

THE BENEFITS OF COMPREHENSIVE MINISTRY PLANNING AND ITS CORRELATION
TO CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH

BY

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Abstract

A plethora of literature on the market seeks to instruct leaders on how to take their congregation through a ministry planning process. While these resources are conveniently at our finger tips, the research of this thesis reveals many WELS congregations are not putting together long term ministry plans. The purpose of this thesis is to encourage these congregations to reevaluate their ministry planning approach and use the method of comprehensive ministry planning.

Three distinct sources of information provide the encouragement. First, while God commands us not to worry about what tomorrow will bring, Scripture shows God has called us to place a considerable amount of effort into planning our future work in Christ's Church. Second, the experience of WELS pastors who implement comprehensive ministry planning in their congregations proves there are definite benefits of this practice. And third, a survey of WELS congregations uncovers a correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and congregational health.

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Introduction

The leadership of every organization must emphasize two critical tasks. First, leaders must clearly articulate the direction of the organization and its future work. Second, leaders must maintain the primary operations of the organization. Considering those two tasks, two kinds of organizations develop. The first is an organization where leadership successfully places a concerted focus on each of the two tasks. The second is an organization whose primary operations function well, but its direction going forward is unclear.

Organizations, including churches, have a natural tendency to fall into the latter group. Churches have a tendency to lack direction. In his book, *Parish Planning*, Lyle Schaller makes two generalizations concerning this natural tendency. First, he says every organization tends to evaluate and redefine its purpose in terms of maintenance and survival. Second, any organization without visible purposes, definable goals, and fleshed out plans will most assuredly make institutional maintenance the primary concern of the organization. More often than not, institutional maintenance becomes the sole concern of the organization. Schaller notes the problem becomes even worse in voluntary nonprofit organizations, which a church can be labeled as using business terminology.¹ To make matters more complex, churches struggle mightily as their purposes and goals are spread out more than those of the International Red Cross, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and other voluntary nonprofit organizations which were organized for very specific purposes.² This is especially true for a large established congregation. Congregational needs grow as the number of members increases. The leadership of the large congregation is then more likely to cater to the current membership needs. The task of discussing and planning the churches long term future work is put on the shelf.

Making a conscientious effort to not fall into this tendency, the leadership of a congregation must routinely ask the “what’s next” questions for the congregation’s ministry. Congregational leaders must become determined in their ministry planning. The purpose of this paper is to communicate the importance of long term ministry planning to the leadership of congregations in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).

¹ Lyle E. Schaller, *Parish Planning* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 95.

² C. Kirk Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 111.

To be clear, I am not proposing a new method of ministry planning. Comprehensive ministry planning is not some “fresh new look” at ministry planning. Simply put, it is a term used to distinguish congregations who plan their future work comprehensively from those who do not. Comprehensive ministry planning is a congregational ministry plan of three or more years which has the congregation’s entire ministry in mind. It is not a building project. That is a facilities plan. It is not a yearly action plan. That is a calendar with event dates and project deadlines. Both are obviously important and will be included in a comprehensive plan. However, the comprehensive ministry plan itself is a document articulating the key emphases of ministry, a vision of the congregation’s future, and a plan mapping out how the membership is going to reach their goals.

In order to achieve my purpose, I have broken this thesis into three parts. I draw conclusions from a distinctly different source in each part. In part one, Scripture shows our Lord has called us to plan for future ministry as we participate in his saving work. In part two, interviews with pastors of WELS congregations who implement comprehensive ministry planning uncovers the four primary benefits of this form of ministry planning. Lastly, in part three, a survey of seventy-two WELS pastors shows a correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and congregational health.

After conducting this research, I have come to the conclusion that *the gospel tool of comprehensive ministry planning is a necessary practice that should be included in the critical tasks and functions of gospel ministry for pastors and leaders in WELS congregations as they strive for congregational health.*

Literature Review

The church growth movement began in the mid-1960s with an emphasis on international missions. The use of its principles began to spread throughout American churches in the 1970s. The movement became cemented in mainline American Christianity in the 1980s and still is the foundation of many ministry practices today. Emphasis on the methodologies of ministry is a key component of the church growth movement. Consequently, the church growth movement sparked an explosion of literature on specific ministry methodologies.

Strategic planning was one particular methodology the church growth movement specializes in. Aubrey Malphurs is a longtime leader in strategic planning “how-to” literature. His most popular work is *Advanced Strategic Planning: a 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*. In his book, Malphurs lays out a lengthy nine step model for strategic planning. He asserts this model is flexible enough for almost every size and type of congregation to implement in their particular community. Malphurs is extremely thorough as he guides his readers through the process of developing a strategic ministry plan.

From the start, Malphurs declares the resistance to change as the source of the Christian church’s current numerical decline. Consequently, the necessity of leading a congregation in a new direction drives Malphurs’ philosophy of ministry planning. Along the same lines of *Advanced Strategic Planning*, Malphurs also wrote *Developing a Vision for Ministry* where he focuses more on the process of creating and communicating a vision for future ministry rather than just a strategic plan in the strict sense.

In his book *Church Unique*, Will Mancini dissects the method of strategic planning. He labels strategic planning as an outdated form of ministry planning. In Mancini’s experience, strategic planning overwhelms and burns out congregational leaders more often than not. Instead of strategic planning, Mancini stresses the importance of casting a vision of the congregation’s future culture instead of detailing what work is to be done. He shifts the emphasis away from doing toward being. If you read ministry planning literature from church growth authors, you will hear the word “vision” used frequently. Mancini does an excellent job of clarifying what a vision for future ministry actually is and how to successfully communicate a ministry vision to the membership of your congregation.

If you want to familiarize yourself with multiple popular methods of ministry planning, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann is a great place to start. Rendle and Mann lay out a wide variety of approaches for ministry planning and instruct the reader on the fundamental types of planning, whether it is for ministry or not. This book is another example of a “how-to” approach for formulating a ministry plan. More importantly, Rendle and Mann continually show how formulating a plan for ministry is a fantastic opportunity for fellow believers to understand their purpose as a church and to grow in their unity with one another carrying out their gospel mission.

In almost all of these books, and many others I used but did not cite, there are overarching tones of church growth theology. The authors took the Bible seriously and encouraged mission work earnestly. Church growth authors do provide a breath of fresh air in an anti-supernatural and post-modern culture. However, the bad comes with the good as these church growth authors continually supplant the importance and efficacy of the means of grace with the ministry methods of man. Sociology, not Word and Sacrament, wins the day for making disciples of all nations in Church Growth theology. The ecclesiology and missiology of these Church Growth authors is clearly different than confessional Lutheranism.³

When a confessional Lutheran begins reading Church Growth literature, the first order of business is to reaffirm their confessional position, most specifically concerning the means of grace. God has chosen to bring people to faith through Word and Sacraments and has instructed Christians to make disciples through those means alone. Nowhere in Scripture do we find statements directing us anywhere else than to the means of grace for faith and wisdom in Christ.

However, even if a Lutheran pastor or lay leader has to read with a good deal of doctrinal discernment, most of the current Church Growth literature on ministry planning is well worth their time. We go to these authors to learn from their expertise on leading congregations as social organisms. We do not go to them for doctrine. These authors are on the cutting edge of modern research and communicate their findings on how to lead and direct the work of a congregation.

While the approach of the authors I researched was extremely practical and beneficial for congregations, they fall short in one particular area. The authors I focused on almost exclusively spent their time instructing the reader *how* to formulate and implement a ministry plan. My

³ A confessional Lutheran is one who subscribes to the historic Lutheran Confessions as a correct exposition of the Holy Bible.

purposes do not include instructing you *how* to put together a ministry plan. I am more interested in showing you *why* you should ministry plan. Outside of the introductory chapters, these authors were not concerned in convincing the reader *why* exactly ministry planning is important. They assume the reader already has a strong desire to put together a comprehensive ministry plan. I do not think they are totally at fault. If the reader picked up their book in the first place, there is a good chance the reader is already convinced the topic is important.

As I read through these books I found a gap in research has developed. Few resources are available to persuade the leadership of a congregation to seriously consider increasing their ministry planning efforts. Adding to the problem, the resources available lack depth and detail in attempting to open the reader's eyes to the need of ministry planning. With this thesis, I intend to fill this gap. In order to accomplish this goal, I primarily relied on Scripture and the experience of WELS pastors who use comprehensive ministry planning in their congregations for the basis of my arguments. The literary resources referenced in this review were used first to educate myself with current methods of ministry planning and then to glean talking points on the *why* of ministry planning.

Part 1 - A Scriptural Perspective on Ministry Planning

Scriptural Evidence for Planning

The roots of ministry planning methodologies make some church leaders uneasy. Current literature on ministry planning adapts methods developed in the business world and applies them to the church. Some Lutheran readers resist ministry planning because they feel secular sources are leading them down a road of secular goals. So these Lutherans say that if a planning method comes from the business world then it should stay there. But search through Scripture and you will find a surplus of planning principles and examples. In Scripture we see the creator of detailed planning was not a CEO sitting behind his Fortune 500 desk. It was the Creator himself.

Genesis 1 starts it off. The revelation of God's infinite wisdom revealed itself in his love for order. His love for order demonstrated itself in the plan God put in place for his world. Even though God could have turned the darkness of nothing into the creation of everything with a simple snap of his fingers, he did not. Instead, step by step, he carefully chose to implement his creative plans in a purposeful and specific way.

The beautiful and orderly results of God's creative plan did not fade away when he declared everything to be good. The blessings continued, as he planned to care for all people, and we see these blessings in our own lives. Paul, in speaking to the people of Lystra, pointed them to this truth when he told them, "God] has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Ac 14:17).⁴

Not only has God made plans for all people, but Scripture presents evidence of God's specific plans for specific nations. God planned the rising and falling of every nation of all time. "He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Ac 17:26). The best example, by far, are God's plans for the Old Testament nation of Israel. God revealed to Abraham what he intended to do with and for his descendants. God revealed his specific plan of deliverance to Moses at the burning bush. God revealed his specific plans to the people of Israel through the prophet Jeremiah. Before the exile of Jerusalem, he told them,

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the NIV 1984.

“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Je 29:10,11).

God got even more specific as he planned the lives of individuals. He told his prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart as a prophet to the nations” (Je 1:5). In Luke, immediately before the birth of Christ, God told Zechariah the plans he had for the priest’s son John: “he will go on before the Lord...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 2:17).

In all of God’s plans, we are told he “works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Ro 8:28). The greatest proof of Paul’s words in Romans 8 is God’s plan of salvation. In his plan to save mankind, God himself confirmed the specificity of his planning. He set a specific time to send his Son (Ga 4:4). He planned specific circumstances under which he would send our long-foretold Messiah so that Jesus would fulfill everything written about him (Mt 5:17).

In his sending, God commissioned his Son with specific goals. Jesus was to reconcile the world back to God (2 Co 5:18). Jesus was to accomplish the world’s reconciliation by living perfectly in our place. “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Co 5:21). Jesus was to be the sacrificial lamb in our place. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). And the list of passages proving Jesus’ reconciliatory purposes and goals can go on.

So, does God take planning seriously? Even before reading the surplus of examples above, any student of Scripture would answer the question with an immediate “Yes, of course!” But the more we consider God’s planning, we see his plans are neither general nor vague. God’s plans are purposeful and specific. Nor does he put together a plan and leave it in the filing cabinet. Instead, God always follow through. He takes a proactive approach in the implementation of his plans throughout the way.

Do not take the above Scripture references to say God really needs to think everything through in order to govern all things effectively. God absolutely does not have to plan like we do to carry out his work. So how should we react to God’s use of planning? Consider the fact he uses an abundance of planning terminology. He has clearly communicated to us the truth he himself plans. He chooses to reveal those plans to us with planning terminology. All this takes us

away from a negligent opinion of “detailed planning is only for the business world,” to an understanding that Scripture deems thorough planning as sanctified behavior. If God would put great effort into planning for the future, his people should want to imitate him.

Not only does God approve and encourage our use of planning, but he also assumes our use of planning. While God tells us not to worry about tomorrow (Mk 6:34), he assumes we will not have a lackadaisical, “take each day as it comes” attitude towards the responsibilities he has given to us. God expects us to plan. This divine expectation is communicated in the portions of Scripture where the Holy Spirit distinguishes God-pleasing plans from evil ones. “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Pr 15:22). God assumes our planning when he instructs us to be meticulous as we map out our future work. “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (Pr 21:5). God assumes the wisdom of planning when Jesus declared a lack of planning to be blatant stupidity.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?...Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand men? (Lk 14:28,31).

As was his practice in using parables, Jesus is taking a simple truth from everyday life to expound on a truth of faith. His goal was not just to share earthly wisdom concerning planning and leave it at that. Also, Jesus’ goal was not to minister to the people for the benefit of the Palestinian workforce. His goal was to minister to the people for the benefit of his Father’s kingdom. While ministering to these lost souls, Jesus has a clear strategy. Jesus had a plan.

In Mark 1, the whole town was watching as Jesus healed Simon Peter’s fever-stricken mother-in-law. The townspeople were amazed. More and more gathered as Jesus went off to a solitary place to pray. The disciples urged him to come back. Jesus had won the people over in displaying his awesome power, and now his audience was starving for more works of wonder. They loved him! But staying there was not in the plan Jesus had already put into place. He told them, “Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mk1:38). Even though staying would have been beneficial, Jesus would not let what seemed to be a pressing need override the importance of his plans.

Consider how Jesus sent out the Twelve. 1 Timothy 2:4 clearly states God wants all men to come to know Jesus as their Savior. Yet our Lord told his disciples, “Do not go among the

Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel” (Mt10:5,7). Is Jesus speaking out of both sides of his mouth? Of course not! Jesus excluded those outside of the nation of Israel from the disciples’ preaching and teaching because he was not yet at that particular stage in his plan. The time for worldwide gospel work would come when Jesus would issue the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Even before Jesus sent out the disciples in Matthew 28, he had a specific ministry plan to train his disciples for their upcoming task of full time ministry. While Jesus was with his disciples, he taught them. He postponed their future ministry so they could observe how to minister from their teacher’s example. Jesus sent them out for a short time in Matthew 10 and mentored them when they returned. Jesus did all this with the goal of sending his disciples out on their own in the future.

Through and through, Jesus displays ministry planning at its best. But look to God’s people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament who held positions of leadership in the church. There you will see even more examples of solid planning. Nehemiah is one in particular we should note. While in exile, Nehemiah heard reports of the mess in Jerusalem. Nearly a century after the Jews had been released from exile, David’s city was still in ruins. God’s servant Nehemiah, serving as cupbearer for the Persian King Artaxerxes, grieved over Jerusalem and asked the Lord to allow him to be a part of the solution to restore Jerusalem. His first response to the problem was prayer, but he did not stop there. He did not sit idly by and wait for a miracle to happen. Instead, he planned. Months before God answered his prayer, Nehemiah thought through what he would do if the Lord allowed him to go back to Jerusalem.

About three months later, when the king asked Nehemiah, “Why does your face look so sad?”, Nehemiah described the present state of Jerusalem. The king asked Nehemiah what he wanted and Nehemiah immediately laid out the plan he had previously put together. Nehemiah explained the timeline for the rebuild. He asked the king for letters to be sent to the other governors of the empire for a safe passage during the long journey to Jerusalem and for protection during his stay. Then when Nehemiah faced opposition from his own people in Jerusalem, he did not shrink, but he stayed the course. Nehemiah stuck to his plan. He listened to the concerns of others but did not let them stop his plan from moving forward. Nehemiah’s efforts were blessed only because the Lord blessed his work. But at the same time, Nehemiah’s

efforts were effective because he had a well thought-out vision and strategy to accomplish an overwhelming project involving many people.

The Holy Spirit chose to give us many details of Nehemiah's purposeful plans during the rebuild. We can learn much from Nehemiah, but he is one of many suitable examples of thoughtful planning. Joseph planned the details of God's overall plan in providing for the nation of Egypt. Joshua was given specific objectives by God and put together detailed military plans to accomplish them. David made careful preparations for Solomon before the temple was rebuilt. And Hezekiah made the pool and tunnel in Jerusalem to provide the city with water.

When it comes to ministry planning specifically, we should look no further than the apostle Paul. Paul was certainly guided by the Lord throughout his ministry. His humility and persistence in giving all glory to God for every ministry success is evident in Acts and his letters to the churches. However, Paul also displayed a God-pleasing boldness as he was a visionary, an outstanding planner, and a detailed strategist.

The instructions given to Paul were simple: preach to the Gentiles (Ac 22:21). Paul could have taken this general command from God, found a prominent Gentile city, like Ephesus or Corinth, and set up shop to stay for good. But he did not. The Lord had set Paul's heart on fire with the gospel to spread the life-giving message of Jesus Christ to as many people as he possibly could. In order to do so, Paul put together a plan for each ministry journey as he traversed from city to city, country to country, and continent to continent.

While Paul consistently had his next step in mind, he was in no way taking the Lord out of his ministry's driver seat. Acts 16 is proof. In verse 6 Luke writes the Holy Spirit, for a time, intentionally kept Paul out of the province of Asia. Then, "when they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bythina, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (16:7). Afterward, God called Paul and his companions via a vision to cross the Aegean Sea and preach to the people of Macedonia. From this section of Scripture, we see the Lord had a plan and led Paul through that plan. Yet even though he knew God was always in complete command and control of his ministry, Paul still considered it vital to use his God-given reason to implement a depth of planning and organization in order to accomplish the mission Jesus had given him.

Paul knew where he wanted to go and why he wanted to go there. Especially in the later part of his ministry when he intended to go to Rome and then Spain. Paul's mammoth dreams of spreading the gospel were matched by his bold plans. When he got to a new city, he had a

specific evangelism plan. He would first go to the local synagogues. There he would use the Old Testament Messianic prophecies to proclaim Jesus as the Christ.

Paul had a plan for training future leaders. Look through the book of Acts and notice Paul never traveled alone. He was training future ministers such as Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, and Timothy, so they could be ready to go off on their own in the future. Paul's eyes were always looking ahead to what would come next for his Savior's young New Testament church.

So why look at all this evidence of planning in Scripture, specifically focusing on ministry planning? To be clear, the point is *not* to tell a congregation, "See this here? This is how you should plan for ministry!" That would be not only foolish, but wrong. The above examples *describe* how God and his people planned. These ministry planning examples do not *command* specific forms of planning. These Scriptural examples do not yoke us with ministry planning systems or methodologies. So what do they teach us? To keep it simple, the evidence of planning in Scripture screams at us and says, "Plan for the future of your congregation's ministry!" As leaders in his church, take this aspect of serving your God and his people seriously. Set aside time to assess your church's situation, set specific goals, formulate a plan, and put it into action. Yes with these examples, our Lord teaches us that planning your congregation's future work is critical, fundamental, and absolutely necessary when taking up the task of gospel proclamation in his Church.

The Place of Congregational Ministry Planning in God's Saving Work

As God's people planned, in both the Old Testament and New Testament, for the specific ministries God had given them, they were not following a "Thou shall ministry plan" command. God never explicitly gave them those instructions. So then, why should *we* put a great deal of effort into planning the future work of our congregation's ministry?

Thus far, we have answered the above question in two ways. First, we follow the example of the "cloud of witnesses" in Scripture who intentionally planned for future ministry. Secondly, God encourages planning for *every* aspect of our lives, so our work in his church is no exception. The third part of the answer is the focus of this particular section. Unequivocally, Scripture gives our ministry planning a rightful place in God's saving work. Because we have a role in God's saving work, we are called upon to put together well thought out ministry plans.

Paul states: “[God] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Ti 2:4). In order to accomplish the desires of his gracious heart, our Lord Jesus Christ sends his Church into the world to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19,20). Putting these two passages side by side, we understand God’s desire for all men to be saved and the mission of the church to be one and the same.

However, considering our mission as leaders in his church, we must first have a detailed discussion on *how* individuals are brought to and preserved in this saving faith. More specifically, where does our ministry planning fit into this saving work of God? With the purpose of giving structure to this discussion, I will use the outline of the “causes of salvation” formulated by the 17th century Lutheran theologian Johan Andreas Quenstedt. While Quenstedt was not the first to introduce the terminology, his particularly clear exposition of the topic will serve our purpose best. Quenstedt detailed the causes of salvation into four parts. First he lists the principal cause; second, the impulsive causes; third, the instrumental cause; and fourth, the ministerial cause. It is important to note Quenstedt’s purpose, and my purpose, is not to slice and dice how God brings people to faith. There is a clear synergy between the causes of salvation. Jonathan Hein writes,

To delineate between these causes is not to separate them. For example, take the gift of faith. What is the cause of faith? Scripture tells us. The cause of faith is the Spirit. “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit”(1 Cor 12:3). However, Scripture also tells us the cause of faith is the Gospel. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17) This is not double-speak. Scripture is teaching that while there are multiple causes of salvation, there is synergy between them.⁵

First, *the principle cause* of our salvation is God himself. “Obviously, if there were no God, there would be no grace, no Savior, no Word, Sacraments, ministers, and so and so forth.”⁶ God and God alone has the power to take us from our state of spiritual death to life. Paul writes, “Because of his great love for us, *God*, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:4,5, emphasis added). Not only is the Triune God the principal cause in our conversion, but he is also the

⁵ Jonathan Hein, “Treasure in Jars of Clay: The Synergy Between the Instrumental and Ministerial Causes in God’s Plan of Salvation,” 3, <http://wlsessays.net/node/2224> (accessed October 12, 2014).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

principal cause as one grows in faith and in his life of sanctification. “It is *God* who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Php 2:13, emphasis added).

Second, “The *impulsive causes* of salvation are those things which moved God to act for our benefit. There are inner impulsive causes: the tender heart and fatherly love of God.”⁷ “[God] saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:5). Also, “there are outward impulsive causes: both the misery of mankind and the merits of Christ.”⁸

Third, the gospel in Word and Sacrament is the *instrumental cause* of salvation. Paul, considering his own ministry, said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Ro 1:16). The gospel of Jesus Christ created and preserved saving faith in those Paul ministered to. The writer to the Hebrews tells us the Word has the power to cause salvation when he writes, “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (He 4:12). Jesus tells us baptism, where the Word and water are applied for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, has the power to cause salvation when he says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16). Finally, concerning the instrumental cause, the Lord’s Supper, where Christ gives us his body and blood, preserves believers in the one true faith. This truth is clear in the Words of Institution when Jesus said, “This is my body, given for you.... This is my blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:26,28).

Fourth, “the *ministerial cause* of salvation is the ministers God calls.”⁹ In yet another instance of his overwhelming grace, God allows his chosen people to genuinely be involved in the salvation of others as they share the gospel. Paul displays his understanding of his role as the ministerial cause of salvation when he writes, “I have become all things to all men so that by all means *I might save some*” (1 Co 9:22, emphasis added). From the rest of Paul’s writings and from the Pauline passages we have observed, it is obvious Paul never placed himself above God as the principal cause. Paul knew his place in God’s saving work. Yet he instructed young pastor Timothy, “Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, *you*

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Ibid., 3.

will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Ti 4:16, emphasis added). These passages teach us we can rightfully say we save those to whom we minister. We say this understanding God, the principal cause, is the one working through us as we use the means of grace, the instrumental cause to which he has bound us.

Looking at the way Quenstedt details and communicates the truths of God’s saving work, we overflow in thanksgiving. First, we give thanks to God, considering how he chose to use his incomparable power, taking us from the damning darkness of death to the light of eternal life. Second, we give thanks to God considering how we have been saved by grace alone. God does not expect us to work out our salvation on our own. Instead he freely offers us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ Jesus. Third, we give thanks considering how God chose to communicate the gospel to us in such an accessible way. We do not have to search high and low to discover God’s love for us. We can open our Bibles, attend worship, daily remember our baptism, and continually receive forgiveness at the altar of the sacrament. Fourth, we give thanks considering how God chose to involve us in his saving work as he gives us the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with others.

These are more than enough reasons to give thanks! But looking at the last one, our role as the ministerial cause, gives us pause. Stop and think of how tall of a task this is. God gives you and me the responsibility to go out into a world naturally hostile to God and confront them with God’s Word. God gives you and me the responsibility of being watchmen on his tower to proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sins as the Day of the Lord approaches. In this work, God promises to hold us accountable if we are not faithful. Along with the prophet Ezekiel, we heed the warning of God when he tells us, “When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood” (Eze 33:8).

In light of this, we can easily find ourselves in the position of a rookie council member or pastor. They have been waiting to serve their Lord in a position of leadership for some time. They are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, ready to lead their particular congregation to finally set its community on fire with the gospel. But then the harsh realities of gospel ministry begin to set in. Their bright eyes dim, their tails fall to the ground, and the wild fire of the gospel seems to be just a pile of smoldering coals inside the church walls. To this young worker, their role as the

ministerial cause of salvation now becomes the most intimidating and daunting task they have ever undertaken.

So what should they do now? In all honesty, we are asking the wrong question. The appropriate question is “What has God done to comfort and motivate us as he includes our work in his saving work?”

First, our Lord has given us the powerful gospel to strengthen *ourselves*. Paul reminded Timothy of this. After telling his young pastoral counterpart of the hardships he himself endured for the sake of the gospel, Paul told Timothy he would not be exempt from the hardships of ministry. Timothy would, at times, find himself broken down and exhausted. Paul followed with these instructions, “Continue in what you have learned and become convinced of...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Ti 3:14,15). Like Timothy, we are to strengthen ourselves with the gospel in the face of an intimidating ministry. Then and only then will we be thoroughly equipped for every good work as the ministerial cause of salvation.

Second, God has given us the powerful gospel to preach to *others*. He has given us the Word which carries God’s power to crush a dead heart of stone and turn it into a heart of vibrant faith. He has given us the sacrament of Baptism which carries God’s power to take a damned sinner outside of God’s eternal family and bring him into the fellowship of believers, into the family of God. Finally, he has given us the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which carries God’s power to strengthen the believer with the sure forgiveness Christ has won for him.

Third, if giving us the means of grace to strengthen ourselves and then others wasn’t enough, God has given us our gifts and abilities to play a role in his saving work. It would be foolish for us to speak as if God had given his church a task he knew we could not carry out. So, as Luther put it so well in his explanation of the First Article of the Apostles Creed, “He gave me my reason and all my senses, my mind and all my abilities.” The first and third of those God-given gifts, our reason and our minds, have a strong correlation to the present discussion of ministry planning. Made in his image, God gave us the ability to sort through problems in ministry, consume and formulate new ideas, and humbly project our future service in his kingdom. In giving us these two particular gifts, God expects us to use them to the fullest in planning as we seek to save souls for Christ.

Along with Luther, we issue a glowing review of reason. “Reason is a very gift of God whose value cannot be measured, and those things which it wisely ordains and discovers in human affairs are not to be despised.”¹⁰ Luther rightfully put reason on a pedestal when it came to “human affairs.” It is important to note human affairs do include the work of the church insofar as the church deals with humans.

On the flipside, we take a different opinion of reason when talking about our relationship with God and how it is made right. When considering matters of faith, we need to heed Luther’s warning when he says, “Reason must be deluded, blinded, and destroyed. Faith must trample underfoot all reason, sense, and understanding, and whatever it sees must be put out of sight and ...know nothing but the Word of God.”¹¹ Reason can and should be used extensively in the work of the church as God intended it to be used, to bring him glory and to build up his church. However, it cannot rule the day. The Word of God must rule. Christ must rule.

Luther was not the source of this ever important truth. It was Paul who spoke of the place of reason compared to Christ when he wrote, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The arguments Paul refers to are thoughts and designs of human reason that oppose the gospel. When Paul faced the hostilities of these enemies of the gospel, he used the same gospel to destroy them. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul took the double-edged sword of the Spirit and brought them to their knees. It was like a mighty military fortress crumbling to pieces at the hands of an enemy against whom it stood no chance. Human reason and logic were then taken captive by and made obedient to Christ, the conquering king.

The technique of taking things captive with the gospel is exactly what we are doing when we go to the business world take popular long-range planning methods for use in our own settings. Paul says we take *every* line of human thought and put it under the headship of Christ, our head. We who have been given the task of preaching the gospel employ methods of organizational planning that do, in fact, come from a secular realm, but we make them obedient to Christ. They now serve the purpose of the gospel. It is not the other way around.

In an interview with Pastor Jonathan Hein of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Summerville, SC, he shared this illustration with me,

¹⁰ WA 40,3,612.

¹¹ Delivered in his last sermon, in Wittenberg on January 17, 1546.

I liken [ministry planning] to how we use music. There are no commands on forms of music in Scripture. God did, however, invent music and the science of music. Any music we have wasn't handed to us from heaven. It was written by man. But we have taken something like music and we've made it captive to Christ. We have put the gospel to music. Which the Scripture encourages us to do, but doesn't tell us how to write music. And in doing so we've taken something that could be used for evil and now use it to carry out gospel ministry....And this is what we want to do with planning. We grab onto something that originated on this earth and we've emptied it of certain things and purposes and made it captive for Christ.¹²

Thus far, I have written vaguely about what is an adequate method of planning and what is not. I did this because Scripture, while calling us to plan in general, does not place one form of planning over another. As Pastor Hein said with music, Scripture gives us remarkable freedom in what methods of planning we can or should use. But this does not mean we should fail to judge certain methods of planning with a discerning eye. The approach to ministry planning some authors propose has given many confessional Lutheran leaders pause. I am particularly speaking of approaches to ministry planning coming from the Church Growth Movement.

Most of the authors who write about ministry planning tag themselves as Church Growth disciples without reservation. In light of this, a review of Church Growth principles is in order, especially those principles affecting the current ministry planning literature.

Professor David Valleskey, in his paper "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation," found Church Growth theology defines effective evangelism by growth in worship attendance and membership.¹³ With this definition of ministry success, the Church Growth Movement places an extremely high stress on reaching the goal of numerical growth while remaining virtually silent on the proper use of the means of grace. Instead, Church Growth theology focuses on certain sociological methods proven to make churches grow. Valleskey writes,

Reading Church Growth literature tends to leave one with the feeling that following a set of sociological principles produces growth, this in spite of the claim of McGavran that

¹² Jonathan Hein, phone interview by author, November 16, 2014. Pastor Hein is a WELS pastor at Beautiful Savior Lutheran in Summerville, SC. Since 2013, Pastor Hein has served as Director for The Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC). The CCC assists WELS congregations to assess and evaluate ministry, review biblical teachings and principles that impact ministry, develop plans to adjust and expand ministry in appropriate ways, and carry out their plans over a period of time. Pastor Hein was also used for my interview research in part two.

¹³ David J. Valleskey, "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation," delivered to the WELS pastors of the *Ohio Conference of the Michigan District* on October 15, 1990, 12, wlsessays.net (accessed on October 22, 2014).

“men cannot make the Church grow—only God’s Holy Spirit can do that.” Such a statement sounds good; but it does not go far enough in that it does not connect the Holy Spirit’s work with the means of grace, as do the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.¹⁴

The history of the Church Growth movement provides us with few answers. Having their roots in Reformed theology, those espousing Church Growth will give credit to God as the principal cause of salvation while disregarding the means of grace as the instrumental cause. Consequently, the most popular and most frequently used methods of ministry planning found in today’s Church Growth literature will spend little to no time emphasizing the use of Word and Sacrament. The means of grace are replaced with their own “successful” methods as the instrumental cause of salvation.

So what then should a leader of a confessional Lutheran congregation do? We find ourselves between a rock and a hard place. Should we use Church Growth ministry planning methods or not? Professor Valleskey offers a few suggestions to WELS leaders as they wrestle with this question. Here are three of them. We could uncritically accept everything the Church Growth Movement offers, and thus become a part of the movement. We could totally reject the Church Growth Movement and everything about it. Or we could use the approach of the Israelites when they left Egypt at the time of the Exodus. God’s people took from the Egyptians what would benefit them on their upcoming journey to the Promised Land. This last approach is what Professor Valleskey suggests. I wholeheartedly agree.

We should pick and choose suitable planning methodologies from the Church Growth Movement for our own purposes. We are not taking these books off the shelves to learn a new ecclesiology or missiology. What we are doing is learning how to plan the future work of a congregation. Plugging a business planning model into a congregational setting can be extremely frustrating. On the other hand, taking a planning model formulated and tested in a congregational setting is obviously much more applicable.

Think of the positive possibilities. Confessional Lutherans pick from the various methods of planning offered by the Church Growth Movement. They empty these planning methodologies of their theological weaknesses and make them captive to Christ. We would not build our gospel work around anthropological methods. Instead, our planning would place a proper emphasis on using the Spirit-powered means of grace as our Lord commands. While

¹⁴ Ibid., 13.

putting together our ministry plans, we would confidently trust Word and Sacrament to create and strengthen faith. This Lutheran approach to ministry planning would put a Reformed approach to planning in its cross hairs and blow it out of the water. *That* would be ministry planning at its best!

Part 2 - The Primary Benefits of Comprehensive Ministry Planning

A Description of Comprehensive Ministry Planning

The language of past and present ministry planning methods can get extremely complex. This depth of terminology does not come from a wide array of categories. There are really only a few general methods of planning frequently used in American churches. Instead, a complexity of language develops when an author creates a unique variation off of those general methods. Adding to the confusion, terms like "vision" are used throughout but each author puts his or her own flavor to the term. As a lead into our discussion of comprehensive ministry planning, a brief overview of ministry planning categories is fitting.

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann's book *Holy Conversations* provides a general framework for types of planning. They state there are essentially three forms of planning: problem planning, developmental planning, and frame-bending planning. Problem planning is a problem-solving method applied to a clear need. Problem planning is a form of planning asking "how do we fix something and return to the way things were?" Developmental planning is a method of building off of what is currently functioning well for the church or organization. The goal in developmental planning is to decide on the next steps while keeping what is currently in place. Lastly, frame-bending planning seeks change. In frame-bending planning, the guiding assumption is things are not functioning as they ought and need to be taken in a different direction.¹⁵ In discussion, distinguishing between the three general types of planning is easy. However, when you look over an actual plan of an organization or church, you will probably find elements of all three.

Problem, developmental, and frame-bending planning are *types* of planning. They are generalizations useful for grasping the overall philosophy of planning. Discussing *methods* of planning is a different matter. Methods of planning describe the distinct model used to carry out a task.

¹⁵ Alice Mann and Gil Rendle, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (n.p.: Alban Institute, 2003), 6-9.

The first method of planning to consider is called operational planning. Business management books discuss operational planning thoroughly. Operational planning, as its name gives away, focuses on maintaining the primary functions and operations of the organization. It details who will do what and what they exactly they will do. It does not have a long-term focus. What operational planning provides in giving clarity of roles, structure, and accountability; it lacks in giving direction. Every church implements operational planning no matter what other method of ministry planning they use. In the WELS congregations I surveyed for part three of this thesis, operational planning was the most common method used. Problems with operational planning develop when it is used alone. When that happens, operational planning turns into an oversight of function instead of a plan in the truest sense of the term, a map of future work. Operational planning stands in direct contrast to the comprehensive ministry planning I am proposing.

Strategic planning is by far the most well-known method of planning. Will Mancini defines strategic planning in its most basic sense when he writes “strategic planning is the process of determining the overall direction of the organization and then “breaking down” that broader direction into objectives that are then divided into smaller, more measurable action steps or goals.”¹⁶ While Mancini describes the general use of the term, strategic planning typically goes much more in depth. A more precise usage of the term “strategic planning” in ministry settings would be what author Aubrey Malphurs of Dallas Theological Seminary details in *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*.

While Malphurs’ work offers a great step-by-step tutorial on how to lead a church through a planning process, it exemplifies the weaknesses of strategic planning. With its overload of information put into a ministry plan, strategic planning displays its limitations by missing the human element. Will Mancini offers his criticism of strategic planning, “The assumption is that more information will produce a clearer direction, but just the opposite is true. I call this the ‘fallacy of complexity.’ Too much information shreds the big picture into so many small pieces the vision is hopelessly lost. More information equals less clarity.”¹⁷ Another common hindrance of strategic planning is its tendency to carry out a high volume of planning

¹⁶ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey -Bass, 2008), 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 21.

with a low volume of implementation. Advance strategic planning goes against the desire of most congregational leaders who want to focus on actually doing the work of the church instead of just talking about it.

Some propose vision casting as the answer to strategic planning's weaknesses. Vision casting stays away from an information overload and concisely paints a picture of the future. To put it simply, vision casting is "what it will look like when we get it right." This method will be a part of any kind of ministry plan whether the ones putting it together realize they are casting a vision or not. Vision casting leads the congregation to articulate exactly what the congregation wants to be in the future.

So what about comprehensive ministry planning? If you grab a few books on ministry planning you will not find this term used. The term comprehensive ministry planning is a tag I have created for this thesis to describe a certain type of planning. Comprehensive ministry planning is not a new method of ministry planning. Each church should use whatever approach suits their purpose and dynamics best. One will lean towards strategic planning and the other towards vision casting, both could very well be forms of comprehensive ministry planning.

A comprehensive ministry plan has five key traits. First, the plan comprehends the entirety of the congregation's ministry. The plan includes every branch of ministry (worship, education, evangelism, counseling, youth ministry, children's ministry, etc). Second, the plan seeks input and is developed by multiple individuals. This is not a plan pastor puts together on his own and presents to the congregation. Third, the plan is goal oriented. Some goals are extremely specific. Others goals are flexible. Maybe the goals are landmarks for coming years. Or maybe these goals stem from vision casting. Forth, the plan is detailed. The plan will articulate how you intend to accomplish these goals. The plan does not have to be as detailed as an advanced strategic plan, but it could be if the congregation chooses to do so. And fifth, the plan has a strong emphasis on the future work of the church as it reaches beyond an annual plan. A good bench mark would be one of three or more years.

The first and the last traits are the highest priority to be considered a comprehensive ministry plan. Note that comprehensive ministry planning stands in direct opposition to the method of operational planning which focuses only on the immediate future.

In order to get a first person perspective of this type of planning in action, I conducted interviews with five WELS pastors who implement comprehensive ministry planning. You can

find the list of questions I used for the interviews in Appendix A. After conducting all five interviews, I looked for common threads and themes in dialogue. I looked for points all five pastors agreed on. The following four benefits of comprehensive ministry planning were the most frequented topics of discussion. The following four benefits are those that the five interviewed pastors said were the most glaring benefits from their personal experience using comprehensive ministry planning. I allowed the personal experience of these pastors to lead the conversation. The lessons learned during those conversations are the contents of this section.

Benefit One – Unity Built by Consensus

Every veteran pastor will tell you a culture of in-fighting is one of the, if not the, sharpest tools the devil uses to cut into congregational health. Sadly, many churches today struggle to overcome this poisonous problem. In-fighting is nothing new for the Church. For example, as we see in his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul dealt with a vicious atmosphere of hostility. In Corinth, different groups within the congregation were pitted against each other. From start to finish, the Church here on earth will always be vulnerable to the disease of disunity as long as it is comprised of sinners.

Many factors can create a congregational spirit of disunity. Disagreement over the direction of ministry is one of them. Disunity will rear its ugly head when gaining victories for personal agendas becomes more important than gaining the victory of agreement. Far too often voters meetings, open forums, and council meetings look like war zones as multiple agendas go toe to toe.

The diversity of methods in American Christianity today may cause this disunity. There are more styles of ministry than ever before in American Christianity. From within what they themselves label as a failing congregation, WELS pastors and members cannot help but gaze at what everyone else is doing. In addition, the mobility of our modern world has created an extremely diverse membership with extremely diverse congregational and denominational backgrounds. Henry Klopp writes, “Particularly today, when we have so many Christians

transferring from one church to another, the issue is magnified. The problem is people assume their agendas are the same as everyone else's."¹⁸

The problem gets worse when disagreement over the direction of ministry has its roots in the church's office, particularly in a larger congregation with two or more pastors. There the blessings of unique individual visions for ministry can turn into a tug-of-war for the future work of the congregation. One pastor pushes for a vision where evangelism dominates. His associate sees a pressing need for worship excellence and pines for it. Meanwhile the third pastor's heart burns to address the church's adult discipleship weakness. When putting together a ministry plan, all three of their passions can and should be included. But so often a struggle ensues for one pastor's passion to win the day as the other pastor's passion plays second fiddle. If these differences are not addressed in an orderly way, if there is no structure to the conversation, the result can be disastrous. Aubrey Malphurs writes, "Most often a ministry with multiple visions ends with a split. Actually the split was already cooking on the back burner from the very beginning of the organization; it only needed sufficient time to boil over and cause a major ministry disaster."¹⁹

Understanding in-fighting in a church could happen in places other than Corinth, Paul encourages the Ephesian Christians, and us, with these words: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). Planning is a tool of the gospel we can use to put Paul's words into practice. When God's people plan for their congregation's ministry, they are striving to have unity prevail over personal agendas. Intense effort put into formulating and implementing ministry plans is taking Paul's encouragement and intentionally putting forth great "effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."

As stated earlier, comprehensive ministry planning will comprehend, or include, a wide range of voices during its formulation. The elected leadership, along with the pastor, will take a primary role. But they will not put the plan together on their own. Those involved with putting the ministry plan together should intentionally meet with individuals from a wide variety of groups like mothers, young couples, college students, young adults, teens, the elderly, and new members. Another congregation may choose to hold multiple open forums. Either way, the

¹⁸ Henry Klopp, *The Ministry Playbook: Strategic Planning for Effective Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 33.

¹⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 19.

whole congregation puts the plan together. Differences of opinion are appropriately discussed and sorted through in those structured discussions. “Planning provides a means of identifying and negotiating these differences in a structured way.”²⁰

After many voices have been heard, the congregation can move forward and put together a plan with a spirit of unity. Pastor Randy Hunter, a WELS pastor at St. Andrew in Middleton, WI, has seen this approach produce unity within his congregation.

The membership made the plan. Men and women formulated the plan. They determined the recommendation for what we should do in this area of ministry for this year, for the next three years, and for the next five years. They determined that. We take all those perspectives, suggestions, and specific plans of the committees and the executive committee makes the final call. The executive committee, by our constitution, has the right to say yes, no, or ask for a revision. But ultimately, it is the men and women who put this plan together, so then why wouldn't there be consensus?²¹

When members have a say, they naturally create unity as they work together. Planning also fosters unity as the members now have a platform to restudy the mission and purpose of the Church. Consensus among the membership builds as individual members grow in their understanding of God's call for them to be his disciples. Even though little time was spent on discussing Bible study while formulating a plan, because it was an assumed requirement in my interviews, I believe this part of the planning process trumps all other benefits of planning. Together, the congregation as a whole, or maybe a selected group in a larger church, is reminded of how God's purposes for the Church, communicated to us in Scripture, guide our work. The members and leaders of the congregation are reminded of how God's power, not theirs, will work through the administration of the means of grace. They will then allow Scripture to draw the lines within which the church does its work. While studying what Scripture has to say about *the* Church, they cannot help but to consider how the Bible also defines and affects *their* church. Clarity is developed as the congregation's unique personality and purpose comes forward. “One of the critical benefits of planning is that it gets people talking and thinking about their identity and purpose. Even if little needs to change, the conversation enables them to identify and claim who they are and what they are to do [as a congregation].”²²

²⁰ Man and Rendle, 26.

²¹ Randy Hunter, phone interview by author, November 14, 2014. Pastor Hunter is a WELS pastor at St. Andrew Lutheran in Middleton, WI. Over the years, Pastor Hunter and the members of St. Andrew have consistently made a concerted effort in long term ministry planning.

²² Mann & Rendle, 24.

After Bible study, congregational assessment, and ministry plan formulation comes the presentation of the ministry plan to all the members. Here is where the leadership takes advantage of the ever important opportunity to justify what exactly they plan to do. Each congregation I interviewed placed a high priority on this step. Pastor Hein discussed how “every time we put together a plan, we justify the importance of it when we present it to the congregation.”²³

Purposefully justifying the importance of certain projects, goals, or the general direction of the ministry as a whole is not a one-time annual shot, or done only at the onset of a five-year plan. This happens consistently throughout the implementation of the plan. Pastor Parlow shared, “We make every effort to talk about [our ministry plan] in worship, in Bible classes, in small groups, and in parking lot discussions.”²⁴ A plan is just a dusty book on the shelf if it is not consistently communicated to the membership of the congregation. So when a pastor purposefully communicates the “*why* we do *what* we do *the way* we do it,” the result is unity and consensus.

As planning builds consensus, the congregation’s trust in the leadership builds along with it. Consequently, the childish anti-authoritarian attitude which breeds in-fighting is put in its place. Then the family of believers can focus on actually carrying out the task their Lord has assigned them instead of arguing about how they will carry it out. Pastor Hein stated,

Another important blessing we have seen in a well communicated long-term plan is less fighting among both the leadership and membership. Tension kills a church. If you plan well, you might have a couple of weeks where you are in disagreement over what you are going to do over the next few years or next months. But once everything is put down on paper, you know what you are doing for the future. The heavy discussion is over and the heavy mission work, guided by a clear plan, can commence.²⁵

²³ Hein, Interview.

²⁴ Dr. John Parlow, phone interview by author, November 6, 2014. Dr. Parlow is a WELS pastor at St. Mark Lutheran in De Pere, WI. Serving as lead pastor, Dr. Parlow is responsible for the overall vision and direction of St. Mark’s ministry.

²⁵ Hein, Interview.

Benefit Two - Increased Membership Involvement

An old church adage says 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. Research has proven this to be true.²⁶ There is no particular “secret sauce” of a method or approach, including planning, with which leaders can successfully turn the table on a lack of membership participation. However, the pastors I interviewed shared how comprehensive ministry planning is a critical tool the leadership of their congregation’s use to increase the percentage of members involved in ministry.

Every congregation has three groups of people. One group is actively involved. They will almost always provide a helping hand when needed. On the opposite end is another group who will never give their time outside of worship. You can try just about everything to get them to help, but it is just not happening. Then there is the middle group. These members will sacrifice their time only when they are convinced the cause is making a significant difference. They are the ones who need to be shown how their time volunteering serves a larger purpose. They are the ones who constantly need the vision and direction of ministry put before their eyes before they offer their time.

In an article titled “Ten Ways to Double Your Church Volunteer Recruitment and Retention,” Thom Rainer believes putting a ministry plan before the membership is imperative. He puts it at the top of the list when he writes, “First, the church must have a clear and compelling vision. Then leaders should redundantly express how different volunteer ministries tie to that vision. Such a clarification gives purpose to the work of the volunteers. And without purpose, volunteer ministries struggle.”²⁷ St. Paul’s in Muskego, WI makes this a top priority. Even though Pastor Panitzke has not seen a convincing effect from the initial presentation of ministry plans, he has witnessed the benefits of having a comprehensive ministry plan in place to refer to while recruiting volunteers one on one.

Letting them know how they are a part of the bigger picture. That is the key. Nobody has time to give. But if you let them know the direction of ministry and how they can be a part of it, we've seen positive results from that approach. If you just ask them to help with

²⁶ See *The Other 80 Percent: Turning Your Church's Spectators into Active Participants* by Scott Thumma and Warren Bird.

²⁷ Thom Rainer, “Ten Ways to Double Your Church Volunteer Recruitment and Retention,” thomrainer.com, last modified September 1, 2014, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2014/09/01/ten-ways-double-church-volunteer-recruitment-retention/>.

a typical event or program, all you're asking them to do is give up their time to keep the organization going. Most people aren't interested in that. Let them know they are a part of a challenge, an adventure. That is what has worked for us. I would offer the same advice to any and every congregation.²⁸

Pastor Hunter shared how he sees a need for this approach while working with young adults. He does not ask a millennial to fill a vacant role on a board or committee because the response has been negative. Instead, he has seen positive results from seeking out young individuals asking them to use their unique gifts in a role that not only sparks their interest, but also moves the ministry forward.

[The leadership of our congregation] senses the younger generation wants to be a part of *something*, but not a committee. The generation of my parents, that is how they got things done. They understood committees. My generation, the baby boomers, are interesting. They saw a need for the structures and committees, they bucked against it, but they did it anyways. Now with the millennials, it's "Don't even bother asking me to serve on a committee! But if the church asks me to do something that I feel passionate about or I have skills for, yeah, I'd be glad to help with that."²⁹

A current trend in churches, including many WELS congregations, is something called a time and talents survey. Perhaps your congregation has used one. In philosophy, it is a great idea. However, those surveys are often stored away and never seen until a curious new pastor runs across his predecessor's files. A time and talents survey will show the members that the leadership wants them to be involved. But when the survey is not connected to a specific plan for ministry, they become obsolete.

I see many WELS churches using a "time and talents" survey. That's good, but it can be absolutely pointless if it's not attached to a purposeful plan. Where are those people going to get plugged into? It can't just be in what they say they are interested in; that would hinder overall function.³⁰

Unless you have a comprehensive ministry plan in place to fit members into, a time and talents survey can actually be discouraging when nothing comes of it. The one filling out the survey got excited to serve, but eventually walked away empty-handed. Bitterness will probably result. To fill the void, Pastor Hein takes this approach,

²⁸ Peter Panitzke, interview by author, Muskego, WI, October 26, 2014. Pastor Panitzke is a WELS pastor at St. Paul Lutheran in Muskego, WI. Serving on a pastorate of three, Pastor Panitzke serves as the ministerial team leader coordinating the work of the other team members. He also is the pastorate leader in terms of St. Paul's ministry vision.

²⁹ Hunter, Interview.

³⁰ Hein, Interview.

Instead of a survey, with our emphasis on planning, we continually hold that plan before the congregation and say, “Hey, here is what we are doing or about to do. You can give your offerings towards this, but we also need you to help out with A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.” We're not asking them what they can do and then say, “Oh, this would be nice.” No, it's part of the plan with goals. That way, they get an immediate response and are encouraged to serve again in the future.³¹

You may be thinking, “So you're saying the way to get more involvement would be to put together a plan which expects more from them than we are already asking?” At first glance, this approach seems ignorant. Initially I was skeptical as well. When I put this particular benefit on the list for the interviewees to respond to, I did not expect much feedback. But I delved into the topic more and more with each interview after Pastor Parlow shared a different perspective with me. “To be honest, the reason many people leave the church is not because we are asking too much of them, it's because we are asking too little.”³²

Understandably, some members consider a leader's plea to be more involved as overbearing. But the truth is there are many who are presently becoming more and more disinterested with their current place in the congregation. The longer they are spectators to ministry, the further their passions drift away from the ministry. With this mindset, St. Mark in De Pere, WI tells its new members they are expected to serve in one way. The important thing is for the members to serve, but only in one way. So they intentionally discover the gifts and interests of new members. “It is better, humanly speaking, to be involved using your fit in this. Real purpose and joy is in serving God's people and God's work with what God gave you.”³³

Benefit Three - Informed Decision Making

Difficult decisions will arise as a congregation walks the path of faith together. In order to guide his people through those decisions, God has given us his Word as a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Ps 119:105). God's Word is the first place for a congregation to turn as it sorts through both the *now* and the *next*. Scriptural principles will be the basis for the decision, but principles do not always make the decision for us. More importantly, when it comes to the specifics of our ministries, God is not going to make the decision. He has put this task in our

³¹ Hein, Interview.

³² Parlow, Interview.

³³ Parlow, Interview.

hands. While we understand we will never be perfect in our decision making, we still strive to make the best decisions we possible. We do everything to avoid “knee jerk” decisions. We want to be reasonable. We want to be informed. The pastors interviewed all said comprehensive ministry planning is a fantastic tool to use in order to make those informed decisions.

Allow a story to illustrate. A mother stops by church to drop something off as she crosses out another to-do on her list of errands. With baby in one arm and toddler in the other hand, she pokes her head into her pastor’s office just to say hi. A casual conversation on the happenings of her young family’s life transitions to the happenings of the children’s ministries at church. This is her chance. The idea she has been brewing for some time is about to boil over. She desperately wants more for her kids as these toddlers will need more and more Christian education in the years to come. So she presents this brand new, life-changing, ministry with the energy only her personality could produce.

What’s the pastor to do? He is hit with a curveball on a sermon prep morning and does not know how to respond. He does not want to crush her spirits since she will be a immensely positive influence in the congregation as her kids go through the school. But if the congregation takes action on this idea now, or even anytime soon; he would lose four Sunday school teachers and even more volunteering mothers. So he stalls her with all the niceties he can think of as his thoughts scramble for a polite way to say “thanks, but no thanks” without her storming out.

If you are a pastor or leader in your congregation, you have probably found yourself between the same rock and hard place. Saying no to a passionate member is like pulling teeth for the people pleaser in all of us. But at times you *have* to say no lest the mess of disorder ensue.

Comprehensive ministry planning makes our no’s, and better yet, our yesses, to new ideas much easier. Comprehensive ministry planning guides tough decisions and provides reasons for those decisions. Pastor Hunter offered two different examples expressing two benefits of comprehensive planning in decision making. The first was a time when St. Andrew was knee-deep in their five year plan. A young woman approached the leadership wanting to lead a mission trip. The leadership was cautious for good reason. The high expense of the trip was not in the annual budget set aside for youth discipleship and St. Andrew had never taken a mission trip. But after further discussion with the young woman, they realized it fit extremely well in their current plan’s goals to emphasize youth meetings less and active participation in

ministry more. So they decided to finance the trip. “We looked at it and said, ‘why not?’ These young adults are on fire to spread the gospel right now. This is awesome!”³⁴

The second example was when a bold new ministry was proposed by a group of adults. The leadership thought about it long and hard. They decided to put the idea on hold telling them, “Let’s use that idea. Let’s keep it alive. But here’s our plan *now*. Who knows, maybe what you’re proposing should be in this plan.”³⁵ The ones who proposed the new ministry still carried intensive research in order to present more information to the executive committee for next time the congregation’s five year plan was put together. “Those two stories just go to show that having a plan in place allows leaders to be flexible and open to something new, but also keeps them on task, so they aren’t just jumping on something else: ‘Oh that’s cool, I heard of this church doing this; let’s try that!’ The church has a tendency to be great at that.”³⁶

As time goes on, using a comprehensive ministry plan to guide decisions builds the membership’s trust in the leadership. It can be infuriating, when the pastor is consistently forced to say no, both for the pastor and the members. The members interpret this as “Pastor’s way or the highway.” But the pastor is not just pushing for his way; he wants what is best for the congregation. But his well-known “no” communicates a different message. What he needs is for the congregation to trust he is doing what is in their best interest. What he needs is a comprehensive ministry plan. Pastor Hein shared how trust in the leadership was built over time as Beautiful Savior placed a high emphasis on sticking to the plans in place.

Our members see [the ministry plan] year after year and they have come to understand there is a lot of thought put into this. Not that all our decisions are wise; we’re not perfect. But the fact we have thought this through encourages the membership. They come to the understanding that the specific gospel work we are carrying out is extremely important. Questioning decreases and trust increases.³⁷

So while the leadership has to say no, members know there is good reason behind decisions. A track record of informed decision-making stemming from comprehensive ministry planning has proven the fact.

³⁴ Hunter, Interview.

³⁵ Hunter, Interview.

³⁶ Hunter, Interview.

³⁷ Hein, Interview.

I personally believe every congregation of every size would see more informed decision making after a comprehensive ministry plan is in place. The larger congregation, however, has more of a need for this than the smaller church. Because lay leadership turns over more in a larger congregation, there typically is more turnover of philosophies and ideas for ministry. The continual transitioning and training of new leaders in a bigger congregation necessitates being driven by a specific vision and specific plan.

Problems from not having a specific plan in place multiply for a large congregation with more than one pastor. I am speaking of the times when a pastor reads a book, talks to a colleague, or attends a conference and familiarizes himself with different styles of ministry. He will probably take those new ideas and tell his associate(s) he has finally found the answer their congregation has been searching for. While his intentions are pure, he could be doing more damage than good. An atmosphere of second-guessing can develop.

Pastor Joel Heckendorf is on a pastoral staff of three at Immanuel Lutheran in Greenville, WI. He and his colleagues have found comprehensive ministry planning curbs excessive excitement.

I see the benefits when the pastors get together. It's easy to say, "Hey, look what I just read!" and get everyone fired up. But someone has to press the brakes. It's not fun, but it's essential. Oftentimes we're brought back to reality when we compare the idea to our plan. You have to come to the realization that you can't do everything. Planning helps that. You say, "It's a great idea, but it really isn't where we want to go right now with our current plan and vision."³⁸

Pastor Hunter shared a similar observation,

You go to another church, or you read a blog, or you visit a thriving church and come back saying, "Oh, we have do this and that!" Well, maybe you do. But we are going to be reasoned about it. And we are going to make decisions with an informed mentality, instead of emotion or sheer force of personality. In the business world it translates into everyone gets afraid when a CEO goes to another business seminar, because he is going to come back with another big idea and it jerks everything around in another direction. You won't move forward. You'll end up in the ditch.³⁹

³⁸ Joel Heckendorf, phone interview, October 30, 2014. Pastor Heckendorf is a WELS pastor at Immanuel Lutheran in Greenville, WI. Serving as coordinating pastor on a pastorate of three, Pastor Heckendorf oversees the overall ministry direction at Immanuel.

³⁹ Hunter, Interview.

Not only does comprehensive ministry planning force you to evaluate new ideas for ministries, but it also leads you to take a good hard look at what is already in place. “Planning in general, but particularly ministry planning, forces you to become an evaluative person.”⁴⁰ Earlier we discussed the importance of justifying the plan after it is put together. When this happens, you have to think about and articulate the clear purposes of every branch of ministry in the plan. There has to be a good reason for every committee, event, and program. As the congregation works through the plan, you are forced to evaluate whether or not each of those ministries is carrying out the purpose for which you created it. Pastor Hein has seen this evaluative attitude among the leadership at his congregation.

We have become more efficient because we have set parameters if certain ministries should continue or not. That is one thing good planning does for us. There are no “sacred cows” that can’t be cut. Everything is constantly being looked at. What we want to serve more is not a program, but the gospel. If it serves the gospel, then we’ll continue to do it.⁴¹

This goes for long-standing ministries and relatively new ones. Five years ago at St. Andrew, where Pastor Hunter serves, a significant ministry was launched after years of preparation. The buildup and initial positives were substantial. But soon after ministry launched, the lights grew dimmer and dimmer. The leadership decided it was best to discontinue the ministry. Pastor Hunter reflects saying,

That was a hard, hard, hard decision that frustrated a lot of people. But it turned out to be inconsistent with our vision. It turned out to be inconsistent with our initial planning and reason for starting it. As difficult as it was for many, including myself, I now look back and understand how planning played an important in that final decision. It would still be in existence and struggling if we never planned it with the intention for it to do something specific in the first place.⁴²

⁴⁰ Heckendorf, Interview.

⁴¹ Hein, Interview.

⁴² Hunter, Interview.

Benefit Four - Increased Emphasis on Outreach

The writer of Psalm 116 was overcome by trouble and sorrow as he wrote, “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow” (Ps 116:3). After the LORD rescued him he responded, “You, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling” (116:8). He asks, “How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?” (116:12). Part of his response is what the apostle Paul quotes when he wrote, “I believed; therefore I have spoken” (2 Co 4:13).

The same is true for Christians of every age in time. “With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak” (2 Co 4:13). Christ has rescued us from the greatest affliction of all, the wages of sin. Our faith is built upon this reality. Then, with a grateful heart convinced by the gospel, we speak. We share the message of Christ with those who do not know him as their Savior.⁴³

The words of the Psalmist and the Apostle Paul give us the reasons we emphasize outreach. They tell us the *why* of sharing the good news of Jesus because of what he has done for us. So we come to this discussion understanding the gospel, and only the gospel is the Christian’s source of motivation for evangelism.

However, we also must approach evangelism with a clear perspective of our sinful nature. There would not be a need to even talk about evangelism if our sinful nature was weak. Then we would just go out and share the good news over and over again. But the reality is we have a sinful nature who fights tooth and nail to put a muzzle on our gospel-speaking New Man. This spiritual battleground, between one who wants to keep the gospel from others and one who wants to share it with every joe on the street, rages within us. As this battle rages in our heart, it also rages within the heart of the congregation because we are the make-up of the congregation.

The work of the Church is to proclaim the gospel in Word and Sacrament. This work happens in a variety of ways. The list includes worship, education, counseling, evangelism, youth discipleship, visitations, and so on. We can break these forms down into two categories: in-reach and outreach. The former uses the gospel to build up those within the congregation. The latter uses the gospel to reach out to those outside the congregation. In order to see results from

⁴³ David J. Valleskey, *We Believe - Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism* 4th ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 13.

the New Man versus Old Man battle going on in the congregation's heart, you can look at the balance between in-reach and outreach. Often the pendulum swings to the side of in-reach. So how can the leadership of a congregation get it swinging back the other way? How can they strike a healthy balance? I strongly believe comprehensive ministry can be used as a gospel tool by the leadership to increase outreach efforts and strike a healthy in-reach/outreach balance. The pastors I interviewed emphasized this point.

The congregation should not set a goal of striking a *perfect* balance between in-reach and outreach. That is unrealistic. An ideal percentage of the two does not exist. Instead the goal is to be faithful to the mission Christ has given us. In retrospect, I should have listed "remaining faithful to our God-given mission" in the list of "possible benefits" which guided the discussion of the interviews⁴⁴. Even though it was not on the list, Pastor Hunter pointed this out to start our conversation.

The most important motivation, and benefit, of thorough ministry planning is faithfulness to the mission of Jesus' Church. Adequate planning gives us a satisfaction that we are being faithful to the mission he has given us. We live in an area where we will have more opportunities for mission work than we will ever be able to carry out. We could do a lot of great things which have God-pleasing motivations and purposes. But we must choose where we will use Word and Sacrament. Planning helps us to do our best to strike the healthiest balance of worship, nurture, and outreach. It is just built into the plan. So the plan helps us stay faithful to the mission of Jesus' Church.⁴⁵

The sinful nature needs to be put down in order to put a proper emphasis on outreach. Pastor Panitzke shares how planning helps restrain our Old Man's desire to focus on only ourselves.

We have seen that if we don't consciously plan, we are only going to serve ourselves. We have to be battling against a selfish focus. If congregations are here to say, "We are going to serve those in our congregation and those in the community with the gospel," it's probably not going to happen. It usually doesn't work that way. It's a great philosophy in theory, but if you just *talk* about how you are going to put equal emphasis on both, usually what happens is you will only focus on in-reach. Why? Because those are the people who are talking about what you're doing. Those are the people who are critical of what you are doing. Those are the people begging for the pastor's time. So, naturally, you work to please them. Planning forces you to think about "what are we doing to reach the

⁴⁴ See Appendix A.

⁴⁵ Hunter, Interview.

lost.” Planning forces you to put that outreach philosophy, that mission statement, into action.⁴⁶

As we plan for ministry, we fight against exalting our needs above the needs of the lost. Our guide is Christ’s command to deny self. This is the theology of the cross. “The essence of the Christian’s cross in every stage of life and in every changing circumstance is this: *self-denial*. [Jesus] tells us, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (Mk 8:34).”⁴⁷

As the individuals who make up the Church struggle to deny themselves and carry their crosses, so does the Church. Putting the deserved emphasis on outreach is a cross the Church bears. The Church struggles to deny itself and reach out to others.⁴⁸ Yes, is it a joy to share the gospel. What is better than to share the good news of Jesus with those who have not heard it before? What is better than to see the light turn on as you teach a Bible instruction class? But it is hard to identify a cross our sinful nature wants to throw down more than going and knocking on the door of a world who considers the message of Christ foolishness (1 Cor 1). Planning is a tool⁴⁹ the congregation can use to use to curb our sinful nature as we seek to bear this cross.

In Luke 14, it is very interesting how Jesus makes a connection between planning and cross-bearing as he talks about the cost of being a disciple. As noted in part one, Jesus encourages planning when he says,

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?” (Lk 14:28-31).

But zoom out for a moment and look at Jesus’ words in context. Immediately before these verses Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife

⁴⁶ Panitzke, Interview.

⁴⁷ Daniel M. Deutschlander, *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections On His Cross and Ours* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008), 13.

⁴⁸ Self-denial might not be the best word to use for a cross the church bears. In the Great Commission, Christ has commanded that “making disciples” and “teaching” are involved in the work of the church. That is a part of in-reach. So saying the church denies itself doesn’t mean the church neglects ministering to the souls under her care.

⁴⁹ Emphasis is on *tool*. This is not meant to say planning replaces God’s Law in putting down our Old Man, or the gospel’s role in empowering us to carry our crosses.

and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26,27).

Right after his words on planning in vv. 28-31, Jesus says, “In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:33). So Jesus sandwiches his encouragement of planning with cross bearing. Jesus connects a plan with a cross.

Jesus tells us we need to think long and hard about where we place our loved ones in our hearts. Love for our dearest is not to go above our love for Christ. Loved for loved ones cannot go above our faithfulness to the calling Christ has given us. Jesus tells us this because he knows our love for the nearest and dearest things and people, including our love for self, can become an obstacle to our love for him.

Comprehensive ministry planning restricts the love for ourselves from poisoning the ministry waters of our congregation. Consequently, it is less likely for our ministry to just focus on whom we love and what we love to do; instead comprehensive ministry planning plans cross-bearing. Pastor Hein shared how this plays out in the ministry of Beautiful Savior in Summerville,

You plan to overcome your weaknesses. If you look at my day timer you’ll see there is no time scheduled for sermon study and sermon writing. The reason is I *love* text study and sermon writing. I love it. So I’m always going to give it the time it deserves without putting it on the schedule. But what you will find on my schedule is evangelism and delinquent calls. It may sound weird because I’ve been a mission pastor for years, but evangelism still scares me to death. My Old Man fights tooth and nail to tie me to my office chair. So I need to have those things in my day planner, or else I wouldn’t do them. I could write two sermons a week, put together some great Bible classes, and then do almost nothing for evangelism. I could look back on my week and still pat myself on the back and say I was faithful because I’m preaching Law and Gospel. There would be truth to that. But it would be a ministry driven by a theology of glory if I only did the things that I liked to do, the things that I was comfortable with, rather than doing the things which for me were crosses, which is making evangelism calls and delinquent calls.⁵⁰

Pastor Hein’s evaluation of his personal struggle to balance his time carrying out in-reach and outreach is no different for a church. Just as we must daily plan to overcome our individual weaknesses, so also a congregation must plan for ministry to overcome its weaknesses. A congregation has to intentionally plan to do the outreach it struggles to carry out.

A church does not have to put “worship every Sunday” in a comprehensive ministry plan. We love to worship. It is built into our DNA. A congregation will hold worship on Sunday

⁵⁰ Hein, Interview.

whether they plan it or not. We do not have to be intentional about growing in our life of sanctification through worship, a foundational piece of our life of faith. A church also might not need to have to plan on keeping up the property. Members will see the property work needing to be done and will offer their help. They'll say, "We need to keep this up; let's put it in the budget." But the typical church does not have a team full of members, pastors included, chomping at the bit to go door to door canvassing. They do not necessarily want to take the time on a Monday night to go meet with a worship visitor. Why? Because it makes us uncomfortable.

Planning holds the congregation accountable to bearing its cross. Planning is intentional about cross bearing. We must prod ourselves with a plan that holds us accountable to do what makes us uncomfortable.

Part 3 - The Correlation between Comprehensive Ministry Planning and Congregational Health

Methodology of Quantitative Research

Thus far I have delved into two sources of information to prove my thesis. First, I shared what Scripture has to say about a congregation's ministry planning. Second, I shared the most common benefits of comprehensive ministry planning found during lengthy one on one interviews. Those two sources offer the strongest arguments for comprehensive ministry planning. I also understand the focus of research up to this point could be labeled biased as I approached my study of Scripture and interviews already supporting comprehensive ministry planning. In response to this, I set out to conduct quantitative research in order to broaden the pool of study.

Using online surveys, I gathered information from sixty seven WELS congregations concerning their current methods of ministry planning. I had two specific goals as I began this portion of research. First, I wanted to grasp the current methods of ministry planning used in WELS congregation. Second, I wanted to see if there is a correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and congregational health.

For the second goal concerning congregational health, I focused on three statistics: average worship attendance, average adult Bible class attendance, and yearly adult confirmations. Above all, my interest was in studying the correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and adult confirmations. I set out to discover if there was a correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and congregational growth via adult confirmations.⁵¹

I set two specific criteria for the congregational sample group.⁵² One, all congregations had to be established before the year 2000.⁵³ And two, all congregations had to have a worship

⁵¹ As I have stated earlier in this paper and as I clearly stated to those pastors who participated in this survey, by no means do I intend to downplay the means of grace. I conducted this survey with the understanding that the means of grace are the only means by which a person's faith can be created, maintained or strengthened. Our Lord rightfully deserves and receives all credit when the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament produces numerical results.

⁵² All congregational statistics were gathered from the annual WELS statistical report found at <https://connect.wels.net/AOM/MCG/CongStatsReport/Pages/default.aspx>.

attendance of at least 100 worshipers in 2013. Then I broke these congregations into two groups. The first group of congregations had five or less adult confirmations in the years 2007, 2010, and 2013. They had to have five or less in *each* of those years. 163 congregations met the requirements for the first group. The second group of congregations had ten or more adult confirmations in 2007, 2010, and 2013. Twenty four congregations met the requirements for the second group. I intended to see if there was a percentile difference of congregations who used comprehensive ministry planning in the two groups. A total of 187 congregations were invited to fill out the survey, which can be found in appendix B. If a congregation had more than one pastor, I invited only one to participate.

My goal of the survey was to determine whether or not the congregation used comprehensive ministry planning or not. Two factors stood out in helping me make this determination. I wanted to know if the congregation was ministry planning for more than three years. Second, I wanted to know if this ministry plan was for the entirety of their congregation's ministry. A building plan or an outreach plan would not suffice to be considered a comprehensive ministry plan.

Three particular questions stood out above the rest in helping me achieve my goal. The first was the third question of the survey where I gave a description of operational planning and the participant answered with a simple yes or no if the description described their congregation (see Appendix B). The second was the fourth question of the survey where the participant was offered the opportunity to describe their congregation's ministry planning in their own words. The third was the seventh question of the survey where the participant chose from three options as to which best described their congregation's ministry planning efforts. For the most part, if the participant chose "we have an overall ministry plan in place which includes an outreach plan", then they were a congregation who used comprehensive ministry planning more often than not.

Of the 187 congregations who were invited to fill out the survey, sixty seven responded. Along with those congregations who filled out the survey, I included the five congregations I interviewed as they all met the criterion I set for the congregations who filled out the survey. While these five did not fill out the survey, I had no reservation to include them with those congregations who used comprehensive ministry planning as each one gave me an in depth look

⁵³ As the focus of my paper is more focused on established congregations, I did not want to include mission congregations. This is not to say that mission congregations should not use comprehensive ministry planning.

at their methods of ministry planning. That brought the total number of congregations included in this quantitative research to 72.

Results

The first table shows how many of the congregations surveyed used comprehensive ministry planning and how many did not.

Table 1 (All 72 congregations)		
Method of Planning	Number of Congregations	Percentage of 72 congregations
Comprehensive Ministry Planning	32	44%
Non - Comprehensive Ministry Planning	40	56%

The second and third table show the distinction of planning methods used by those congregations who had five or less adult confirmations in 2007, 2010, and 2013 and those who had ten or more adult confirmations in 2007, 2010, and 2013.

Table 2 (49 congregations who had 5 or less adult confirmations in 2007, 2010, and 2013)		
Method of Planning	Number of Congregations	Percentage of 49 congregations
Comprehensive Ministry Planning	14	29%
Non-Comprehensive Ministry Planning	35	71%

Table 3 (23 congregations who had 10 or more adult confirmations in 2007, 2010, and 2013)		
Method of Planning	Number of Congregations	Percentage of 23 congregations
Comprehensive Ministry Planning	18	78%
Non-Comprehensive Ministry Planning	5	22%

Tables four and five show the correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and a change in average worship attendance from 2007 to 2013.

Table 4 (32 Congregations who used comprehensive ministry planning)		
Combined 2007 Average Worship Attendance	Combined 2013 Average Worship Attendance	Percentage of Increase or Decrease
12,501	12,558	0.45% Increase

Table 5 (40 Congregations did NOT use comprehensive ministry planning)		
Combined 2007 Average Worship Attendance	Combined 2013 Average Worship Attendance	Percentage of Increase or Decrease
9,241	8,369	9.4% Decrease

Tables six and seven show the correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and a change in average adult Bible class attendance from 2007 to 2013.

Table 6 (32 Congregations who used comprehensive ministry planning)		
Combined 2007 Average Adult Bible Class Attendance	Combined 2013 Average Adult Bible Class Attendance	Percentage of Increase or Decrease
2,957	3,348	13.2% Increase

Table 7 (40 Congregations did NOT use comprehensive ministry planning)		
Combined 2007 Average Adult Bible Class Attendance	Combined 2013 Average Adult Bible Class Attendance	Percentage of Increase or Decrease
2,018	1,911	5.3% Decrease

Discussion

In his book *Church Growth Principles*, C. Kirk Hadaway pulls statistics from a large scale survey conducted in 1988 of over 500 metropolitan Southern Baptist churches. The survey was sent to selected pastors from three types of congregations: churches displaying rapid growth, churches displaying a plateau in growth, and churches experiencing numerical decline. The survey was designed to test a wide variety of hypotheses concerning principles in the Church Growth movement.⁵⁴ One of those hypotheses was “does a planning process which involves evaluation and a long-range plan correlate with church growth?” The results came back in the affirmative. The survey results showed eighty five percent of the churches which had stepped off a numerical growth plateau and into a steady growth period had reevaluated their programs at least five years prior to their growth. Only fifty nine percent of the churches which remained on the plateau took the same measures. Also, forty percent of the “breakout churches” had

⁵⁴ Hadaway, 12.

developed a long-range plan, as compared to only eighteen percent of the churches which remained on the plateau.⁵⁵

C. Kirk Hadaway's survey, the interviews I conducted, and the survey of WELS pastors I conducted all communicate that there is a correlation between a concerted effort on long-term ministry planning and congregational growth. The fact, shown in tables 2 and 3, that over three fourths of the congregations who consistently had ten or more adult confirmations over a six year period used comprehensive ministry planning and less than thirty percent of congregations who consistently had five or less adult confirmations over the same period of time did not use comprehensive ministry planning clearly shows the correlation. This particular result of my survey sticks out head and shoulders above the rest.

Because I first tallied up the results of adult confirmation statistics, I was a little surprised when there was not as strong of a correlation between comprehensive ministry planning and average worship attendance. The results show the average worship attendance of those congregations who used comprehensive ministry planning remained about the same while those who did not had about a ten percent decrease.

There was more of a distinction for the average adult Bible class statistic. Over six years, there was a notable growth in Bible class attendance among congregations who used comprehensive ministry planning and a slight decrease among those who did not. I did not list it in the results section, but another noteworthy statistic has to do with the percentage of worshipers who attend adult Bible class. In 2013 twenty seven percent of the average worship attendance attended adult Bible class in comprehensive ministry planning congregations. In the same year twenty three percent of the average worship attendance attended adult Bible class in congregations who did not use comprehensive ministry planning.

A manual on writing the discussion section of this type of research instructs me to explain the reason for correlations found in the resulting data. But when it comes to explaining results which show the above correlations, I am hesitant. A simple answer would be "God is choosing to bless these congregations numerically more than those." While that is true, it is also cutting the conversation short. We are probably keeping the discussion short because we do not want to place a method of ministry over the power of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 120.

To be perfectly clear, using comprehensive ministry planning is not a firm guarantee for congregational growth; only God can choose to bless gospel proclamation in Word and Sacrament where and when he pleases. So what *do* the results of this particular survey tell us? They do not tell us if a congregation uses comprehensive ministry planning they will automatically see a significant increase in adult confirmations, worship attendance, and Bible class attendance. The results of this survey are not guaranteeing future results in ministry. But what the results of this particular survey do tell us God *is* in fact blessing the gospel ministry efforts of congregations who use comprehensive ministry planning. With this study's results, the work of the Holy Spirit is being put on display concerning congregations who organize their gospel proclamation with comprehensive ministry planning. That is something each and every congregation who does not think long term ministry planning is important should strongly consider.

Self-Criticism of Quantitative Research

I am not a social scientist or a statistician. I am a student of theology attending a seminary who trains its students to put their theology into practice. A difficulty throughout my survey research was carrying out the research while at the same time familiarizing myself with legitimate research methods in order to produce legitimate results. While I do believe my results and conclusions are legitimate, I am the first to say here were weaknesses in my research.

First, identifying congregations who could be labeled comprehensive ministry planners was difficult. Some congregations planned farther into the future than others. Some included a majority of their ministries in their plans more than others. There were approximately fifteen surveys where I had to look long and hard at their answers to make a decision. More than anything, I wanted to make a clear distinction between congregations who had detailed long term plans and those who stick strictly to operational planning. I believe I did.

Second, the sampling of congregations for tables four through seven could have been more random. The primary hang up occurred when I broadened my focus from just adult confirmations to adult confirmations, average worship attendance, and average adult Bible class attendance in the middle of sending out my surveys. If I did this again I would have selected two hundred other congregations for those particular emphases.

Third, I should have reached back to ten or more years instead of just six. I chose to use 2007 to 2013 because it was less likely there would have been a pastoral change at the congregation over six year period compared to ten or more years. There were some congregations who said they had just started to use comprehensive ministry planning within the past few years. If I would have reached farther back and if there was a change in pastors, there probably would have been more congregations who had changed the way they planned over a six year period. If this were the case, the statistical blessings of their ministry planning would have been more difficult to gather.

Conclusion

Not every congregation is ready to put together and work through a comprehensive ministry plan. Those steps are at the end of what may be a long ten step process. Many other steps need to happen first before a congregation puts the time into formulating and implementing a comprehensive ministry plan. Committees need to be formed. A long process of congregational assessment needs to be done. The congregational leaders need to come to an agreement on what method of planning they will actually use.

This thesis shares research that may assist you to get the comprehensive ministry planning ball rolling. Reading the wealth of literature on how to ministry plan is not a starter. A congregation must first agree to go through with long term ministry planning. I believe the information shared in this thesis can be extremely useful for those conversations. I hope this thesis will be read by pastors who are attempting to convince their leadership to put more effort in ministry planning. I also hope this thesis will be read by a congregational president who is trying to convince his pastor to take the lead in the congregation ministry planning efforts.

Though it sounds so simple, it is extremely difficult to convince someone planning is necessary. It sounds so elementary we hesitate to say provide the argument. I believe that is a reason many authors have not spent much time on the *why* of ministry planning as they write their “how to ministry plan” books. But look at all Scripture has to say about planning. Look at the agreed upon and shared benefits of those who use comprehensive ministry planning. The fact they have seen similar benefits for their ministries is convincing. Then look to the fact God has blessed many congregations who use comprehensive ministry planning with an increase in adult confirmations, worship attendance, and Bible class attendance. Now you have something to share with those who do not believe comprehensive ministry planning is worth the time of your congregation.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for WELS Pastors Implementing Comprehensive Ministry Planning

1. What observations and events led you to increase your planning efforts?
2. Is your planning comprehensive?
 - *Does it include all areas of ministry?*
 - *Does it seek input from multiple leaders and members? Who all is involved in its formulation?*
 - *Is it thorough?*
 - *Is it goal oriented?*
3. Benefits of planning. (see list on next page)
 - *Changes in the congregation you've seen directly correlated to your planning efforts*
 - *Primary benefits*
 - *Secondary benefits*
4. How have you encouraged the lay leadership of your congregation to increase their planning efforts?
5. What are some key points you would bring up with someone who doesn't think good planning is all that important in the work of a church?
6. Do you think there is a lack of planning in WELS congregations?
7. What have you done to educate yourself in leading your congregation through the process of ministry planning?
8. What do you think could be done to better equip WELS pastors to lead a congregation through ministry planning?
9. What didn't I ask that I should have?

Possible benefits of congregational planning at your specific congregation

- Builds a consensus among the leadership and membership as to the direction of ministry
- Develops teamwork among the membership
- Builds on congregational strengths and minimizes its weaknesses
- Promotes an “other” attitude (outreach mindedness)
- Promotes better stewardship of God’s gifts to the congregation. (finances, talents, facilities, etc.)
- Opens the eyes of the membership on how they can involve themselves.
- Establishes an evaluative attitude which seeks to make needed adjustments to ministry efforts
- Informed decision-making that supports long-range strategic direction
- Organizational alignment with enhanced effectiveness and efficiency
- Improved communication between leadership and membership. Better communication among leadership.
- Better calculates, manages, and directs financial resources
- Rise in giving as members see how and where their gifts will be used.
- Please share some of your own!

Appendix B
Survey Questions

1. Does your congregation have a mission statement

- Yes
- No

2. Does your congregation have a written out and specific vision statement which guides ministry planning?

- Yes
- No

3. Would this description of ministry planning describe your congregation?

“Decisions concerning ministry efforts are made on a meeting to meeting basis. Typically those decisions are purely based off of the results from the previous month or year of ministry. The method of strategic long-range planning is not used.”

- Yes
- No

4. If you answered NO to the above question, please briefly describe the ministry planning process of your congregation. If you answered YES and want to clarify what your congregation does for ministry planning, please do so.

- (paragraph answer)

5. Is your congregation currently working through a long-term ministry plan?

(By “long-term” I mean three or more years)

- Yes
- No

6. If you answered YES to the above question, does that plan include all areas of ministry which your congregation carries out?

- Yes
- No

7. Choose which best describes your congregation.

- We have an overall ministry plan in place which includes an outreach plan.
- We do not have an overall ministry plan in place, but we do have a document articulating our outreach plan.
- We have not developed an overall ministry plan and we have not developed an outreach plan.

8. Does your congregation have a routine process in place which measures results from previous ministry efforts?

(This could take place monthly, quarterly, annually, etc.)

- Yes
- No

9. Does your congregation have a routine process in place where it sets specific ministry goals?

- Yes
- No

10. In your opinion, rate the need for your congregation to increase its efforts in ministry planning.

- No need at all
- Minimal need
- Apparent need
- Considerable need
- Pressing need

11. In the context of your specific congregation, what are the primary obstacles and difficulties in formulating and implementing a congregational ministry plan?

- (paragraph answer)

12. Agree to Disagree scale. “Understanding the Holy Spirit is the only one who can create, maintain, and strengthen faith; there is a correlation between congregational growth and adequate ministry planning.”

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. What is your interest level in using a congregational counseling group to assess the current ministry of your congregation and to assist in formulating a ministry plan based off of that assessment?

- (scale of 0-5)

14. Concerning the question directly above, please explain why you answered the way you did.