

TRAINING THIS GENERATION TO TEACH THE NEXT: TRANSFERRING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE IN BRAZIL

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Transferring Christian knowledge in Brazil

In a letter to the participants of this conference containing preliminary information by Pastor Tomhave, a comment was cited from the 1988 conference. The idea behind the comment has had a tremendous impact on our work in Brazil, for it is from that idea that our Brazilian work plan developed. The comment says: "A missionary's purpose does not end when we have found or gathered a group of people who are willing to listen to us and let us pastor them. That is only the beginning. Our ultimate goal must be to build them up spiritually to the point where they can minister to themselves so that we can move on."

The plan that has been developed on the Brazilian field by the mission coordinator, Pastor Richard Starr, has this very goal in mind. It is called the Ephesus Plan. It is the method we plan to use to accomplish what the title of this paper says. It is our method to "train this generation to teach the next."

Please understand correctly the phrase, "we plan to use" this method. Parts of the Ephesus Plan are already in use. We are busily engaged in planting churches in Porto Alegre and Dourados (and also Campinas in the near future). However, to this date we have not found the people who seem to have the desired qualifications to be trained to be future trainers. Right now the vast majority of our efforts are being spent on gathering this generation, so that we can then train the generation to teach the next.

That being the case, I have chosen to present the Ephesus Plan to you nearly verbatim as Pastor Starr wrote it in 1989. A few minor points have been updated. In this way you will have a good idea of how we in Brazil plan to train this generation to teach the next.

The Ephesus Plan, by Richard D. Starr

As the newest WELS world mission field, WELS in Brazil has some unique opportunities as we formulate our plans for the future under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have the advantage of gleaning the best ideas from the strategy and self-analysis statements of other WELS fields. An increased awareness in the area of missiology by many within Christendom has resulted in a proliferation of books on the subject, books which contain some interesting insights. Of course, by God's grace, we also have the blessing of an inspired book on the subject, written before the term missiology had even been coined, namely, the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

In planning for the future work of the WELS in Brazil, we are able to look at what the Christian church was like in the first century of its existence, what it has become today and what we would like it to be in the future. Although our Brazilian field is not completely free of traditions and preconceived notions regarding the division of labor within the church, we do have the opportunity to shape and influence the basic external form and structure of this church body. The renewed interest in lay involvement and lay ministry within the church, which the WELS is currently experiencing, will certainly have an impact on our plans, too.

A basic premise involved in this type of long-range planning is that the Lord gives each generation special challenges and resources with which to work in spreading the good news of salvation. In utilizing those gifts, offices, forms of office and resources which the Holy Spirit has given our generation, we are not in any way condemning or gain-saying the faithful use of such resources by past generations. We must recognize that the Lord Christ may produce, through the circumstances of time, different offices and forms of office. It is the responsibility of each generation to use them to God's glory in the most faithful way.

What are our resources and challenges at this time in Brazil? The country is as large as the forty-eight contiguous states of the USA; we have five WELS missionaries. In contrast, Zambia is the size of Texas and has ten WELS missionaries. The middle and upper classes of Brazil are fairly well educated. They are extremely interested in learning English as a means of job advancement. Communication and transportation within the country, while not always as advanced and reliable as in the USA, are inexpensive and quite adequate for our purposes. The populace is interested in religion but disillusioned with the lies of Roman Catholicism. We have three preaching stations, which consist of a few families. The economic situation of the country is in a shambles, which may be one way in which the Lord is preparing a bountiful harvest of Brazilian souls since they cannot put their trust in the cruzeiro (money). The sister church body in Brazil of the LC-MS received tremendous amounts of financial subsidy from its wealthy American sister and still relies heavily on that funding. Now that the funding is being withdrawn by the financially-strapped LC-MS, the Brazilian church body is experiencing severe weaning pains. A most dangerous and harmful precedent of large amounts of subsidy has been set by the LC-MS before us. As a consequence, some of our former members viewed subsidy from the WELS as a foregone conclusion and an expected right.

However, we dare not look only at Brazil and Brazilians as we plan for the future. What baggage do we expatriates carry with us into Brazil as a church body and as individual missionaries? By God's grace, a solid foundation on Scripture, first of all, is our heritage. We have an excellent training in the truths of God's Word. We have been faithfully and diligently prepared to function well as parish pastors. Yet, is the typical WELS midwestern congregation the ideal for which we are to strive in Brazil? Is a 200 communicant congregation with a two-room Christian day school and one "Herr Pastor" what we want to see in Brazil by the year 2010? If it is, then we can start working right now on five such congregations and we had better place them well from the very beginning for that is all the congregations we shall have in Brazil for a long time. That is what will happen if the BWM and the Latin America Executive Committee and, more importantly, we missionaries ourselves view us simply as pastors serving in a foreign land.

Recently I was impressed by some comments from August Pieper written in 1916 and translated by Carl J. Lawrenz. Professor Pieper wrote, "A little congregation of a few souls in some remote nook of the world ought not to be charged with despising God's gifts or the gospel if it does not engage a recognized pastor but gets along with the best gifts which it has in its own midst, as this had to be done by the first congregations founded by Paul in Pisidia."

To me, that sounds a lot like Brazil. But could it be? Could there be a true, functioning and God-pleasing Christian congregation without a WELS pastor leading it? The concept is intriguing. Yet it creates a problem for me. I've been trained to be a Timothy but now I'm called to be a Paul. How do I, as an individual and as a member of a team, adjust to being a missionary instead of a pastor?

In my opinion, I must first realize, as Professor Pieper wrote, that "as far as the form of the public ministry of the church is concerned, there is no external regulation, either of a legal or evangelical kind;...that there is no divinely instituted and prescribed form of the ministry, even for the administration of Word and sacrament, that the Holy Spirit here works freely through free Christians." So, I am truly free to be creative and imaginative in my faithful use of God's abundant grace and gifts in his kingdom.

The task before us is formidable. We're charged with evangelizing the fifth largest country with the sixth largest population in the world using five expatriate missionaries. It is a true understatement to say we are faced with a severe manpower deficit. If we are to be more efficient in our use of the God-given resources before us, we must change some ideas and methods which may have worked well in the past in order to utilize our potential to the maximum.

The solution is not a new one; it is as old as the Christian church. It is, however, a somewhat forgotten one. Again, August Pieper hit the nail on the head when he wrote in 1916, "No church has set forth the doctrine of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians more clearly and emphasized it more

strongly than the Lutheran church,...And no church puts this doctrine less into practice. Among us the laity is largely consigned to listening and doing nothing in the congregation, and the pastor wants to do everything by himself." If we, as missionaries, want to be pastors and do everything by ourselves, the nationals will let us, human nature being what it is. We missionaries will work hard and faithfully for our Savior and thank him for the privilege, feeling we have done the best we could and that the Lord's will was done. However, the result will be a dependent national church constantly relying on expatriates. That may stroke our ego, in a perverse sort of way, but, in my opinion, it is not serving God's kingdom of grace in the best possible manner.

So, what do we do? WELS in Brazil is trying to look to the biblical example of the consummate missionary, the Apostle Paul, in formulating a plan to bring about a four-selfs (propagating, governing, supporting and discipling) church within the next twenty years. We call our strategy "THE EPHESUS PLAN."

EPHESUS PLAN

NAME OF PLAN--"EPHESUS"

- Paul spent approximately 3 years in Ephesus, planting a church.
- We would like to spend 3 years (more or less) in each new field or area with a two-man expatriate team.
- The time frame is flexible. The mission council will periodically review the situation in each area and decide with the two-man team and the congregation when the expatriate team should move to a new area. This should help prevent missionaries from becoming long-term pastors of individual congregations and congregations from becoming too dependent on a missionary as their fulltime pastor.

TARGET GROUP

- We want to serve all people with the gospel, without regard for their race, education, social status and/or wealth.
- In Christian freedom, however, a target group without discrimination and exclusivity, can be an aid in planning an orderly and effective outreach.
- Our target group is the middle class, which has an education (can read distributed materials), religious interest (open door), and the capability to support the work financially. Because we are working in Brazil, this group is also mostly lapsed Roman Catholics.

IDEAL SITUATION

- Two expatriate missionaries work in a rapidly growing area (examples: Sao Paulo, western frontier) for three years, establishing a congregation that can function with an active lay ministry and without a fulltime pastor until national pastors are available.
- Lay ministry functions with materials supplied by expatriate missionaries and national pastors, under frequent (monthly) visits by a supervising missionary or national pastor. Lay leaders teach, read sermons, make calls (evangelism, member, sick, delinquent, etc.), administer sacraments, totally administer all secular affairs of the congregation.
- As these congregations grow and develop, we anticipate natural leaders to become evident who would be encouraged by their peers to pursue further training in a Bible Institute/Seminary.
- Subsidy for students (determined by nationals), rent for meeting places, support of national pastors (determined by nationals), support for new exploratory areas, funds for buildings, etc. all come totally from nationals. No WELS subsidy whatsoever, other than the expatriate missionary team.

IMAGE OF LUTHERAN CHURCH IN BRAZIL

- MINUS: only for Germans, formal, cold, boring, the German Roman Catholic Church.
- PLUS: good schools, closer to Bible than the Roman Catholic Church, no pope.

HOW TO BEGIN IN A NEW AREA

- Plan future expansion work with church leaders.
- Serve contacts from current church members, which may not always get us into ideal "Church Growth" localities.
- Fulfill a perceived need and utilize one of the Lutheran Church's image pluses, that of improving English language skills. Many middle class Brazilians want to know English, since this can increase their salaries and promotion possibilities. Emphasis is always on teaching Bible truths, not English. However, we can be ready to help with English language problems and provide an opportunity for Brazilians to speak with native English speakers (a high priority for many people). In this way, we can show ourselves as Christians who are warm and caring people (overcoming an image problem) with something worthwhile to share.
- The Information Center functions in Portuguese, at the end of the three-year period with lay ministers. The "Communicating Christ" Audio-Visual Adult Bible Doctrine Course" by Carl Leyrer, translated in Portuguese, can be used effectively.
- Emphasis is also placed on keeping people in Bible study after they have been confirmed, viewing confirmation only as a beginning to the study of God's word and not an end.

MATERIALS

- Everything used by the expatriate missionaries and the national pastors must be transferable for use by the lay leaders.
- The first "generation" of converts must be involved in gaining and training the second "generation" of converts using these transferable materials.
- Materials will be translated and originally produced by expatriates and nationals.
- Direct mailings, radio, newspapers, billboards, mobile loudspeakers, etc., are available means of advertising.

GOD'S WILL BE DONE AND HIS NAME BE PRAISED!

Richard D. Starr
6 September 1989
Latin American Missionaries' Conference

You get a good idea from the Ephesus Plan how we intend to train this generation to train the next. Because we have relatively very few souls at this point in Brazil, less even than when we started, and because we have to this point not found the people with the desired qualifications to be trained for the public ministry, it is premature to say that this is how we are doing it. (A possible exception is one of our laypeople in Campinas. He has actively evangelized his friends and relatives, has formed a small group of Christians on his own initiative -- certainly not discounting the Holy Spirit's initiative, of course -- has conducted Sunday morning Bible studies provided by the missionaries and administered Holy Communion to the group, and received infrequent visits from the missionaries for training. Our present intention is to send one missionary in January to live in Campinas and concentrate his efforts on training this layman and his wife much more intensely.) As stated earlier, the vast majority of our efforts now are being spent on gathering this generation so that, once gathered, we can concentrate more heavily on training it to teach the next. May our gracious Lord bless those efforts, for Jesus' sake.

Bruce J. Marggraf
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