

"COME AND SEE"

Church History--Prof. Brenner  
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February 14, 1994

*Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

*"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.*

***Come and See,"** said Philip.*

*John 1:44-46*

Since our Lord's Great Commission, evangelism has been at the center of the Church's work. To bring the Gospel to all those who do not yet know their Savior Jesus Christ is a top priority within our Wisconsin Synod. Following the example of the Apostle Paul who wrote that "by all possible means" he attempted to bring people the Gospel (I Cor.9:22), our Church has looked into different ways to share this Good News. We send out mass mailings, walk door to door, have special "Friendship Sunday's", and use many other methods to encourage the unchurched to come to our worship services and hear our God's Holy Word. Local congregations within the WELS are looking for new approaches to evangelism, in an attempt to bring more and more

people into the family of believers. An evangelism tool which has come to our Synod is know as the "Come and See" service, or "Seeker" service. During my Seminary days, I have heard my classmates, fellow Seminarians, Professors and other Pastors make comments about such an approach to evangelism. When asked if they had visited such a service, the general response was, "No. But I have heard a lot about it."

There are many who feel we shouldn't be using such an evangelism tool in our Synod. My purpose in reporting on the "Seeker" service is not an attempt to answer the criticism of such a service. Rather, my purpose simply is to inform. Through this paper and the video included with it, it is my intention to offer the opportunity to witness first hand how one congregation in the WELS makes use of a "Seeker" service. I will allow the individual reader/viewer to come to his/her own conclusions about such a service. For this reason, one should not read this paper, without also viewing the tape. Please take note of the fact that two different services are included on the tape. The first is from December 5, 1993; the second is from January 9, 1994.

Why would a congregation in the WELS decide to use such an evangelism tool? What is involved in planning and conducting such a service? What attempts are there to keep contact with the visitor? These are just a few of the questions I asked Pastor Allen Zahn in an interview on January 8, 1994. Pastor Zahn is the Pastor at Divine Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church,

in Indianapolis, Indiana. Divine Savior conducts a "Seeker" service once a month, on the first Sunday of every month. The service takes place at 11:00 A.M., in place of the regular liturgical service. (A liturgical service is conducted on this Sunday in the 8:00 A.M. service.)

Divine Savior has been conducting "Seeker" services since the early summer of 1991. When I asked Pastor Zahn why they began to use such a service, he pointed to the success they were blessed with at worship services held in a local park following their two weeks of Vacation Bible School during the summer. It is from the success of these services which led to the use of a "Seeker" service. The Lord has blessed Divine Savior with a group of Christians who not only have great singing and speaking abilities, but they also have a deep love for their Savior and the unchurched. With the talent available, this congregation "looked for a **new** way to do evangelism work," according to Pastor Zahn.

The reader should take note at this point that in the opinion of Pastor Zahn the "Seeker" service is very much an evangelism tool. However, it is not the **only** tool used by Divine Savior to reach out to the unchurched with the Gospel. It is one of a number of programs, which includes "Friendship" Sunday's, mass mailings, and door to door canvassing. Some think that the "Seeker" service is the only tool used by a congregation to do the work of evangelism. In the case of Divine Savior, that is not factual.

Pastor Zahn points out that "planning such a service is not an easy project." In the case of Divine Savior, Pastor meets

with an organizational committee which plans out the themes for the upcoming months. This committee also plans out the individual services. As he meets with this committee, Pastor Zahn states that "it is the Pastor who is ultimately responsible to make sure that the entire service remains focussed on the basic teachings of the Bible--the Law and the Gospel."

It is my opinion that one is able to get the best idea of how such a "Seeker" service is put together only by sitting down and watching one; thus, the reason for the video tape. When one watches the video, you will notice that there is a sizable group which participates in conducting this service. 15-40 members of Divine Savior are involved in a typical "Seeker" service. Adult choirs, children choirs, quartets and actors in skits and the Pastor all have a part in the service. The basic outline of the service involves several singing groups and/or solos, skits, a presentation from puppets, time to greet one another and sign a welcome pad, and a message from the Pastor (see sample bulletins).

As was stated above, Pastor Zahn expressed his opinion that he thought of the "Seeker" service primarily as an evangelism tool. What efforts are made, then, to keep in contact with those who visit the "Seeker" service? Pastor informed me that Divine Savior has what he called a "Bread of Life" program. A group from the evangelism committee of the congregation makes a visit to the home of the new prospect within 24 hours of the "Seeker" service. Upon greeting the visitor at the door, a loaf of bread is handed out along with a card which reads, "Jesus is

the bread of life." The new prospect also receives a visit from Pastor at some point during the following week.

Having made these contacts, it is hoped that the prospective member will attend one of the Bible Information Classes. Divine Savior makes use of two courses: The first is a very basic review of the doctrines found in the Scriptures called "Bible Seekers Class"; the second is a more detailed study of these doctrines, following our Synod's "Communicating Christ" Bible Information Class. Through these classes the potential new member is encouraged to attend the other (liturgical) worship services offered at Divine Savior. Pastor Zahn states that this may take some time, "The 'Come and See' service is only entry level. As the people who are new to the Church grow in their knowledge of God's Word and in their faith in the Savior, it is certainly our prayer that they would attend worship services on a regular basis so that the Word of God heard there may continue to nurture their faith."

The reaction of the members of Divine Savior to such a service is as mixed as the reaction in our Synod. There are those who are in favor of this form of evangelism and those who are opposed to it. However, the members of Divine Savior **are united** in their to desire to share the Savior's Gospel, and win back souls which are drowning in the sea of unbelief. They have a very deep commitment to reach out with the Gospel to those lost souls. Pastor Zahn makes this point, "Those who prefer the liturgical service have not stood in the way of the 'Come and See' service." Regardless of whether or not they personally agree with having such a service, the majority of the members of

Divine Savior are united in their zeal to share the Good News with the unbelieving world around them.

Finally, I would like to share with you this story from the "Come and See" service which I attended on January 9, 1994. A member of Divine Savior, whom I have known since I was in grade school, took me aside to express her opinion about the "Come and See" service. She informed me about her father who is in his seventies and never once stepped into a church. Since the first time she brought him to one of the "Come and See" services, this woman's father has attended the "Come and See" services on a regular basis. The prayer, of course, is that as he hears God's Law and Gospel presented, that the Holy Spirit would kindle in this man the desire to learn more about his Savior and to seek membership in the church. However, the thing which stands out in my mind was the joy this woman expressed; joy that her father, who in past would have nothing to do with religion or the church, was now hearing God's Law and Gospel!

This sums up the purpose of the "Come and See" or "Seeker" service. Our Lord has sent us out into this world with a great mission: to win lost souls by proclaiming His Word. The different ways by which we share the Gospel message are, of course, a matter of adiaphora. The directive we have from our Savior is to bring the Good News to those who do not yet know Him. The example we have from the Apostle Paul is to use "all possible means" to win back lost souls. The "Seeker" service, as long as it remains centered on our Savior, and our Savior alone, *may be* one such means.