

Synodically Encouraged Evangelism

Senior Church History

For Prof. Westerhaus

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NOTE: Most information from this paper was gathered from the synod's "Book(s) of Reports and Memorials" and the synod presidents' "Report(s) to the (#) Districts." Documentation would have been massive and hard to follow. Therefore I offer you an alternate system for this paper. Throughout the paper I have placed the date of the year from which I have received information. I have also placed at the end of my paper a special Bibliography which indicates on what page the report or memorial concerning evangelism begins. In this way if you merely pick up the book which corresponds to the date you may easily find the verification you need. THANK YOU.

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The business of the church is to gain and retain souls for Christ. It is fitting that our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod should make special efforts to encourage, promote, support and motivate evangelism programs. In 1959 the synod specifically began a new effort in that direction. Without a doubt evangelism had been done before that time but in '59 a new era was beginning where wealth, the television, far away jobs and a decline in the spirituality of the United States prompted new efforts to seek the lost.

Our synod did several things through a newly formed committee of the synod, the Commission on Evangelism. This committee spread the word and taught the practice of evangelism in many ways. This paper will explain the broad outline of how the Synod and its districts brought about evangelism programs in most churches of the synod and prepared for the future by educating those training to serve in the ministry.

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1.

The history of synod encouraged evangelism sets itself into

three rather distinct eras. The first era begins in '59 and goes to '73. In this time mainly pastors were becoming aware of evangelism's potential in their congregation. From '73 to '80 the laity of the synod became much more aware and active. From '80 to the present a mature system came into being with the synod mainly serving as a resource and supplier of evangelism material and a coordinator in larger efforts. The districts became the motivators and action team which continues to educate the pastors and laity as well as continue to encourage evangelism awareness.

The history of synod encouraged evangelism in the WELS actually begins in 1957. In that year a conference of pastors from Wisconsin sent a memorial to Synod. It cited a current problem which is not unfamiliar to us in the '90s; a shortage of manpower. The memorial also pointed out that there was an untapped source of manpower, that source was and is the laity of our synod. The memorial resolved that the synod create an evangelism committee to develop programs and materials and to establish and supervise workshops.

The synod adopted this resolution and formed a committee of 7 men. Compared with the present Board of Evangelism this committee was rather small and had the daunting task of establishing a synod wide program with little experience or resource.

These men looked at their task as impossible. In '59 they declared that they would attempt to encourage 100% of the individuals of the synod to participate in an evangelism program. Yet, they went about this task in the correct way, they laid their cares on God and prayed for his guidance and support. In

their first report to synod they had studied the Scriptural principle of evangelism and had put together an evangelism handbook.

At first they concentrated on a program to retain members who moved from place to place. Their name would be sent to the synod representative who would refer that name to the nearest WELS pastor.

For those first few years they hoped to receive some feedback on their "gaining and reclaiming" program. This did come in measured amounts for a few years as awareness of this committee slowly grew, although at times it was lacking.

In '61 the committee began a program of visitations to bring awareness to the pastors. The "vistor" functioned a little bit like today's circuit pastor. He discussed and encouraged an evangelism program with the pastor as well as answering any questions which that individual had. This program was especially aimed at recent graduates who had not seen organized evangelism programs and who would be the future of synodical action. By '64 the committee reported some congregations had experienced "amazing results" from the use of their first programs.

Part of these results may be attributed to the '61 convention which reorganized the committee. It gave the committee a representative from each district along with a chairman and secretary. This move prepared this synod committee for the future. Eventually, instead of putting on workshops and presentations itself, producing materials itself and motivating all by itself it now had the tools to communicate, organize and

coordinate on a wider level and with greater ease.

Real awareness did not really sink in until the '70s when most pastors finally knew about and understood the program. In 1971 at the encouragement of the Committee on Evangelism, the synod convention theme was "We Believe...Therefore We Speak." The members of synod had realized the need for this program. Yet there were hard times, too. From '67 to about '73 the committee submitted several negative reports lamenting the lack of awareness on the congregational level and action on the pastoral level. By '73, however, the committee reported that "evangelism had come of age" in the WELS and in a way it had. These first years convinced many pastors that evangelism should be a part of their ministry.

Although the pastorate had generally been convinced the laity did not have the same information or spirit. The message had not yet reached them. The lack of synodical action proves this fact by showing little interest in promoting this committee, the slow growth of evangelism programs in the churches and the status quo in adult confirmations. The budget for this committee stayed relatively the same considering inflation from '59 - '73.

Adult confirmations remained at about 2,500 per year from 1957 to 1971 while during the same period the baptised membership grew by almost 100,000. There may be several other reasons for this lack of growth; the baby boom which lead to a younger membership, the attitude of the country during the 60's which lead away from the "establishment," the growing workload of counselling for pastors. Yet, certainly, if the laity had caught the evangelism bug there should have been more growth than what

did occur. (see appendix 1)

At this point, however, the committee itself continued to encourage evangelism and the districts began to jump in and help by putting on their own informative, educational and motivational seminars on evangelism. From '73 to '80 the light of awareness increased from a nightlight to a lamp. Synod encouraged evangelism had finished its second era. The committee had successfully involved the districts and informed the laity.

Statistics indicate a renewed effort to reach the lost beginning in 1980. The percentage of adult confirmations to synod totals rose sharply and have remained relatively steady since that time. (see appendix 1) In terms of actual numbers of souls evangelism efforts had brought in about 500 more per year after 1980 than before. Then after 1980 the ratio of adult confirmands to baptised membership remained steady which means that the number of souls continued to grow as the synod grew (see appendix 1).

The synodical committee also continued to encourage the laity, but the synodical committee changed its direction. It began contributing to the future by producing material for the establishment and maintenance of personal and congregational evangelism programs. During this time the committee began to ask for a synodical "full time evangelist" because the work was becoming too much for the chairman and because the committee needed to centralize. The synod did not grant a full time worker until '81 and it did not get one until '83 because of a tight budget.

In 1983 the committee passed a major milestone. It recieved Paul Kelm as its first fulltime chairman. With this new administrator it began to take great strides. The laity in general had become aware of the Savior's calling and the need for evangelism programs and now together with the committee began to produce more dramatic results.

As a matter of history the committee became a board in '85 and was placed under the newly formed Board for Parish Services. It also received a modern tool of outreach, the Mass Media Board, which had been active since '80. By '89 when Paul Kelm took another call, the Board of Evangelism had found its ni~~t~~ch^{as} as a guide and supplier of evangelism rather than the sole encourager. Already from '83 the synod board received less attention than the actions of the district committees.

Almost from the beginning the districts also played a major role in the promotion of personal and congregational evangelism. The newly formed synod committee suggested in '60 that the synod establish "area evangelism programs." The committee was preparing plans and procedures for just such an occurance just by organizing itself. In '61 the synod approved of this suggestion in convention and in the district conventions of '62 District Committees on Evangelism were established.

For the first period from '62 to '73 the district committees helped to inform the pastorate of the this vital ministry. From '73 to '83 they expanded into other areas. During this time they began to publish their own material and put on their own work-shops.

In '84 the districts saw an explosion in the work they were

doing. They had become the "backbone" of evangelism efforts and now that backbone explored new directions. One district carried out an analytical survey of its congregations to determine evangelism needs. Another began teaching its area Lutheran high school kids about evangelism. These committees began to cooperate more and more with the District Mission Boards and to focus more on tracking and consultation of evangelism programs.

Just as the focus and purpose of the Synod program changed so did the district program. From these two areas the head and backbone of synodical evangelism efforts has evolved. This should well serve the fingers and toes of our synod to reach more and more people for Christ.

2.

The synod also encouraged evangelism in other ways. The first of these was workshops.

The first workshops were generally presented by the synod men with some help from the district men. About the year '70 these workshops began to hit their stride. One in the Dakota-Montana District attracted 565 people. In '72 pastors were being trained in the practical aspects of witnessing by learning "Talk About the Savior" (TAS). In '79 Wisconsin Lutheran College presented a well recieved synod wide convocation which tried to "remove misconceptions and practical obstacles that hinder effective implementation of an Evangelism program."

Action on the district level for workshops began to hit its stride in '78. The first "Evangelism Weekends" began and were

presented exclusively by the districts. By '83 all the districts had established and presented their own programs. These workshops now took on more practical aspects. They focused on the motivation and training of the laity. By '88 there were 80 workshops covering 75% of the congregations in the synod.

This focus hit the bullseye since in '87 the synod wide evaluation program (which was begun two years previously by a single district) determined that the laity needed more "commitment and training." By '89 more specialized training was offered by the districts. They began to teach about assimilation of new members. At about this same time the synod had established a cycle of five workshops for the continuing education of evangelism.

The results of all these synodical workshops are quite heartening. The synod committee reported a marked rise in interest and awareness of the laity and clergy alike.

3.

The synod also began other innovations to encourage evangelism. Early on they began to encourage evangelism in the synod schools in order to have a base of support and an understanding of the Biblical principles governing evangelism.

In '72 the evangelism committee sent men to the Seminary to introduce the men there to modern evangelism methods. The men at the Seminary were required to call on two prospects of a local church. This program also was taught at Dr. Martin Luther College beginning in '76. The program received a set back in '77 when there were not enough churches willing to help out with the

field work to give the men some practical experience. After a 7-year hiatus the field work was renewed.

At this point the seminary still kept evangelism as a small part of its practical theology curriculum. It was scheduled to be taught during only one quarter of the final year at the seminary. In that quarter it also shared time with 3 other important subjects which demanded time to be taught; Counseling, Christian Marriage and Stewardship. (Seminary catalogs '72 - '78)

In the '79-'80 school year the seminary afforded evangelism more time. Now evangelism only shared time with the subject of the call into the ministry, an appropriate partner.

In '85 the Seminary called David Valleskey. A major part of his call consisted in teaching evangelism. He brought back the field work as part of evangelism training. By '88 the program had expanded at the Seminary. Prof. Valleskey also taught a middler evangelism course and moved the fieldwork to that year. Now vicars were expected to have evangelism experience. Some vicars were even assigned to home mission congregations to receive a greater taste of evangelism.

Yet, evangelism encouragement went even further than this in the schools. As early as '85 Northwestern College and DMLC began to send out Travel/Canvass/Witness teams to congregations who were running special evangelism efforts. These young men and women took their vacation time to serve throughout much of the synod. In '88 this program lead to the "Summer Evangelism Experience." NWC students spent their summers assisting pastors and congregations in their outreach efforts. In '91 DMLC also

joined this program.

These programs have left their mark on generations of ministers and teachers already in the field. They cannot help but to encourage future evangelism efforts.

4.

From the beginning this committee established other avenues of awareness and permanence. It established and supported several innovative programs. This was evangelism in action.

The first of these was the Soul Conservation program which was briefly discussed earlier. Although this was not new to Christian denominations, the evangelism committee introduced it to the WELS in '63. The committee wanted to keep track of people who moved from one place to another. In this way the WELS could continue to serve these people and perhaps set up mission churches in areas where many were moving.

Throughout the history of this program its success disappointed the committee. In '69 the committee reported that out of a theoretical total of 20,000 moves only 2000 moves were reported. In '76 the Special Ministries Board took over the program and the program continues to serve our members.

The committee also established the Inner City Mission program which ran for 3 years. This program responded to the changing nature of our inner cities.

In the '40's and '50's white people were moving to the suburbs. Blacks and other minorities began to infiltrate areas where the WELS had churches. Because of the prejudice of the times many of those churches folded. In the sixties our "Negro" mission in the south closed down not because of a lack of

Synodical Conference work was transferred to LCM's districts

interest but because now integration was the government prescribed way. Yet this government ruling also helped some of our inner city churches which began to invite and accept an ethnic mix in their midst. Yet there was a big "hole" in Milwaukee from which our churches had fled.

The Inner City mission attempted to reclaim the areas where the WELS no longer was. Young men from the seminary canvassed, witnessed and ministered seeking the lost for Christ. It saw limited success. It sent several blacks to our remaining churches but it did not fill in the "hole."

In a way this program continues. The synod's Multi-Cultural Mission Committee (MC) ² established the Mission to the Economically Deprived ² in 1988. MC has since been disbanded but the program continues to function and grow under the Board for Home Missions.

The committee has also begun other programs which do not have or need the long term support of the synod. For example, in 1989 the committee sponsored a synod-wide "Evangelism Sunday" for Epiphany. It has also produced special evangelism pointed programs for the celebrations of Easter and Christmas.

The committee also has initiated several cutting edge studies. Some of these have examined "back door" losses, rural outreach strategies and the growth pattern of the WELS. These are intended to help specific groups of Christians in planning and implementing evangelism programs.

The committee also continues to be involved in reacquainting experienced pastors in the use of evangelism methods through a

regular summer course at the seminary. This "School of Outreach" began in '87 and continues to the present.

It seems as if with the Lord's blessings this committee will continue to be on the cutting edge of synodical evangelism.

5.

Although the committee is highly involved on the synodical level, it has also strived to be practical on the congregational and personal level. The evidence of this is found in its huge production of resources.

At the creation of the committee Pastor Wilmer Valleskey started to collect, save and sell evangelism materials out of his home. This "bookstore" soon became very full. In 1984 he sold \$13,500 worth of material. The bookstore was even selling materials to other denominations not of our fellowship. Out of necessity and practicality Pastor Valleskey transferred the bookshop to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) in '87.

At first the committee concentrated on doctrinal materials. These explained the Biblical basis for evangelism and the need to encourage the laity. Since the early years doctrinal papers have steadily appeared as a review of God's commands but the papers need no longer fight tooth and nail to establish the biblical basis of the synod's action. Papers have turned more practical in nature. An especially good paper to read is "We Believe ... Therefore We Speak" from the '71 convention. It has been put into booklet form.

The synod has also published other more practical booklets from early on. "Talk about the Savior" (TAS) and "God's Great Exchange" (GGE) teach methods of witnessing to prospects. They

present the way of salvation in a simple memorable way. They include other witnessing tips, illustrations and passages.

TAS involved the use of a flipchart to illustrate the points that the witness made and also aided the witness's memory. GGE expects the witness to have elementary drawing skills and a better memory. In a way this could be considered a step back but with an experienced witness this method did not seem so "canned." It requires a series of simple drawings to illustrate the way of salvation and has the added advantage of leaving something behind for the prospect to review.

Other materials produced by the committee established a continuous stream of encouragement to the laity and the clergy. TELL (The Evangelism Life Line) is directed at the laity. It gives up to date evangelism news, provides tips and new methods to try and presents motivational essays and stories for encouraging the laity. "Gleanings" which is basically identical in purpose aims at the clergy but also keeps the pastor up to date synodically and reviews doctrinal concerns.

The synod through NPH also provides a wide range of tracts. Some offer simple answers to questions about biblical doctrine and practice. Others are more specifically evangelistic. These focus on life issues and the solutions found in God and Christian fellowship. Another innovative tract which has found wide accept-ance is the Prospect Newsletter. Other denominations have ordered, used and are happy with this innovation. The newsletter presents a simple christian message to prospects via the mail. The messages focus on a christian witness of Christ with the

background of such things as the season of the year, holidays and daily life issues.

Most of these resources perhaps seem a little bit old hat and straight forward but the committee has also looked to the future with video technology.

6.

In 1973 the evangelism committee looked into video technology and other types of mass media. As the synod looks to the future this branch of synod work is becoming mature and technologically up to date.

At first the audio visual material was mainly used for promotion of synod programs. In the early years, when VCRs were only a toy of the rich, the material could only be produced on such things as 9mm film or slide^s(projectors). It is certainly impractical to carry a projector and screen to every evangelism call. These materials however did help inform and train the laity in the 70's.

By 1985 technology had advanced. It gave us the RSVP (rear screen video projector). An evangelist could carry the whole system although it was still a little bulky. RSVP carried a basic law/gospel presentation. The format was a slide projector with a timed message.

Evangelists noticed quickly what advantages this system gave. The video presentation presented a precise message of sin and grace, there was no fumbling for words. This was certainly not intended to supplant a one on one human witness but it aided in clarity. Secondly, the video presentation also held the attention of TV trained Americans. Thirdly, fewer distractions

would come up while attention was concentrated on the screen.

The committee became more world and culturally oriented with this technology. RSVP was promptly translated into Spanish, Swedish and Mandarin.

The committee soon replaced this expensive and bulky technology with video cassettes. With the advent of the VCR this technology costed less, presented a more vivid message and was easier to use. By 1991 the committee produced Soul Search, another evangelism tool. Already several denominations have taken interest in this presentation and are buying it for their own use. The committee promptly translated this to spanish and has issued a ethnic edition for use among minorities.

Mass Media however involves more than just evangelism materials. John Barber, a former Hollywood director and head of the Mass Media division, has produced TV commercials and video shorts.

The video shorts, often based on the commercials, can be presented at fairs and in church basements as promotions for individual churches.

The commercials have been played as part of larger mass media campaigns in designated areas. In 1991 during the CHristmas season a series of these commercials ("Precious is the Child") went national. They were shown on all the major networks and several cable networks.

As hinted at before the Mass Media office provides materials, guidance, advice and services for mass media campaigns. These campaigns have contacted many prospects in the

heart of our synod, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan.

In 1991 several major areas organized mass media efforts to coincide with the national commercial, Saginaw, MI; the Twin Cities; Detroit; and Milwaukee. But in 1991 when the commercials went national people from 36 states called the 800 number, some searching for a solid church home (Hartman, 71).

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As a result of ^{the} synod's long term commitment to evangelism, evangelism programs have become a part of congregational life in the WELS. From practically no support of any evangelism programs the synod has reached every congregation of synod in one way or another.

The Board for Evangelism has grown from a small pastor's office to a budget of well over \$200,000 a year. This does not mean that evangelism efforts in a congregation need tons of money to establish an evangelism program. What it does mean is that synod has made a commitment to bring God's Word to all people.

This commitment will continue for years to come. Already this committee has planned for the 2000 in keeping with the synod's "Vision 2000+" goals. (see Appendix 2)

The synod has begun to accomplish its ^{seemingly} impossible purpose, to have every WELS christian witnessing for Christ. Let us pray that the synod continues to motivate us by the love of Christ to witness our faith to the whole world. Let us also pray that this valuable, important tool of our synod is not neglected by our churches but remains to serve God's people and the people of the world till Christ returns.

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APPENDIX #1

	Synod Membership (Baptized)	Adult Confirmands	Adult Confirmands as a Percentage of Membership
1946	288,355	2588	.89%
'48	297,922	2766	.93
'50	307,216	2797	.91
'52	316,839	2354	.74
'53	322,947	2577	.79
'54	328,969	2732	.83
'55	334,975	2622	.78
'56	339,106	2610	.76
'57	342,993	2503	.72
'58	346,790	2736	.79
'59	348,725	2661	.71
'60	352,563	2479	.70
'61	348,184	2611	.75
'62	349,981	2127	.61
'63	354,840	2434	.69
'64	358,466	2506	.70
'65	363,100	2413	.66
'66	367,959	2473	.67
'67	371,048	2502	.67
'68	371,802	2309	.62
'69	376,319	2601	.69
'70	381,321	2740	.71
'71	383,263	2560	.66
'72	386,244	2833	.73
'73	388,411	2826	.72
'74	390,028	2764	.70
'75	396,545	2977	.75
'76	400,201	2972	.74
'77	402,573	2946	.73
'78	403,910	2942	.72
'79	405,512	3081	.75
'80	407,987	3510	.86
'81	411,216	3745	.91
'82	413,503	3584	.86
'83	415,368	3429	.82
'84	416,657	3404	.81
'85	416,624	3647	.87
'86	417,735	3156	.75
'87	419,806	3419	.81
'88	419,750	3496	.83
'89	420,419	3707	.88
'90	421,396	3705	.88

(Worgull, Statistical Report)

COMMISSION ON EVANGELISM
Planning For The 90's

Key Thrust #1

HELP PASTORS AND LAY LEADERS TO HAVE A POSITIVE AND CONFIDENT ATTITUDE AND APPROACH TO THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH, PLACING A DUE EMPHASIS ON OUTREACH TO THE LOST AND STRAYING.

1. Focus on God's (Spirit's) promises. Focus on the joy of ministry. Articles in TELL, DC Newsletter, Conference and circuit presentations, etc.
2. In cooperation with the CC produce a video (initial showing at district conventions in 1992) which focuses on the church's mission with an emphasis on lay ownership and involvement. *"The Promise"*
3. Town hall meetings in 1992-93 to listen to pastors, lay leaders and the "man in the street" to provide direction to our synodical evangelism ministry.
4. Completion of D. Valleskey's, "Theology and Practice of Evangelism."
5. Motivational video and resources in response to the Rural Church Outreach Task Force.
6. A National Evangelism Convocation in 1993, sponsored by the Commission on Evangelism and coordinated under the direction of the Western Wisconsin Commission on Evangelism.
7. The annual Evangelism Sunday emphasis.
8. Lutheran Pastors' Leadership/Communication Seminar
9. Develop an improved communication's system with congregations by having every congregation appoint a Director of Congregational Information.
10. Pastor As Soul Winner - Conference/district presentation. Provide experiential training in evangelism one-on-one or in small groups for pastors, teachers, staff ministers.

Key Thrust #2

PROVIDE DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUAL CONGREGATIONS IN OUTREACH PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION.

1. Using developed resources help individual congregations plan and implement outreach programming through the BPS Parish Assistance Program and the district evangelism committees. Expand and refine the Evangelism Weekend

- concept. Provide training and resources for district committees for parish consulting. Do a new congregational evangelism survey at the end of workshop V to determine the parameters of parish assistance.
2. In liaison with the multi-cultural committee assist congregations in planning and implementing multi-cultural outreach.
 3. In cooperation with M. Cares assist congregational members to witness (give answer to) the cultists at their door. (Mormons, Jws, etc.)
 4. Using developed resources help congregations plan and implement ministry to inactives. (Assimilation and Retention)
 5. Provide resources/workshops for training Christians for personal witness/friendship evangelism. (Friendship Witnessing Workshop, etc.)
 6. School of Outreach: continue to enroll congregations in this basic program. Pilot "limited versions of the School of Outreach in outlying districts. Development of special workshops. (Large, Middle-size, Small, Urban, Rural, etc.)
 7. Summer Evangelism Experience(SEE). Develop into an elective practicum at both NWC and DMLC.
 8. Training Christians for Ministry(TCM). Provide courses for Tracts 6(Evangelism) and 9 (Inactives) as planned.
 9. Tract Committee. Continue to provide needed resources. Implement plans for expanded tract use by congregational members.
 10. Soul Search. Implement a nation-wide marketing strategy. Develop a companion mini-Bible study. Develop a sequel video.
 11. TELL. Continue to produce as an "idea" bulletin for congregations.
 12. Prospect Newsletter Service. Continue to produce.
 13. Develop a new series of newspaper ads.

Key Thrust #3

HELP GROUPS OF CONGREGATIONS PLAN AND IMPLEMENT JOINT MEDIA ASSISTED OUTREACH PROGRAMS.

1. Continue to organize media assisted outreach programs using "Living Free in Jesus" through 1993.

2. Develop a new joint outreach program by 1994-95.
3. Plan and develop additional national outreach efforts as Christmas '91 during this decade. (Evangelism Sunday 1992 has such an emphasis.)
4. Plan and develop, in cooperation of BHM and BWM, a world-wide outreach "program" for 2000/2001.
5. *Lite Talk*
~~"Crossroads"~~. Plan and develop this media assisted (radio) outreach/event.