborhood which refuses to adapt to the culture of its new neighbors and becomes an “island of one kind of people in a sea of another kind.” “Old Age” refers not to a church of older members, but to a rural or small town church that is running out of people (members and prospects alike). The remaining six diseases can be diagnosed and treated. They are: 3. “People-blindness,” unawareness of the “people groups” around the church. 4. “Hyper-cooperativism” or ecumenical energy-drain. (You should read Dean Kelly’s *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*.) 5. “Koinonitis,” the “holy huddle” that has church members loving each other but ignoring “outsiders.” 6. “Sociological Strangulation,” facilities and program too small to permit growth. 7. “Arrested Spiritual Development,” or “We quit growing after confirmation.” 8. “St. John’s Syndrome,” second generation Christians who’ve lost the zeal of being a church in mission.

Now I find this pathology interesting and valuable, but a trifle too simplistic and unscientific to support the analysis with medicine. And while I do not doubt the value of a “third party” consultant, I’m not ready to let my fingers do the walking through the yellow pages of church growth to find a doctor. Spiritual health and medical health have fascinating similarities, but quite dissimilar sources of knowledge.

The process (remember, “church growth” is a process, not a program) of church growth is where the rubber meets the road (or the data finds a road). Let me first share the perspective and insights of Kent Hunter. Hunter says that “ignorance can be corrected by information, but people have to want to learn.” Passivity (apathy) is the real hurdle to overcome. It takes time, perhaps a five-year initial plan to get to a “growth model” in a declining church. Some people will never “catch the vision,” but if 40% of the congregation does and is willing to be equipped for growth ministry, the possibility of significant growth is good. The first step is to raise the level of discontent and learn how to manage the conflict constructively. People have to become uncomfortable with a “no grow” status quo and a philosophy of ministry out of step with the biblical description of the church and its mission. The next step is self-study: a combination of Bible study, statistical analysis and vision-lifting. Step three is to “celebrate victories, capitalize on positives.” Hunter talks about the “Pygmalion Effect” of positive reinforcement on the congregation’s self-image. Like any good Lutheran, he emphasizes that only the gospel motivates; and he openly parts company with his “church growth brothers” on this point. Step four is goal-setting and strategy-formulating. Hunter speaks of this as a spiritual exercise, seeking God’s will for the congregation and asking His help to remove barriers. The congregation must “own” the goals. The strategy must be based on facts.

Kent Hunter seems willing to acknowledge that church growth can be a do-it-yourself project, though he is a consultant. Win Arn’s Institute for American Church Growth seems a bit more mercenary. Then again, they have to pay for the resources they produce. And they produce the best resources, expensive resources. “Love in Action” is a 30-month process the Institute will conduct for \$3000 per congregation in groups of ten congregations. Each of four phases includes at least one seminar conducted by their consultants and the materials and assistance to structure congregational task forces. The first phase is diagnostic. Phase two focuses on relational evangelism, using “The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples” and concluding with a “Celebration of Friendship” event, which uses a program by that name to bring unchurched friends to church. Phase three focuses on assimilation, utilizing a program entitled. “The Shepherd’s Guide for Caring and Keeping” and concluding with a “Welcome Home Day” for the reclaimed. Phase four is “Mobilizing the Laity for Ministry” with another kit so named and a “Lay Ministry Festival” to cap it off. The materials are all slickly published, with film, videotape and overhead transparencies.

Maybe you’d prefer becoming a “Church Growth Associate” of the Institute. The Institute assures you that its consultants will help you adapt church growth principles to your theology, but you might prefer to do it yourself and become a consultant to your own denomination. Through five modules over a period of roughly 18 months, the Institute will train you in the use of their seven basic seminars. (Beyond those mentioned earlier are a basic church growth seminar and the program “Let the Church Grow,” a “Who Cares About Love” seminar and program that’s hot-off-the-press, a Sunday School seminar and kit, a planning seminar using the “Opportunity Check Up,” and a “Church Planting” seminar. The tuition runs about \$1800. Leasing the A-V resources is another \$2500. And \$11.50 royalty for each participant at each seminar (half the cost per participant) must be submitted to the Institute. Growing doesn’t come cheap. But it’s not money which keeps me from signing up. Though not said clearly, the message I received was that a Church Growth Associate is expected to “parrot” his instructors and use the seminar programs as they are. A lot of churches are doing so.

What about us? What are the options? We can ignore church growth on one end of the spectrum and jump in, presumably with Win Arn’s Institute, on the other end. I wouldn’t recommend either extreme. We can develop our own church growth center and resources; but that’s not feasible, at least not at this point anyway. We can eclectically use the principles and buy or rent the resources which can be “sanitized,” at least with disclaimers where necessary. That is already being done. There would be real merit in having at least one “expert” who could offer recommendations based on sound Lutheran theology to congregations interested in

church growth. The effort would be nearly full-time. We can turn to Kent Hunter's Church Growth Analysis and Learning Center for Lutheran church growth consulting, an option not unlike Donald Abdon's Parish Leadership Seminars. We may even be able to arrange WELS church growth consulting by WELS consultants utilizing the diagnostic center Hunter operates in Corunna, Indiana and many of his resources. It's time for you to respond to the question. What about us?

At the very least we should be challenged by the church growth movement to reassess our commitment to the mission of the church and rethink our strategies in carrying out that mission. Self-appraisal is healthy. No doubt, that's why I was asked to include an evaluation of "An Instrument for Congregational Self-Study" produced by and for our synod.

"An Instrument For Congregational Self-Study" Analyzed

Having drafted the convention resolution which urged the creation of this self-study document, I have a special interest in its use. Therefore, my analysis does not come from a totally neutral perspective. Self-study has become a way of life for synodical schools, and in that experience is rooted the conviction of its value. However, self-study by itself can produce little more than performance data and a sharpened sense of mission or purpose. If it does that, it has done well. The will to plan and act following self-study is necessary to realize more effective ministry. The committee which produced this self-study had no "hidden agenda." Its introduction identifies several objectives: 1) increased awareness of the responsibilities of called ministers; 2) increased awareness of the call to, the need for, and the potential in lay ministry; 3) sensitivity to the possible need to call additional staff persons for effective ministry; 4) sensitivity to the need for evaluating a church's program in the light of its mission and objectives and, if necessary, realigning program. There are also appropriate disclaimers in the introduction to answer misplaced expectations or misuse.

Several messages of the introduction deserve emphasis. The need for comprehensive and continuous self-study is critical if a congregation is to seriously shape efficient ministry. Others might say that S-M-A-R-T goals are critical because they can be evaluated. Further, self-study should address not only the past, but the future. What long-range vision, what mid-range goals, what drawing-board strategies exist in the congregation's planning process? The third emphasis I want to draw from the introduction leads to my major criticism of the document. The committee says that "a self-study should involve the greatest possible number of persons." Yet, in the GENERAL DIRECTIONS section and throughout, there are no suggestions for involving more than small committees in the evaluation. While such committees are the appropriate vehicle for gathering objective data, they are too small a representation of the congregation to adequately assess the subjective dimensions of program effectiveness. People's perception of the church and its ministry may be flawed, but it should be known. I would recommend questionnaire, interview or telephone survey methods of sampling the membership for opinions in each of the eight categories under study. I would further recommend "scaled" responses (e.g. 1 to 5) to some subjective questions. And I would recommend random sampling of at least 25% of the congregation to draw a composite picture of people's perceptions. There might also be some value in allowing members to offer specific suggestions in the IMPROVEMENT section of the eight chapters.

Each chapter is outlined into PURPOSE STATEMENT, DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY, ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION and BEYOND THE SELF-STUDY. The outline, the categories and their consistent use are commendable. Flexible use of the material offered within each category will mean that irrelevant questions are ignored and missing areas of investigation can be added. The Purpose and Policy questions in each chapter will make for difficult answers in congregations where these don't exist. To draft and redraw such statements will be a healthy exercise in direction-setting. It isn't just church growth consultants who should be asking: "What business are you in, and what is the scope of your business?" There will be other questions difficult to answer. The congregation seriously intent on honest evaluation not finger-pointing, and improvement in its capability of ministering, not self-congratulation, will find the tough questions the most valuable.

Before offering some constructive criticism of the instrument (to justify the expenditure of my time and yours on this subject), let me heartily endorse the document as an example of committee work at its best and recommend its use. I do not intend to isolate features of the self-study for praise. Please understand that silence is commendation. My thanks are added to, I hope, a growing appreciation across the synod for the work and the product of the committee.

The first booklet is basic to subsequent foci of study. It gathers nearly all the statistical data a congregation should have to understand itself. Remember that numbers represent people. Number profiles describe areas of (potential) ministry. Some numbers suggest fruits of faith. Numerical progressions alert us to both thanking God and seeking His help. In the broad section entitled "Human Resources," I miss any reference to "transfers out" or "losses to excommunication or voluntary removal." These are valuable statistics if we are to be aware of "back-door" losses and do something about it. Of course, our synod's statistical report ignores the same items. One might even conclude that membership statistics in many of our congregations do not reflect meaningful reality. Within the category of "Membership in Various Groups" one recognizes a reflection of WELS character. There are many and carefully delineated categories for homogeneously grouped children's ministry but few such categories for ministry to adults. The self-study assumes (probably correctly) that our churches have a limited number of opportunities for fellowship and Bible study targeted to adults and their diversity. I must contradict myself here and offer special praise for the committee's inclusion of a column for "non-members enrolled" (I'd add "or attending"). There are a few items I would like to see charted in this chapter beyond what is called for. "Length of membership" computed at 1 year, 2 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years, 10-20 years, and 20+ would profile the congregation's character in a uniquely valuable way. Charting ethnic background and vocational categories would be another significant profile. There is no place to record important annual activities of the congregation and their attendance (e.g. "new member dinner" church picnic, mother-daughter banquet). My biggest criticism is that there is no attention anywhere to a "community profile." Demographics on the community in which the church ministers are generally available. Comparison with the congregation's profile would be instructive. We minister *to* a community, not merely within a community. In the second of the two data-gathering sections, "Physical Resources," I would add a horizontal line entitled "Percentage of capacity in use" to better assess our facilities and needs. I would also add a question regarding "ease of access" which would include traffic flow, clear directional signs and consideration of the elderly and the handicapped. Because a "narthex" is important to the social temperature of the congregation and the impression made on visitors, there should be a line or question of evaluation on its condition, size and adequacy. The same attention should be given to office and meeting rooms.

Subjective evaluation of the eight areas of self-study focus will reflect my earlier encouragement to gather members' perceptions primarily. I am not competent to address many of the subjects with real expertise. And you don't need a critique longer than the document evaluated. The narrowed focus of my present ministry will no doubt be reflected in what follows. I beg your indulgence.

Perhaps it is the nature of self-studies to make ministry sound mundane. That was my first impression in analyzing the chapter on WORSHIP. Several of the specific questions seemed almost irrelevant to so soaring and vital a topic. I don't believe we will improve worship by dancing around the tough questions and gathering tidbits of trivia. This is easily the most difficult area for self-study and, for that reason, I wouldn't recommend beginning here even if the chapter is placed right after basic data-gathering. I want to know the MOOD our worship conveys, the degree of participation by those in attendance (active to passive), the perception of members about the sermon's application to their lives and spirits (and the percentage of law and gospel in sermons), the response of members to the liturgical practice and hymn selection in services, the quality of the choir and organ (not how often the choir sings or how many ranks the organ has). These are subjective questions, but I see very little useful in the answers that would be gleaned from the self-study as it is. There are some less subjective questions that should also be added. How effectively is the order of service communicated? How does the worship setting or facility contribute to (or detract from) worship? What percentage of capacity does the average Sunday attendance represent? Does the choir and its selection of music

represent the diversity of the congregation (more objectively, how long have choir members been members and how are new members or additional musical groups recruited)? I've only suggested some direction. This is a chapter I would urge each congregation to tailor to its situation, sensitivity and—more important—its purpose for evaluating.

By contrast, the chapter on EDUCATION is excellent. Its breadth and depth are to be appreciated. (Perhaps the WELS is “better” at education than worship; or less sensitive in this area of self-analysis. Our focus in worship may even BE education.) The section on “Family Life Education” is forward-thinking, an example of how the right instrument can suggest planning rather than merely review history. There are a few questions I would add. What provisions are made for fellowship to grow through these agencies of education? What teaching style is employed (do people learn actively or passively, deductively or inductively)? Are goals affective as well as cognitive? How is education related to service, stewardship, witness? Are Bible study opportunities available which are appropriate to differing levels of spiritual maturity, different needs or interests? Is there an attempt to sequence Bible study for youth and adults (a curriculum)? What specific objectives does each Bible class have?

The chapter entitled VISITATION is an appropriate grouping for self-study and well written. Under “General” I would add the question: How are appropriate people informed of special visitation needs? The suggestion of lay involvement across the board is to be complimented. Under “Delinquent Visitation” ask: What system is employed for early identification of inactivity? What have been determined to be the primary reasons for inactivity and how has such information been used to “close the back door?”

COUNSELING is another excellent chapter. Under “Assessment/Evaluation” I would add the following: Is there a system for “early detection” of counseling problems (e.g. through a peer counseling or cell structure)? How long have people, typically, contended with their problem before coming to the pastor? What are the “barriers” or reasons that keep members from coming to the pastor (and how can these be removed)? What percentage of counseling is done with people outside the congregation’s membership? Is our counseling ministry an attraction to the unchurched. Obviously, this is a sensitive and somewhat subjective subject for self-study. The committee’s opening suggestions reflect their understanding of the fact and offer a sensitive approach to conducting the study. This is a subject which must be appraised and of which the congregation must be appraised.

I approached the chapter on EVANGELISM far more knowledgeably and critically than the other chapters (at least I hope so). And I came away pleased with the work. There was a distinct over-emphasis on canvassing as THE means of locating prospects and some lack of attention to the use of media in establishing the church’s identity in the community and attracting prospects. What I missed most were references to any strategy for making members aware of the church’s mission to the community and their opportunities as well as a program for equipping all members for relational or “friendship” evangelism. Under the heading “General” I would add: What number of new residents move into the community annually (and later—what program of outreach to new residents exists)? How does evangelism fit into the congregational structure and communicate the involvement of the rest of the church in its mission? What percentage of the congregation’s budget is allocated to community outreach? There is an excellent statement in the section “Beyond the Self-Study” about community analysis, but a more appropriate place for the subject would be in the “Description of the Activity” section. Examining community and its felt needs is an ongoing process, especially if there is a serious intent to identify specific “people groups” the congregation is especially equipped to attract. Other subjects which should be addressed in this chapter include: strategy for welcome, follow-up and nurture of visitors to worship, weddings, etc.; method of maintaining and utilizing a “responsibility file” (as well as a statistical report of the number of “prospects” in that file—from year-to-year!); do members invite their friends to church and why/why not; are the organizations of the church open to non-members and new members, plus why/why not. Well, as I mentioned, I approached this chapter hyper-critically.

The chapter on STEWARDSHIP attempts a balance of time/talent/treasure; but frankly, giving lends itself easiest to data-gathering, and that subject occupies the most space. I wish the self-study would have

broken with traditional break-downs of congregational budgeting so that “home purposes” would separate “maintenance” or “nurturing” ministry from “outreach ministry.” I presume “missions” retains its traditional meaning in our circles of synodical mission work. Under “Administration” there should be a question such as: Who is responsible for developing a list of member talents and gifts and a corresponding inventory of congregational needs, tasks and roles? There could also be a question concerning how the congregation assists its members to identify and develop spiritual gifts. I especially appreciated a question addressed to the involvement of youth and retirees in the work of the congregation.

The unit on ADMINISTRATION reflects the increasing attention this subject has received. It is thorough. It will probably prove to be a difficult chapter to complete. Minor improvements in the “Description of Activity” section would be to add length of membership to the “balance” question, number nine, and to add two additional questions: How are the congregation’s (and the synod’s) ministry, programs, plans, needs, successes, etc. communicated to the membership? What access to administrative units do individual members have in communicating needs and ideas? On the duplicable sheet for all boards and committees I would ask the question: How are the results/plans/recommendations communicated for approval, implementation or information?

The final chapter, ORGANIZATIONS, impressed me with its extensive list of possibilities, a shift from the data-base unit earlier. Like the chapters on education and administration, it provides a check-list for use by every organization. It is a thorough treatment of the subject. My only addition would be: How is it determined that new organizations must be created? And what is the process (permission/approval) for creating new organizations?

However exhausting, this has not been an exhaustive evaluation of the self-study. That, together with revisions, will occur when a number of congregations have completed the cycle of self-study and contributed the wisdom of experience. Self-study (like church growth) is a process, not a program or event. For that reason the greatest value in self-study lies in the process, not an instrument. This instrument is more than adequate for the process. As the committee does, I caution against scheduling the process into a compressed time span. However, if this is a congregation’s initial effort at self-study, dragging the process over years will lose all correlation. Once the initial self-study is completed, individual components can be (and should be) cycled in 6-year intervals (the figure is arguable) and staggered. The basic data of the first, booklet must be recorded annually, however unofficially. It would be my recommendation that a congregation complete the “Congregational Data” I unit and chapter eight, “Administration,” in one year and the other units of self-study during the following year.