

WHO IS THIS CHURCH? THE NECESSITY OF PROPER ASSESSMENT,
LEADERSHIP, AND STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH IN TRANSITION

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Abstract

In the 21st Century, the relevance of needed “change” in congregations is growing. With communities changing in makeup, congregational leadership dwindling, and congregational health often suffering, pastors and members alike need to be prepared to make the necessary adjustments for their congregation “in transition.” Many congregations face a struggle as they look to adjust to the changes or problems around them, while others simply need to find a new direction because of positive changes. No matter what the change or need that confronts a congregation, it will benefit from becoming more aware of several basic needs as they develop a strategy moving forward.

The goal of this paper is to provide a significant amount of research done with pastors experienced in overcoming transition, several conservative and contemporary author’s approaches to transition, and a biblical study of a gospel-centered approach to transition. The approach offered and discussed in this paper follows the Identity Method. The emphasis in this approach is assessment, the gospel as motivation, and leadership led change.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| I. FACING THE ISSUE | 7 |
| II. LOOKING IN THE MIRROR | 10 |
| Warning signs | |
| Symptoms and issues | |
| III. HOW CAN A CHURCH ADDRESS IT? | 13 |
| Difficulties of transition | |
| What if it doesn't work? | |
| What if it does work? | |
| IV. THE BASICS PRESCRIBED FOR TRANSITION | 16 |
| Why do people return? | |
| Meeting religious needs | |
| Improving the quality of ministry | |
| V. PROPOSED MODEL: THE IDENTITY MODEL | 17 |
| Understanding your Lutheran Identity | |
| Lutheran Identity versus Christian Identity | |
| Nurturing an understanding of your Christian Identity | |
| Find your Congregational Identity | |
| Find your Community Identity | |
| Let God direct your "Identity" | |
| Establish leadership and initiating vision | |
| CONCLUSION | 34 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 35 |
| APPENDIX A | 37 |
| APPENDIX B | 38 |
| APPENDIX C | 42 |

Literature Review

The majority of the research for this paper was completed with the assistance of several written resources from both conservative and liberal authors. The rationale behind this was to gain a wide variety of perspectives on how congregations go about making a change. Not surprisingly, the majority of published material that is available fits into the more liberal side of approach. The church growth movement has been driven by an influx of how-to books and inspirational stories intended to be used for starting or morphing small (and therefore struggling) congregations into large congregations. The difficulty in this approach was the attentive eye that needed to be present to sift through these sources to find nuggets of applicable truth for the church in transition. More often than not, these non-conservative resources prescribed an approach that was intended to overhaul an “old way of thought” about church. They would see positive results as large numbers. For example, improving the health of a small church would not fit into the formula they proposed. In the same way, improving the programs of a mid-sized church without the desire to continually increase the size of ministry would also not fit into their formula.

With this difficulty in mind, there were several resources and authors that served only to provide familiarity with how others approach the subject of change. Tim Conder’s *The Church in Transition*, Dan Southerland’s *Transitioning*, and Ron Crandall’s *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church* are all well heralded books in the more mainstream community. Each of them began quite well with inspirational stories to urge change in our dying churches, but none of these titles offered worthwhile advice. The common advice in all three was the importance of an energetic and driven pastor-leader to bring change to a small dying church. Some information in this area is undeniably true, just as Ron Crandall spends a significant time reminding us that pastors must “know and love your people,”¹ that the basis for positive change is found because “the pastors who serve...have described their commitment to Scripture,”² and at the same time he calls the foundation of the churches work “is to be faithful to the work of Christ in the life of every believer, to the end that ‘rooted and grounded in love,’ we might live lives worthy of being called children of God.”³

¹ Ron Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church* (), 44.

² *Ibid.*, 136.

³ *Ibid.*, 105. – Crandall’s basis for evangelism and change in a given congregation is less about preaching Christ and his saving message because of Christ’s call to do so and more about serving the purpose of living more and more

However, several mainstream authors provided some good information and biblical reflection on subjects very pertinent and applicable for the type of transition that this thesis covers. I would place Aubrey Malphurs in this group. Malphurs' *Planting Growing Churches* has a fair amount of content that is especially geared toward mega-churches, but the biblical discussions on change are often quite well done. Malphurs is very good at providing practical advice for self-assessment of pastors as well as assessment of struggling ministries. While this may be the case, there is still a substantial amount of stances taken that signify an allegiance to the church growth movement and perhaps the emerging church.

One source that was extremely helpful and conservative was Lyle E. Schaller. This thesis admittedly relies considerably on much of his writing. He speaks on the subject of change with proper care and awareness that it is a sensitive subject to many. At the same time, he provides a large amount of information for multiple scenarios of transition and gives various remedies for consideration. His aim in writing is assuredly not church growth, but congregational health. In this area of discussion, Schaller's *Growing Plans*, *44 Steps Up Off the Plateau*, *Strategies for Change*, *Looking in the Mirror*, and *Effective Church Planning* are all extremely beneficial and informational works on the subject of transition and congregational health. All of these books were read in their entirety for this thesis, but the one that stuck out as the most beneficial for the subject at hand was *44 Steps Up Off the Plateau*. It specifically deals with the situation this thesis discusses in a Scriptural and practical way: the established church plagued by problems. On the subjects of self-assessment and transition, Schaller generally speaks just as well as current mainstream writers, but conservatively enough to be incredibly useful for the pastor with these needs in mind.

Leadership is one area that Schaller did not get into great depth on in the selections read for this thesis. On the subject of leadership, Malphurs and Mancini are highly regarded on the subject. However, their model leaves much to be desired for the model WELS congregation. They prefer and even single out as the only real approach to leadership, to be the pastor as the leader and others as his followers. One very helpful selection on leadership which was beneficial and recommended for others found from these authors is in Malphurs' approach in *Planting Growing Churches*. The servant-leader model is not perfect as written, but much of the reflection

according to the glory of God, thus becoming glorious ourselves. The tones of works righteousness and church growth ooze throughout these selections and hinder the reader from finding a truly Scriptural basis for a new direction.

and biblical advice surrounding this sixth chapter of the book is extremely beneficial for the pastor to reflect on to evaluate his own leadership. A resource for promoting and instilling a mission mindset as a pastoral leader is Richard Schultz's *The Christian's Mission*, in which he studies scripture from the view of the layman to see the call every Christian has according to God's Word.

The problem with every selection that was read for this thesis, was that none of them lacked some bias or improper focus on the subject at hand: self-assessment, strategizing, finding identity, and establishing leadership for the purpose of congregational health. For this reason, the content of the following thesis is beneficial in taking conservative and mainstream information and incorporating it into the context of our Synod and the struggles of many of our congregations as they look to evaluate ministry and work through a transition.

Introduction

Who are you? That is the question at the center of self-assessment. It is the question that most young adults struggle with at some point in their developmental years. As they look in the mirror and struggle with their identity, they hope and pray to figure out what their life has been, what it is now, and what they should do in the future. That is a frightening time and a difficult task to face. Though difficult, it is an important activity. Analyzing the past, present, and future is an essential part of finding direction. It is that personal assessment that is necessary for every pastor to ask of himself and the church he serves.

So who are you? Staring in the mirror, what do you see? If it is a church with a detailed strategy in place, with all the right answers, top notch leadership, and a pastor with the time, energy, and focus to lead that church in that strategy...then this paper is not for you. If you look in the mirror and see something that troubles you, something that needs immediate attention, or don't even know what you see...then this paper is definitely for you. The fact that you may look in the mirror and not see perfection is not out of the ordinary. Actually, it places you in the majority.

The focus of this paper is to assist a pastor hoping to find a direction and strategy for a church that faces a period of transition. This term may seem either foreign or a bit dirty for those conservative Lutherans who have read anything about the church growth movement. The use of this term in this paper is intended to be without any negative associations. To make this a reality, it is proper to first define what it is intended to mean. What does it mean to be "in transition?" In this paper, it refers to any church facing an issue that needs to be addressed with a new strategy or direction. This could be as simple as having little involvement with the youth or a struggling music ministry, but could be as great as the threat of closing a church or school.

If a pastor considers this term and believes it applies to him and his congregation in no way at all, I would challenge him to continue to assess his ministry. The fact is, whether we realize it or not, every church is continually facing issues that need to be addressed with a strategy that is big or small. If we see no issues, we may be blind to the many issues that are hiding in the shadows or may even be content with mediocrity. There is a good likelihood though, that this isn't a problem at all, because a significant percentage of WELS congregations

are in decline as we speak.⁴ No, ministry isn't a numbers game, but the realization by an increasing majority of WELS called workers is that we are losing members and failing to reach an even greater amount of the lost in our communities. This isn't due to God's Word becoming weak or a deficiency of skills in our called workers, but can in large part be credited to a lack of knowing what to do. The goal of this paper is to encourage and equip the reader to address the problems that a pastor and his congregation may be facing or will face in the future as transitions come into the picture. The shift in ministerial approach has come quite slowly, but it has come from a good place. The abundant need for the gospel outside church doors, the abundance of condoned and encouraged sinful living, the lack of church attendance, the decay of spiritual growth among the youth, and the prominence of a post-modern society that despises organized religion have all led the church to seek more ways to reach this dark, lost world with the gospel. This plays a huge role in the motivation to consider how we do gospel ministry among our flock and in our community today.

Consider the words of Fred Toppe from a paper written in 1995. These issues were on our mind then and continue today. His words echo the sentiment of transition that we consider in this paper and consider as we look at the Synod we serve in:

“It is difficult to assimilate into our churches those who do not share our northern European heritage and our industrious Germanic outlook on life. In my paper I asked, “Would we start a mission in Baton Rouge without a nucleus of ‘our kind of people’ to give it a start, or in Quebec City, or San Francisco, or New York City?” Since that time we did start a mission in Baton Rouge to serve our kind of people who had moved there. We tried in New York City (Brooklyn and Manhattan), but the missions soon folded. We haven't attempted missions in San Francisco or Quebec City, or in any place where we do not have a community of our kind of people.”

“In my paper I asked, could we change the mindset of our church so that we would see mission work not as the domain of home and world missionaries but as a function of all congregations and of all members in our congregations. I concluded: Here, I think, is the direction in which we need to look, to the mission not of professionals, not of the clergy, not to the missionaries sanctioned by boards, but to the mission of all of us. ...It is in regaining a personal sense of responsibility for the souls of our neighbors that we will be able to move in our

⁴ Congregational Report statistics reveal that at least 5% of our congregations have seen a significant decline in membership in the past 10 years (an average decline of double digits per year or 10% overall) and over 20% are seeing similar trends to the rest of Christian denominations in the U.S. (a decline in membership every year, no adult baptisms, or a decline of 5% or more over 10 years). The statistical reports are often incomplete with updated information for many congregations, but the numbers and trends still point to a trend of significant transition in our congregations.

congregations beyond ‘our kind of people’ and that we will more vigorously pursue God’s command to ‘preach the Gospel to all creation’.”⁵

What are we up against “being in transition?”

Somewhere between 65 and 85 percent of all Protestant congregations founded more than a decade ago are either declining in number or on a plateau in size.⁶ A more startling generalization is that the majority of members in most Protestant churches on the North American continent are more comfortable with stability or decline than with the changes required to stop this pattern.⁷ The status quo has more appeal. Growth in numbers just isn’t a priority; instead an overwhelming focus is on taking care of current members rather than reaching people beyond the circle of membership.

Many may question whether this is actually a problem. Our calling as pastors is to care for the flock God has given us. Numbers are not the goal or purpose of having a church. These statements are all true, but they can be dangerous excuses that contradict the calling that every pastor and his people have, which is not only caring for their own, but seeking out the lost as well (this will be considered in more detail later on). The big issue for our purposes now is to recognize that it can become all too easy to become complacent with the size, traditions, and structure already in use. One reason for the trends seen in Protestant churches today is a striking fact that can come off very critical and piercing to us: less effort is required to adjust to the changes that accompany the gradual decline in membership than it is to define and implement the goals required to make the way through transition. The easy example that regularly comes up is the change in the number of services. Should the congregation that has seen a 40 member drop in five years switch from two services to one? It is easy to cut back and only preach one sermon, get an organist for one service, organize a choir for one service, and so on. On the other hand it can seem like a futile attempt to try and encourage and implement the switch from one service to two. Cutting back a congregation’s ministry will always be easier than expanding it. This should never be a reason for us to think it is always the best idea though!

This generalization should not seem foreign to us either. The WELS statistics were included in the study about the declining membership of Protestant churches and they are extremely similar to the rest of the Christian denominations in America (about 65 to 85 percent

⁵ Fred Toppe, *Our Kind of Church (Winnebago Conference, Northern Wisconsin District, September 18, 1995)*

⁶ Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Steps Up Off the Plateau* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 23.

⁷ Ibid.

in decline). The majority (and again I would strongly urge those who deny this fact to assess their situation really well) of our congregations are in transition today. This definition can be broadly applied to anyone who is facing any problem or new direction: implementing the new Supplement or multiple worship settings, changing the number of services throughout the year, starting or adjusting the use of a choir, incorporating a modern worship service, increasing a focus on lay education, starting an early child education program or preschool, facing budgetary problems, a congregational discipline issue, and the list could continue for many pages. Often numbers have been cited so far, but consider this merely a possible warning sign to a problem. The problem is not numbers, but the health of our congregations. When the health of a congregation gets worse and worse, one would expect the membership to fall and the issues plaguing the congregation to arise. This is transition.

The issue the WELS church is facing can be called one of transition as well. The image we have in the 21st Century may be taken considerably differently than it was a century ago. The traditional way of doing things may or may not be the best for combatting the Post-modern world that threatens our beliefs. These questions and looming difficulties are not new by any means, but have been considered for decades now. It may be in more recent times that answers to these questions have been sought on a greater scale.

Facing the Issue

Why is it that the majority of congregations in transition never actually *make* a transition? There are many issues, but the resounding answer which is hard to hear will be repeated over and over: it is easier *not to*. When issues come up, the conservative approach to make everyone happy is to push it off and to make small concessions as the years go on, but the issues are often left unaddressed. When there is a change in the makeup of the local community (race, nationality, age, increasing population or decreasing population) the argument can be made that nothing can be done because there is an absence of “our kind of people,” or the increasing amount of church competition in the area, or the lack of souls that are in search of a church home. These expectations immediately squash any idea of implementing a new strategy, but most of them are false assumptions. More often than not, the reason many congregations that have the possibility of outstanding new visions are left with the status quo is the fear of (and often the existence of) a clash in values among the members.

When these issues come up, there are a few reactions the pastor will face that will challenge his decision making as he looks to find direction. One of the initial steps that the pastor must take as he views his congregation in transition is to consider the approach he will take. When decisions need to be made, ultimately he must decide whether keeping the status quo or favoring change is the proper way to proceed. Lyle Schaller characterizes the possible responses the pastor can make as: The Rational Response, The Democratic Response, and the Minority Response.⁸

The Rational Response

One place that Christians naturally turn is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). The congregation seems to be going down a slippery slope and the immediate response is for the pastor to turn to those verses in Matthew to persuade the congregation to increase its emphasis on Evangelism. Evangelism is truly a Christian teaching and ought to be a motivating factor in the decisions that we make in our congregations. By definition, a Christian congregation is called to seek the lost and proclaim God's saving grace to the world. This rational explanation can be reinforced by adding: (1) an influx of new members is the most effective single means of enhancing the vitality of a worshipping community; (2) new people help to keep the focus on meeting the religious needs of people in contrast to simply meeting the personal and social needs; (3) the numerically growing congregation is more likely to be able to retain the allegiance of the adult children of members than is the declining church; (4) new members can expand the sources for volunteers; (5) the lowest cost strategy to reverse numerical decline is to do volunteer outreach.⁹

These are the generalizations of Schaller, and one would accept any disagreement with them, because they are still just generalizations. To summarize his point, it leads us to something we cannot deny, no matter what we face or what new direction is being considered: God's Great Commission should find its place in our deliberation. Many may dislike the term *rational* a bit here, but instead would give it more weight as the *Scriptural* or *Evangelical* response. We will consider this very important foundation for implementing new strategies and directions later.

Yet, Schaller makes an interesting point about this initial style of response. These types of responses share two characteristics in his opinion. First, they reflect contemporary reality.

⁸ Schaller, *44 Steps*, 24-27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Second, they rarely are influential in persuading people in the church in transition to favor changes necessary to move forward. These rational reasons are most useful in reinforcing the belief system of those *already* committed to change, not in winning new allies. For those who rely on doing things “the way they have always been done” (whether correct or not), the rational response for new direction will not likely win them over. This is a huge generalization on his part, but it does hold weight compared to the other responses left and the Great Commission will find its place in the topic of transition later.

The Democratic Response

Another popular response by the pastor who sees the issues before him is to ask the people to vote for their preferences. “What do you think we should do?” This can be used properly, but the majority of the time it goes as follows: (1) A piece of paper with a few options is handed out: (a) keep things the way they are, (b) spread God’s Word to our neighbors, and (c) undecided or another option we haven’t thought of yet; (2) an overwhelming majority of the people vote for “Spread God’s Word;” (3) nothing happens, and (4) the absence of any actual progress eventually nurtures criticism, hostility, and internal conflict. Put another way, by their words and votes, people may suggest they favor the new direction, evangelism, and growth, but by their actions they usually endorse keeping things “the way they have always been done.”

A better way of using this approach, if it is deemed a necessity to put this to a vote, would be to define the strategy *first* (“The resounding proposal is that we need to *insert strategy here*), then list the resources required to implement that strategy (more volunteer teachers, a second choir, more volunteer workers, schedule changes, higher levels of giving, more staff needs, etc.), and allow people to vote by signing up to provide those additional resources. The positives of this method are a sense of accountability and the lack of an empty vote. Too often, however, the vote may create an illusion of support that does not exist. This could eventually bring those who were eager to support and do the work into dismay and defeat.¹⁰

The Minority Response

The *Minority Response* is often considered to be the most productive response. The response here to the ongoing call for a vote to instigate change is to simply ignore it. This sounds strange and it likely will make the majority of pastors cringe at first thought. Considering the lack of productivity and the likely conflict that comes from votes, this approach can have many

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

benefits. Instead of the vote approach, the pastor starts small with the vision he sees for his congregation. His goal is to rally that small number of people who can conceptualize a vision of a new tomorrow, to build a support group for that vision, and to provide the leadership necessary to turn that vision into reality.

The problem with this approach as most will likely pinpoint is that at least a few of the people who are strongly attached to the “way things have always been” may become hostile in the process. Second, the new reality rarely turns out to be an exact replica of the original vision. Third, the pastor and his leaders will be well advised to err on the side of excess in communicating the vision, the goals, the required resources, and the time needed to implement that dream as they design and explain the strategy. Every concept takes more time and costs more money than originally anticipated. The amount of time spent communicating the process from leaders to the rest of the congregation must be in abundance as well.¹¹

Looking in the Mirror

At this point, a fair number of pastors would be left fairly drained and without hope, but the first step for transition begins here: Looking in the Mirror. Considering the approaches that one could take towards beginning a change (the three styles of response that were just covered) cannot happen if the pastor and his congregation don't see what the problem is in the first place! This is where the goal must find its origin. The first step in making a transition is to thoroughly unveil the issue at hand. It is wise to reserve this step for the pastor first. He is the one called to lead his congregation and the one who will ultimately organize the leadership, formulate and reformulate the strategy, and be at the head of assessing the results. It is up to him to first analyze the problem and find the issues.

Warning Signs

This activity may take several months, maybe even a year to do. Seeing the state of every part of ministry in a congregation is time consuming, but essential. Important parts of this process would be (1) sitting down with the church leaders and gaining their input, (2) approaching staff members to hear their issues, (3) gaining some community perspectives to see the changes and makeup of the people surrounding the church (this will be considered in greater detail later), and (4) most importantly, but often the most neglected, assessing the ministry that the pastor himself is doing in his congregation (this also will be considered in depth later).

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

During this time of assessment, several warning signs should be noted that can key the pastor to his congregation's status of transition.

The symptoms and issues

No matter what the status is of a congregation, they will benefit from assessing themselves to find any warning signs of potential issues. This is no different than any other form of preventative maintenance. The homeowner would be well served to take a look at the water heater every season to inspect it for any wear, to have the chimney cleaned on a regular basis to prevent fire, to check the shingles to prevent leaks or future leaks. For both men and women, the biggest "cure" for many serious illnesses and diseases has been touted to be early detection. This same principle will serve the pastor and his congregation greatly as an initial step.

Consider these examples as possible warning signs that a congregation is headed toward or is currently entrenched in transition¹²:

- 1) Taking better care of today's members moves ahead of evangelism and outreach to the unchurched on the local list of priorities.
- 2) The pastor spends more time thinking and talking about retirement a few years hence than is devoted to outreach and evangelism.
- 3) The average attendance at worship, which has been showing an increase year after year, begins to drop when compared to the same months a year earlier. This often reflects a decline in the commitment level of the members.
- 4) The average attendance in Sunday school begins to decline.
- 5) The unhappy or involuntary termination of a pastor or consecutive terms of short pastorates.
- 6) Financial contributions by members. (The key signal is not when the rate of increase drops. The key signal often is a decrease in the number of households that underwrite most of the annual expenditures.)
- 7) A decline in the number of new members received by letter of transfer or similar form. (This may indicate that the congregation is becoming less attractive to church shoppers.)
- 8) Exceptions do exist, but a common warning sign is when total compensation (salaries, housing, pension, health insurance, etc.) of the paid staff exceeds 50 percent of total member contributions.

¹² Ibid., 42-46.

- 9) References to the past begin to overshadow plans, dreams, and hopes for the future of the congregation. Similarly, tradition and precedents can begin to outweigh vision, innovation, and creativity in planning.
- 10) A decrease in the number of baptisms
- 11) The minister spends more time with individuals than with groups of people.
- 12) If at least one-half of today's members joined more than ten years earlier. Similarly, policy makers have been members for more than a decade.
- 13) If, week after week, nearly everyone has disappeared within ten to twelve minutes after the benediction at the close of the last Sunday morning worship service.
- 14) An inability to design and implement a five-year plan for ministry, program, and outreach.
- 15) Seniority, tenure, and kinship or friendship ties with members of the nominating committee often outweigh skill, wisdom, creativity, competence or enthusiasm in choosing policy makers.
- 16) The ratio of worship attendance to membership drops year after year
- 17) The response to an impending financial problem is to concentrate on reducing expenditures rather than on increasing dollar receipts.
- 18) Decisions to cut back are regularly preferred over decisions to expand.

While many of these symptoms may exist in a very healthy congregation, the existence of several of these or one large issue could show evidence of future or current transition status. Some of this list may cause some disagreement, but the list must only be considered as a guide to seeing possible issues that might be ahead. Again, preventative maintenance is the key as the pastor assesses his congregation and ministry. Many congregations have incorporated this self-assessment and preventative maintenance into their congregational structure by having one or several committees involved in this process. This can be a very effective tool when properly implemented and overseen with the appropriate action by the pastor and his leaders. For many, this list will spark a bit of interest as they look at their congregation. The majority must see that *something* in their congregations could be improved and many might even see that a significant amount of programs and aspects of ministry need to be improved. This will lead to a desire to find appropriate solutions and strategies for improvement, perhaps even new direction.

How can a church address it?

The answer to this question is so vast that it is almost unanswerable in most cases. When the problem is youth involvement or education, there is likely a handful if not two dozen possible directions one could take. Which one is the right choice? When the issue is a divided congregation and plummeting membership, there is likely a handful of avenues that *need* to be pursued as well as an unending list of possible directions to add into that strategy. The answer isn't simple. The answer certainly isn't plain and simple. Being aware of the many difficulties found while making the way through transition is most certainly the place to start though. Just like preventative maintenance, knowing the problem and issues that may come is the critical place to start.

The difficulties of transition

The eventual goal for the pastor and his leaders will be to implement a new strategy in their congregation that will lead them in a direction they feel is appropriate to improve their ministry both within their church and as they reach out to the lost outside their doors. One of two outcomes will eventually surface and every member involved should be prepared for: 1) What if it didn't work? and 2) What if it *did* work?

Both of these scenarios will be stressful, but don't let this be discouraging! More commonly, the first scenario exists. Why did it fail? What are we supposed to do now? The leaders must be ready to squash the belief that a lack of success is a failure, because this is a misleading conclusion. The more appropriate response is to take a step back and see what went wrong. Maybe the right direction is still the same, but the lack of resources or volunteer hours didn't exist. As the assessment moves forward, the proper next step should never be dismay or contentment in the old, decidedly bad ways. Instead, ask the question, "What did we learn that can help us to improve our ministry?"

By asking this question, those suffering from the increasingly common lack of success in transition will likely notice some very useful themes. Making the pastor, leaders, and congregation aware of the reoccurring themes that are holding them back from big goals is one of the most encouraging and rallying statements to be confronted with. The most common themes that hold a congregation back from making a smooth transition include:

*What if it doesn't work?*¹³

¹³ Ibid., 132-136.

- 1) *Excessive impatience* – The pastor and leaders become so convinced they know the problem and have the proper solution that they move too fast. With any large proposal for change, there should be twice as much time taken to communicate the possibilities than the leaders believe. A resounding negative vote may squash the proposed change, even though many members support the basic strategy. The only issue holding back the process and leading to problems is the lack of communication and time to process the positives and negatives.
- 2) *Timing* – This was not the appropriate strategy for the congregation at that point in history. A prime example of this would be the strategy to double the number of teenagers in the youth program. This may be the proper goal, but the amount of youth available makes it impossible or the lack of volunteers would make it impossible. Often, the key to overcoming this problem is proper pre-planning and organization to support the strategy at hand.
- 3) *Lack of Program Staff* – A common barrier is simply the inadequate number of paid program staff members. Sometimes the competence or specialized training of the staff can interfere with the strategy at hand as well, for instance attempting to start a youth program with a paid staff member trained only in early education.
- 4) *Facilities* – This is a painful reality that faces the majority of existing congregations. The financial resources may be in place, along with the need, and the proper staff, but the lack of proper facilities makes the new programs impossible.
- 5) *Distractions* – A common disruption can be the wavering and shifting of a strategy. Often key leaders with the enthusiasm, creativity, and time to implement the new strategy are distracted by a new issue that comes up. This can be both a negative issue (unexpected building repairs, staff changes, health issues, etc.) and positive issues (increased interest in world missions, hopes to renovate a kitchen, thoughts for a Christmas event, etc.)
- 6) *Blinded by Enthusiasm* – For the eager and enthusiastic leaders, impatience and ignorance can commonly slip into the picture. This often leaves the leader(s) believing it will be easy to mobilize all the necessary resources to implement the strategy. As time goes on, the lack of success is placed on the leaders while those who voted in favor point the blame towards the leader and others initially involved.
- 7) *Aiming too high* – Sometimes the dream exceeds the resources. This is not restricted to finances. Occasionally a strategy is chosen that requires more money, energy, time, competence, commitment, or skill than the present staff can or will provide.
- 8) *Lack of Experience* – The necessary amount of volunteers and staff can be involved, but often they are left without any training experience required in order to have the necessary skills for designing and implementing the proposed new direction.

The common theme in these possible problems is the importance of proper time spent in planning, gathering experienced or well trained staff, communicating the strategy to every member, and involving the congregation in the entire process to attain a sense of accountability and excitement. These important steps will also serve an integral role when a congregation has to respond to a successful strategy.

What if it does work?¹⁴

- 1) *Gradual slide back* – Far too common is the success of a strategy with no follow-up. No further steps are taken to nurture the new programs or the increased number of people and the congregation slowly returns to the state it was in before.
- 2) *Increased Numbers* – What sounds like a positive sign can become a problem without proper care. While many rejoice at an increase in membership, no nurturing is given and no increase in programs, staff, and structure lead to greater complexity, increased anonymity, and a lack of satisfaction for the new identity.
- 3) *Lost Members* – With a new direction in place, it can be extremely surprising and unsettling to realize that a few longtime members left for another church home which was similar to the old congregational status.
- 4) *Costs* – The one most guaranteed consequence of a new strategy and improved programs is an increase in costs. Rarely can improvements be made without taking on some sort of cost. Quality costs money.
- 5) *Relationships* – Certain strategies may increase the evidence of relationships between members inside the congregation. However, as positive strategies are implemented, the majority of congregations will see a growth and often a change in the atmosphere. Generally speaking, follow-up strategies are needed to encourage relationships as changes in the congregation take place.

This list represents only a few of the challenges that are common for those who face a positive result from a newly implemented strategy. The common theme remains the same in considering the issues that face a strategy that is successful or unsuccessful: proper time preparing, proper communication provided, and proper resources allocated will go a long way towards bringing success to any strategy. The leaders will also be well served by taking the appropriate time needed to self-assess the progress of the new strategies and also to do preventative maintenance to curb any problems that might arise in the future.

¹⁴ Ibid., 136-141.

The Basics Prescribed for Transition

With these difficulties in mind, there are several basic principles that are offered in order to implement the new strategies needed to make a transition. Universal principles do exist as a pastor looks at his congregation in transition. To see how these principles apply, it is vital to take a look from the outside and discover why the current membership and visitors walk through the doors of the church on Sunday. Even more important is to consider why they come through the door and then *come back again*. What programs do you offer that have people hooked? What part of the worship service intrigues them the greatest? What activities keep people excited to come back and participate again? It is on the basis of this viewpoint that a pastor will consider how to shape a prospective strategy for the future.

Why do people return?

Why do visitors return? The majority of younger visitors will point to successfully addressing their *religious needs*. This is an important fact to gather and remember moving forward. They will first point to the sermon usually (the majority of all surveys done have proven this). This may be followed by favorable comments about the anthem, pastoral prayer, congregational singing, the Scripture lessons, and, perhaps, participation in an adult Sunday school class or a Tuesday evening Bible study group. The focus is on finding a church that excels at meeting their *religious needs*.

Overlapping this set of explanations for returning is a second group of responses that can be summarized under the umbrella of *high quality*. Again the quality of the preaching, if that reflects reality, usually is placed at the top of this list of reasons for coming back a second and a third time. This may be followed by the quality of music, facilities, the welcoming given to strangers, the quality of the worship experience, the teaching ministry, and communication directed at first-time visitors following their departure after the initial visit. The coinciding point to consider is how much the same factors that bring visitors back reflect the attitudes and spiritual health of the membership that comes back every week. These two categories introduce the two most effective ways for a congregation to improve overall ministry and to acquire a basis for strategies needed for transition.

Meeting Religious Needs

The strategy starts here. One focus of every successful gospel ministry is meeting the religious needs of people. In many congregations, they face a transition because many needs are

not being met and this is followed by feelings of animosity, anonymity, emptiness, and spiritual absence. The membership can hardly be welcoming to visitors when they don't feel satisfied at the place they are supposed to be encouraging someone else to visit. This principle applies also to the community. Various religious needs exist outside the church doors and that has to be the focus of the strategy a congregation will implement. What are the specific needs that need to be met? How can this congregation meet them? The emphasis on identifying and offering meaningful responses to the spiritual needs of the members and the lost souls in the community is the first necessary element of a strategy for transitional churches.

Improving the Quality of Ministry

The other element that needs to be present in a strategy for transition is a goal to improve the quality of ministry. One strategy will never work in helping a congregation facing transition: "This is how we have always done things. This is what we founded this church on. If some members don't like it and the community doesn't like it...then this church isn't for them." The gospel proclamation was never intended to be so exclusive or so uninviting. Considering the religious needs of the community will also bring about a reflection on the quality of the ministry already being done. Does it already meet the needs of our people and the people in our community? Is it the best we can do? Would we be better served to improve certain parts of our worship, facility, music, etc.? The likely answer to any self-reflection on quality is a resounding "Yes! We can do better, more, and different!" Just as God is served with increasing levels of quality in the ministry of a congregation, the sheep, both inside the church and those wandering outside the doors, are served.

Proposed Model: The Identity Model

Everything covered to this point has served to prepare the pastor and his leaders to consider the many difficulties that have faced 21st Century Christian congregations. It also serves to define the meaning of transition as well as providing the tools to diagnose it, assess the difficulties surrounding it, and offer some basic principles to approach finding a new strategy to help overcome it. The following recommendations will serve to encourage the pastor who has identified his congregation as transitional to find some direction and to help formulate a strategy to overcome it. My prayer is that it will be of benefit for everyone to encourage, strengthen, and guide us in our faith. We ask that our Lord give us the opportunity to do great things in his name!

The strategy proposed for consideration in this paper is what could be called the *Identity Model*. The basic formula of this approach is assessment, followed by strategy, and then establishment of leadership. The reason for giving it the title *Identity Model* is because of the focus on finding an identity of the congregation and the community as the basis for assessment, the focus on utilizing that identity to formulate a strategy, and the focus on establishing leaders who understand the identity and are driven to make the identity prosper. The reason this is useful during transitional periods is due to the abundance of assessment involved. A congregation in transition has experienced a change or need that must be addressed and this form of vast assessment will guide the pastor and his leaders to find where the problem is and how they can properly move forward. This identity has been divided into four different groups that are necessary for a pastor and his leaders to formulate a new direction: Lutheran Identity, Christian Identity, Congregational Identity, and Community Identity.

Understanding your Lutheran Identity

The foundation that our churches are built on can be rightly characterized as our Lutheran Identity. We are a church body that considers itself confessional and this plays a role in who we are in every congregation. There are definitely areas of ministry within individual congregations that will be different and often it is the differences that define who we are. One point to emphasize with our Lutheran Identity in focus is the unchanging unity that is present as well.

In finding a new strategy or direction, there are aspects of our ministry that will never change. These are found primarily in this confessional unity which is under the umbrella of the Lutheran Identity. Consider what it means for us as we identify to ourselves as a church leader, to our congregation, and to the world around us who we are. President Paul Wendland summarized what this Lutheran Identity looks like as we take a look in at ourselves as a church body. He summarizes our identity as uniquely scriptural, uniquely evangelical, and uniquely confessional.¹⁵

Our congregations confess their unity in scripture, unconditional gospel, and confession as we say along with the writers of the Augsburg Confession and Formula of Concord that “the churches among us teach with complete unanimity.”¹⁶ The teaching that we are unified with is not a German teaching, Luther teaching, nor manmade opinion, but as Sasse writes, “Never and

¹⁵ Paul O. Wendland, *Confessionalism Contextualized: Lutheran Identity Across Cultures* (Mequon: World Mission Seminary Conference, August 9-13, 2010), 2.

¹⁶ Robert Kolb, ed., *Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 486

nowhere does the Lutheran Church inquire after what is German, but inquires after what is true—the saving truth of God for all men.”¹⁷ He also goes on to write, that “the confessional development...did not grow out of the question, ‘What is Luther teaching?’...(but), ‘What does the Word of God teach,’ ‘What is the truth of the gospel.’”¹⁸ To understand our Lutheran identity is simply a quest for the truth of God’s Word. Therefore, a strategy for every congregation begins founded in the truth of God’s Word and in the unconditional gospel.

Consider these three facets of the Lutheran identity in more depth. In the decisions made to develop a strategy to further ministry, it must all be done with our uniquely scriptural identity in mind. “God’s Word is the supreme and final authority for a Lutheran in all matters of Christian faith and life. To find out what God wants for us, we go back to the Scriptures... What is Scriptural, that is Lutheran. What is Lutheran, that is Scriptural.”¹⁹ The pastor and his church leaders will also take into consideration our uniquely evangelical identity. All of Scripture is God’s story of unconditional love for mankind. It is about God’s unending desire to have all men be saved. No strings attached and nothing is demanded in return. This is also extremely unique and beneficial to consider for every area of ministry. Last, we would be wise to consider that we are uniquely confessional. The goal of any new strategy should not go against this important truth that “we are not seeking to create a fellowship of more and more who believe less and less.”²⁰ We are so convinced of the truths of Scripture that we confess and in turn freely bind ourselves to the Lutheran Confessions. The opposite of this would be to dumb down what we teach in order to please the world or to make ourselves more appealing. Instead, every new direction taken by a church in transition must hold firm as its foundation the Word of God, the unconditional gospel, and the Lutheran Confessions.

Former Seminary President Valleskey explained the position we have found ourselves in as we have moved into the 21st century and it hits on this very issue appropriately as he wrote:

This essay has been about moving forward in Christ, about the advance of the gospel in the WELS during the first 150 years of our existence. We need to continually remind ourselves that the only way we can move forward in a God-pleasing manner is to move forward in Christ, that is, within the framework of his will and Word. And we dare not forget that the only God-pleasing advance is the advance of the gospel. Satan will always be tempting us to take shortcuts, to adopt

¹⁷ Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 48

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹ Wendland, *Confessionalism Contextualized*, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

the ways of the world to produce outward, external results. God, however, works in only one way: through the gospel in his Word and Sacraments. Such is the teaching of the Scriptures. Such, therefore, is the testimony of our Lutheran Confessions, as Luther so solemnly insists in the Smalcald Articles: “We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and Sacrament” (Part III, art. VIII, 10).

Get the Word out. Let the gospel advance to ever-widening circles of people. That’s what it means to move forward in Christ. Let God “worry” about the results. We plant the seed; God makes it grow. We let down the net; God fills it. The Word will produce its own results because the almighty God himself stands behind it.²¹

Lutheran Identity versus Christian Identity

The importance of understanding and reeducating ourselves in our Lutheran identity is found as we ask the next question, “Who else are we?” We are surely Lutherans, with the name Lutheran on the church sign out front. We give a *quia* subscription to the works of our Lutheran church fathers, because we believe and teach that they do truly say what the scripture says. We are undoubtedly “Lutheran.” But, we also have to agree that we are further and just as accurately “Christians.” We follow, honor, worship, and give our confession according to Christ and his Word. That shapes who we are even further as a church body and for each pastor it shapes who his local congregation is.

The distinction between these two identities can be easily skewed, even though they ought to be seen as hand in hand! How often have the writings of the church fathers or the traditions of our history been pegged against Scripture to decide what the proper decision or direction is for our church bodies? This doesn’t have to be the case, especially when a pastor and his congregation are looking for a direction to follow. It is both important to see our Lutheran Identity and what that means for us and also to see how being a Lutheran is founded on the commands and purposes of Christ. We are not just Lutherans or just Christians, but Lutherans *are* Christians who have goals or missions to consider that Christ has established for them.

This is perhaps the most important part of this paper. Time and importance must be placed on reminding ourselves and the Christians that are being affected by a transition, that they already have a direction found in God’s Word. This is undoubtedly where every congregation facing a new direction or strategy must find a solid foundation. This is what the pastor must

²¹ David J. Valleskey, *Challenges Facing the WELS in 2001 and Beyond As it Seeks to Advance with the Gospel [Part of a larger essay entitled, “Forward in Christ—The Advance of the Gospel in the WELS 1850-2000”]*, Presented to the South Central District Convention, Dallas, TX, June 5-6, 2000]

bring to his people after he has done his own thinking, research, council with other pastors, and prayer. It is pivotal to discuss the ministry of the gospel.

What has led many churches into a transitional period in our WELS circles is this difficult doctrine. Who is a minister? What does he do? For decades, the understanding has been that ministers were pastors or clergyman. He had spent several years studying “theology.” He was a professional man, dedicated to the service of God and of God’s people. He worked in the church “full time” and got paid for it. The people who “belonged to the church” however, were certainly not ministers. They were lay people, whatever that meant. It eventually seems to have meant that they did not know much about religion and were not very responsible for what went on in the church.²² About 40 years ago, many became aware of this unfortunate understanding. Every Christian is a minister. This can be confusing, but is an important fact to gather. Consider this situation Schultz offers:²³

Problem: Fred considered himself a solid member of his church. He contributed generously. He seldom missed a service. He served on committees when elected. Recently, however, some strange things had been going on. The new pastor had some peculiar ideas.

Fred had mentioned that a new family had moved in down the block from his home. The pastor had said, “Fine! Let me know how things go when you call on them!” Then, when membership instruction classes for the children were about to start, the pastor had called a meeting of the parents. He said he wanted to “give the parents some help in teaching their children.” There had been other instances like this.

Disturbed, Fred went to a church council meeting. It seemed to him that someone was confused about who was supposed to do what in the church. He raised the question in the council meeting.

The Question: Was Fred right? Was the pastor evading his work and trying to shift it onto the members? Just where do you draw the line between the function of the clergy and the function of the laity?

This mindset may be slowly shifting away, but it brings up the critical issue that every pastor and his congregation need to continually study and be reminded of what their duties and roles are in the eyes of God. It is no surprise when problems arise in congregations because of a misunderstanding of this. Pastors become the only responsible party, burn out, and have no one to support them, because “that isn’t the job of the laity.” On the other hand, it can go to the

²² Richard J. Schultz, *The Christian’s Mission* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 17.

²³ *Ibid.*

extreme with every member assuming they should be preaching, baptizing, counseling, and complete chaos overcomes what was once good order.

These are real fears, but they shouldn't cripple us from overcoming them. The pastor has been called by God and his congregation to serve them in a leadership role. He has been called to perform tasks in many areas of the ministry including administering the Means of Grace. Yet, the laity has a crucial role in every day church life to be aware of too. This is where education must take place. This brief study is offered as a basic answer to the root problem that plagues many transitional churches. Instructing God's people of the duties of every Christian will set the basis for any direction a congregation will ultimately go.

Nurturing an Understanding of your Christian Identity

How is God possibly going to carry out his plan? Who is going to do all of the work? As he calls people to faith, he enlists them in his work. This is spelled out in the words of St. Peter: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9) Every Christian occupies a strategic position. Every Christian is a priest. Not just someone set aside, but the point is that every Christian is a priest to every other Christian! Each of us is surrounded by people who have a just claim on our services.²⁴ The other side is true as well, because every Christian is surrounded by people on whom they have a just claim *for* service. The mutual obligation that Christians have as priests manifests itself in seeking and creating opportunities for loving help. This is what has become known as "the ministry of all Christians."

So what is the difference then between clergy and laity? What should members expect from their pastor and the pastor from his members? We know that all Christians are ministers. We know that all Christians are priests, chosen to carry out the functions assumed as people of God. There is a difference though as we compare clergy and laity. The pastors and teachers are provided by God to serve God's servants. They teach the teachers. They minister to the ministers. They lead and feed God's people and prepare them for effective service. *But they are not to minister in the place of the people.* Another way to distinguish this relationship is to see the very particular work that the representative (or public ministry) does in the name of and on

²⁴ Schultz, *The Christian's Mission*, 20.

behalf of a gathering group of Christians. Understanding the importance and differences between these two groups is pivotal in the organization of the congregation.

The ministry of God's people, *laos* (hence *laity*), is the ministry of both pastor and members. The ministry of the Christian is to participate in the vital functions of the church. These functions can be summarized as proclaiming the Word, witnessing, teaching, worshiping, serving, and maintaining a fellowship in Christ.²⁵ This sounds intimidating. It sounds extremely demanding. May all Christians be reminded how Christ warned his disciples, "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. 16:24) No, the roles we have as Christians will not be easy, but God has promised to provide.

Every Christian has been granted by God their own particular set of skills, their own situation, and their own calling. Every Christian is really called to serve in a way no other person is. This can be shocking and terrifying, but God has given us these gifts for a reason and has promised also to provide for the work he is calling each Christian to do. With this distinction and Scriptural understanding of ministry, with everyone understanding what is expected of them as God's own, the individual (whether pastor or member) can see how they will fit into the direction they see fit for the future of their ministry.

Find your Congregational Identity

The most important factors of our identity are without question our Lutheran and Christian identities, but that doesn't mean we ought to stop there as we assess our congregation. Any strategy can still become a complete letdown if the congregational and community identities aren't considered as well. These two ought to be considered hand in hand with one another to answer important questions, but they will be considered separately in order to properly distinguish and assess them as significant identities even when they stand alone.

Remember that a strategy is not formed due to the identity of the pastor alone, but is formed based on him, his people, and his community. With this section, we consider the second of the three. The congregational identity is the makeup of the people inside the doors as the pastor takes a look at the whole congregation on any given Sunday. What does it tell the pastor about them? Who are you? The conservative church, liberal church, charismatic, church of internationals, the racially integrated church, the volunteer church, the youth church, the old

²⁵ Ibid., 24.

church, the world missions church... Who?²⁶ Every congregation is vastly different, even though the building may look exactly the same. This will remain true forever, because every congregation is made up of people with different jobs, skills, interests, ages, races, needs, socio-economical medians, and sizes. Understanding who the congregation is will help a pastor to see what strengths his people already have, what religious and personal needs they require, the types of programs and services they prefer, and the goals and directions they ought to pursue.

Discovering a congregation's identity is a task of introspection and diagnostic research while remaining as objective as possible. A good number of clues might be found in the constitution. Hints might be obtained from past bulletins and newsletters. Sometimes congregations employ a consulting firm or synod counselor to guide an objective analysis. This extensive analysis must be done, likely with a fair amount of input and effort from the congregation, in order to develop a sound strategy. Many consider this process as a time of bringing the congregational identity to a level of consciousness or awareness. This is a time not just to assess, but to discover, formulate, and write it out in order to get it accepted by the congregation. It is up to them to say: "This is who we are, and this is what we want to be."

To do this work, there are a series of questions to ask that can prove helpful for the pastor looking to do this congregational analysis. Some authors often consider this identity analysis the *only* important analysis needed to find what is called a "philosophy of ministry."²⁷ This takes for granted that many other issues about our identity are equally, if not more, important. The mainstream church growth movement uses this practice and omits the other facets of identity, because for them doctrine, confessions, and views are parts of a congregation that can shift, mold, and change in order to meet the needs of the people. As confessional Lutherans, this is a terrible error that puts God's Word and his truths at risk in favor of appeasing the mass crowds they hope to gather. The reason that Lutheran, Christian identities are considered first in this model is to illustrate the importance they have in any strategy and to assist the pastor and his people in avoiding this unfortunate procedure.

With a unified understanding of God's Word and what he desires from this group of Lutheran, Christian, diverse people, they can continue to ask these questions in order to formulate an understanding of their current congregational identity. Appendix A provides a

²⁶ Schaller, *44 Steps*, 91.

²⁷ Kent Hunter, *Your Church has Personality* (Fairway Press, 1997).

reproducible sheet that can serve this purpose if the pastor desires to follow the questions as listed below. Be sure to note that the answers will vary and be helpful in distinguishing which factors are most important and least important about a congregation as they affect a future strategy. The following questions can serve as a diagnostic tool for this goal of finding congregational identity:²⁸

1) What is this Church All About?

This is a general question intended to allow people the freedom to answer in any way they wish. The purpose of this is to get things started and help the pastor and his people begin to reflect upon the identity of the church. Such a vague question will likely show what priorities already exist in the congregation, because a large number of members will list the same type of answers at the top or for the bulk of their answer. For example, a majority may write that “this church is about the kids,” or “this church is about reaching out to the world with the gospel,” or “this church is about coming to worship the true God,” and so on. Young members may see things differently than do older members. The pioneers of the congregation may have a perspective vastly different than those newer members. Those living in the near area of the church may see things completely different from the members who drive a distance to church. The variety of answers will reflect the need to solidify some priorities of purpose. A proper follow-up would be to have discussion and Bible study groups so that meaningful communication develops. This is the driving point of future conversation and to show the importance of formulating a unified strategy and declaration of “who we are and what we plan to do.” The solution to the vague nature of this question is found in the leadership establishment section that will come later.

2) What Are the Church’s Priorities?

A priority is something that comes first, that takes precedence over something else. A priority may or may not be based on the amount of time, energy, and money spent, but this is not always the case. A priority in this case ought to be considered in the terms of emphasis or importance. As with the first diagnostic question, this analysis will become meaningful only as a number of responses are gathered from various members and groups within the church. As priorities are recorded, certain patterns or categories of ministry will emerge again and again. These will begin to reflect the emphases of the congregation as a whole. In analyzing the answers, it is proper to

²⁸ Hunter, *Your Church has Personality*, 96-99.

narrow down the actual priority or source. Someone may answer simply that “Christian education” is the priority, but they may be referring to the youth, to the abundance of weekly Bible studies, to the education given to the community, etc. Narrowing down the root of the priorities is important in assessing the responses to this question.

3) What Makes This Church Different?

This question is a little more specific than the first two. What is it that makes the congregation unique or different from other churches in the area, whether they are in fellowship with them or not. This is a hard question to answer with a response other than the initial answer that “we are Lutherans.” This isn’t the only aspect of a congregation that makes them different and that is the point of this question. The purpose is to bring that reality to the foreground and to analyze the very unique qualities that make *this* group of people at *this* facility special. Congregations located right next to one another aren’t the same. A pastor pointed out that five churches had been built on the same major street, all within five miles of one another on Detroit’s east side. He called it church row and was disgusted that the denomination would allow such terrible planning. Actually, there was no competition. Each congregation had somewhat different priorities. One operated an elementary school and emphasized Christian education. Another conducted a strong singles ministry and stressed fellowship. Still another was characterized by a high view of liturgy and traditional services. A fourth concentrated on service to the whole person, organizing programs to meet the needs of the people in the community. The point is that churches can exist right across the street from each other and not be a threat to the ministry either. Inside every congregation, the uniqueness of the people will shape the programs, the strategies, the expression in worship, the ministries, and the buildings. Understanding what is unique about the congregation goes hand in hand with the apostle Paul frequently speaking about the church as the Body of Christ. Sometimes there will be a few more arms than eyes or legs than ears in a congregation. Similarly put, there will often be more skilled laborers than good singers or more professional businessman than retired workers. These differences will be an important step in unifying a congregation under one Christian strategy.

4) How Would You Describe This Church to a New Neighbor?

Anywhere from seventy to ninety percent of people who join a church do so because of a friend or relative.²⁹ This is a fascinating statistic to consider when formulating a strategy. It is

²⁹ Ibid., 99.

also equally important during this congregational assessment process. A surprising amount of talk about the church takes place, no matter what part of the world someone lives in. The members generally describe their church in a way that reflects its current strategy or ministry. Some will mention the pastor. Others will discuss the programs. Some will talk about the people who make up the church. Looking behind these forms of expression will reveal the identity of the church being proclaimed. This question is important both for assessing the people's view of current ministry and also as an educational moment. It is of utmost importance to have a unified understanding of ministry and strategy among the congregation, because of the chances available to properly or improperly proclaim it to those outside the congregation. Sometimes what people perceive about their church is totally wrong; it reflects personal conjecture rather than the reality of the situation. Then if the people with whom they share this personal opinion visit the church, they are confused and perhaps disillusioned. If they are even encouraged to try the church, they rarely return. The importance of this step is pivotal especially after the formulation of a transitional strategy, because the congregation must be aware of and able to express what their philosophy of ministry is.

Find your Community Identity

This assessment is becoming more and more important for transitional congregations, because more and more transitions are occurring due to a change in the make-up of the community that surrounds the facility. What does the community say about its identity? How does it compare to the congregational identity that was discovered? These are very important questions to ask the congregation, because it may be the root of many problems. A church in California establishes its congregational identity as ninety-eight percent white middle-aged to retired families. Their priorities are Christian education and outreach. The community identity over the last ten years has shifted to eighty percent minority population with a large contingent of Hispanics moving into the neighborhood. If that congregation were to only consider their congregational identity, they would likely not realize what the problems are that they are facing. Their Christian identity and the community identity would likely lead them to the increasing possibility that they should reach out to the community and over ten to twenty years see a significant change in their congregational identity. Ignoring the make-up and changes of the community identity will be a distinct factor of the coming decades in leading congregations through many difficulties of transition.

The same unity and diversity that is seen at the congregational level will be seen at the community level too. What specific traits does the congregation observe about the people around them? What changes have taken place over the last ten to twenty years? Asking these questions will help to bring the congregation to an understanding of what the future likely holds and many opportunities they might be missing out on. An important task for the pastor and many of his leaders will be to do a fair amount of community research by reaching out to local officials, politicians, lifetime citizens, and real estate agents in order to secure a wealth of information on how the community has changed and what it might look like down the road. This information about the community's identity will be of great service as the congregation moves forward.

Let God direct your "Identity"

The fourfold identity becomes the basis for formulating a strategy in the transitional congregation. The path that it takes must be founded in its Lutheran and Christian identity and uniquely shaped by its congregational and community identity. The steps that follow represent the process that takes place after assessment has been finished. At this exciting time, the pastor and his leaders (finding and establishing these leaders comes in the following section) take the information they have gathered to formulate a strategy. Several steps to this process must take place to make this a smooth transition.

Removing Distractions

Before any new positive direction can be taken, issues need to be resolved in the congregation. Sometimes this is the key to transition for a congregation, because the struggles were not the programs, outreach, worship, or pastor. Instead, the financial problems, internal disputes or issues are the only factor holding a congregation back. By far the best beginning point for severely polarized or badly divided congregations is to resolve the preexisting problem. Until that has been accomplished, it is highly unlikely strangers will consider the environment they have stumbled upon as hospitable or inviting. In regard to the financial problems, it may be an important step to consider before implementing anything new. Rarely can a new direction be taken with large financial issues holding the congregation back. The answer to this problem may be found in bringing the goals and hopes that the congregation expressed during assessment into the picture to increase the desire to find a solution for overcoming the financial problems.

Other distractions would include those hurdles that stand in the way of the future strategy the congregation hopes to implement. The congregation must overcome facility issues if it hopes

to implement an increased Christian education program if they are already at capacity. The congregation hoping to increase its evangelism program and membership will have to find a solution to overcoming its already cramped worship area. The majority of issues generally fall into the categories of facility, finances, and organizational structure (a lack of volunteers and service groups), but are not confined to these three groups. The issue remains the same; the first step is to eliminate the distractions and hurdles that stand in the way of any future strategy.

Nurturing Willingness

The top priority in the congregation seeking to implement a strategy is “not finding a strategy for church growth. The real need is a strategy for planned change initiated from within an organization, plus the will and skill required to implement that strategy.”³⁰ A common mistake is the hastiness that can come from the excitement from assessment. With the issues and goals discovered, the reaction can easily be to jump right into the thick of implementing a strategy as if the new direction has been found already. The leadership skills of the pastor are extremely important in this situation. He will be careful to continue the excitement, keeping the focus on the newly established philosophy of ministry, while also taking the necessary steps to approach the transition with patience and diligence.

During the initial steps of transition, it is essential to first nurture the willingness of the congregation to increase the success of the new strategy. Without volunteers, support, and a unified understanding of the direction among the people, there will rarely be success. Instead, after major distractions are out of the way, the congregation must make the transition from hesitance, uncertainty, and timidity to a congregation full of great interest, excitement, and *willingness*. The goals of the congregation can't be wishes anymore, but must become *wills*.

The illustration that plagues the majority of us is weight loss or physical fitness. At some point in the average American's life, he will become excited about working on his weight and physical make-up. There are always new supplements out and new dietary programs to follow that will likely bring significant weight loss to him, if implemented. The key is that last phrase, “if implemented.” Many transitional congregations see the great plans they hope to implement already, but they don't budge. A change must be made from simply wishing to *willing*. The battle in the congregation is comparable to the battle between body and mind. The body wills, while the mind wants. In the congregation, the mind supports a program to call on every

³⁰ Schaller, *44 Steps*, 58.

newcomer to the community living within a certain mile radius of the church. The body votes for the pastor to do all the visitations. It is easy to establish a congregational mindset, but it is difficult to establish a congregational movement. A critical issue faced in transition is the will to do and the skill to make it happen. Both of those pieces of the puzzle are necessary to bring success to a strategy. Without this, congregations eventually become goalless. The possibilities are in mind, but they will never be goals without the reality of being implemented. This drifting along is a characteristic of too many congregations and “it must be replaced by vision, intentionality, a venturesome spirit, and the will to pioneer new approaches to ministry.”³¹ This drive towards willingness is founded in the pastor, but driven primarily by congregational leaders and their encouragement and involvement of the rest of the congregation. When the whole congregation has a hand in the responsibilities, passion, and goal proposed in a given strategy, only then will the willingness exist and continue.

Carving Out a Strategy

Perhaps one of the least threatening comments begins with the assurance, “We’ll keep on doing everything we have been doing.” The important reminder to the congregation is that the congregation’s priorities will never be sacrificed for the pastor’s personal adventure or the goals of some outside mission counselor. An aggravating and common scenario is the young pastor with a plan. A church in transition is greeted by a new pastor who has his own set of goals and ambitions, but does not take into account the identity of his people or the community. After several new programs and an overhaul of the church structure, he is left with his dream congregation. It is structured how he prefers, but the original members have left in large part and the community needs aren’t met by the pastor’s vision. The church that was in transition moves into a new transition.

Carving out a strategy takes much more than the pastor’s personal opinion on proper ministry. The importance of following an assessment model similar to the model given in this paper is essential in developing a functional, successful strategy to overcome transition. Before initially writing out a strategy, it is important to build on the strengths the congregation already possesses. This would tie in with the section on *quality*. With the priorities and strengths of the congregation in focus, the congregation can begin to develop a sense of pride and unity in these programs or facets of ministry already in place. It is in this process that several leaders as well as

³¹ Ibid., 59.

volunteers will begin to show themselves in the congregation. Before establishing something more to the current church life, like a new strategy, this important step will foster a new culture within the congregation necessary to move forward with the perceived strategy.

Once this process has developed, the pastor and leaders that have a similar understanding and excitement concerning a future path gather together. Through a series of meetings and Bible studies, the pastor and his leaders look through the important parts of their Lutheran, Christian, congregational, and community identities along with the goals and priorities of the congregation. When the study is finished, the pastor and his leaders are sure to summarize their understanding of each of the identities to be sure they are in agreement. The pastor then offers his strategy, which is based on the assessment done in the Identity Model. The leaders offer their own insights and support (or sometimes disapproval). Once a consensus is met, the strategy is ready for action. The next crucial step is to find the expertise necessary for the strategy. Then they will incorporate the proper people, staff, time, resources to make that happen. This may take additional workshops, classes, seminars, Bible studies, etc. The excitement of this time as that you have to start doing it! It would be an understatement to say that this is hard to do. In a few sentences, the days, weeks, months, and maybe even years of development were just described. Rarely does this “just happen.” Usually it is the product of visionary and initiating leadership.

Establish leadership and Initiating Vision

No one would ever argue that leadership is *not* a good, important, and expected part of their church body. It would be ridiculous to say that we don't desire leadership or that we don't think it is a good idea to have good leadership among the people and the pastor. The issue that *does* seem to be in question is *who* needs to have leadership and *where* that leadership should come from. The more modern writers on church leadership take great issue with what is commonplace in our WELS circles. The leadership we are accustomed to seeing and promoting is what they call the Co-Leadership or Enabler Model.³² The pastor in this system exercises leadership by simply handing the leadership off to other people (i.e. boards, councils, etc.). The opposite threat that the leadership issue can bring is the empirical or dictator role, often called Absolute Leadership.³³ The pastor can take all leadership into his own hands and improperly dictate all decision making, policy, and direction. Considering the dangers to both sides of this

³² Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Bakers Books, 2004), 101.

³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

narrow road of good Christian leadership, we can rightly come to some conclusions and find a direction that is appropriate for establishing leadership and initiating vision through leadership. These elements will provide the driving force for the strategy in mind.

Establishing Leadership

In the category of leadership, we will consider this theme: It starts with the pastor...it continues with the flock. Leadership in the congregation begins with the pastor. A pastor is called to be a leader. The kind of leader he will be is the real question and the sometimes the real problem. Every pastor should assess what kind of leader he is on a regular basis. If he falls too far to either of the extremes considered earlier (absolute or enabler), some adjustments need to be made. God's Word tells the pastor what type of leader he ought to be. In Mark 10:42, Christ described what a leader is not to be: "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them." This is the Savior's evaluation of absolute leadership. It is a characteristic of pagan leadership, not Christian leadership. Being a Christian leader is not "lording over" the flock. Enabler leadership also isn't biblical leadership, but often is defined by no leadership at all. In this case, the pastor has disregarded the call to lead his people in favor of allowing the elders or officials to do as they will. So what is a good principal to follow in establishing a foundation for pastoral leadership? In the middle of the leadership continuum is the biblical servant-leadership principle. In Mark 10:45, the Savior says, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Christ provides us with both the motivation and the model of a servant-leader. No one would question that Jesus was in charge, yet no one would question his servant's heart. The pastor as leader leads his flock strongly and directly, but he also loves them passionately and has their best in mind at all times. This strong leadership of the pastor shows itself as he directs his flock to take on leadership in their own specific Christian callings within the congregation. So the key signs of servant-leader are the strength and drive to lead others coupled with the loving service to help and guide the flock. This model is found in the work of Christ, but more importantly it is motivated by the love that Christ has shown to him and his flock.

And so leadership continues with the flock. The pastor must take on this task of finding the leaders in his congregation and encouraging them in service in every area of ministry the congregation has. Taking on leadership in a congregation rarely happens by sitting back and

allowing it to develop, but comes as someone (the pastor or an already established leader) identifies the skills of another, directs them in their area of service, and encourages them to take hold of leadership. How does this manifest itself in the grand scheme of transition? In order for the steps of assessment, strategy formulation, and implementation to take place, the pastor must find these congregational leaders to make the vision possible. The pastor as leader will assess and formulate a strategy, but this is not the finished product. The united leadership of pastor and congregational leaders will bring the real strategy to light. As this process makes its way from pastor to leaders, it will bring about a strategy that becomes the possession of the whole congregation.

Initiating vision through leadership

The leadership in the congregation has been identified and a strategy seems to be in place as this group mulls over the research and completed assessments. Now what? It starts with the Pastor...it continues with the flock. Consider this quick summary of the process at hand: 1) Someone (the pastor and his leaders) must have a vision of what God is calling the congregation to be and to do in the years ahead based on their assessments. 2) That vision has to be translated into a strategy that can be implemented (nothing too lengthy or drawn out, but a simple slogan such as “we plan to build a school.”) 3) Leadership is required that can enable the people to see the vision and to mobilize the resources required to implement the strategy.³⁴

In order to initiate any new strategy, the newly educated leadership must bring the vision to the congregation and make sense of it with them. Notice there is no vote or discussion meeting. The pastor and his leaders have spent so much time and energy on behalf of the congregation and now in their excitement cannot help but share what they have discovered with others. The gears begin to turn in the congregation and the pastor and leaders begin to find the needed volunteers, resources, and support necessary to make the vision a reality. It is at this very gentle moment in the process that the pastor must continually be reminded to exercise his leadership by helping to slow things down every once in a while. It is at this moment that the lay leadership must exercise the listening ear of a leader to hear the many positive and negative sentiments that will be flooding in. It is such a tough, but exciting time in the congregation. The vision may fail and it may be a huge success down the road, but some of the most beneficial work has already been completed. No matter what happens, several benefits will have already

³⁴ Schaller, *44 Steps*, 61.

been realized: 1) Awareness of any problems 2) Increased leadership 3) Increased spiritual health 4) Awareness of the possibilities for the future. The process in itself is extremely beneficial for a congregation's health.

Conclusion

More and more pastors are becoming aware of the topic which has weaved its way through this paper: congregational health. The great news is that we are looking and digging to find out how our congregations are doing. Many pastors will admit that things can look great on the outside, but the overall health of the congregation may be plummeting. Sometimes, pastors can feel discouraged by what they see on the outside, but in reality their people are flourishing. The encouragement in this paper is that the assessment tools and subjects written on here are a reminder to pastors to continually assess what is going on in their personal work and in the work of the whole congregation they serve. Every congregation and its leaders will benefit whether in a small transition, big transition, or no transition at all, from the work of looking inward and out on a regular basis. For those interested in doing more research on this subject or who are looking for further assistance with their congregational health, can find it by reaching out to the newly established Commission on Congregational Counseling.³⁵

³⁵ See Appendix B for more details on the work of this board and how to contact them. Appendix C is a sample of the congregational profile that the CCC uses to help a congregation assess their situation and ministry. Elements of this may be useful for a pastor looking to formulate his own personal or congregational assessments as well as a preliminary activity to contacting the CCC.

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What Do You See?



1) What is this Church All About?

2) What Are the Church's Priorities?

3) What Makes This Church Different?

4) How Would You Describe This Church to a New Neighbor?

- *With the answers you came up with, what should we improve and how?*
- *With these answers in mind, what should our church look like in 10 years?*

APPENDIX B –

Congregation and Ministry Support Group

Commission on Congregational Counseling

Purpose

The Commission on Congregational Counseling 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.

Structure

The initial structure of the Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC) will be

1. A five-member Commission (one member appointed as chairman) appointed by the Conference of Presidents¹
2. An executive committee appointed by the Commission chairman
3. A commission director called by the COP
4. *A consultant for the consultation service known as WELS PA called by the COP (funded by WELS Kingdom Workers)*²
5. Appropriate staff

Commission

In order to carry out the Commission's purpose, the members of the Commission shall

1. Grow in their understanding of biblical teachings and principles that concern the ministry of the gospel in congregational life.
2. Evaluate techniques and methods of ministry evaluation, change, and expansion.
3. Oversee and contribute to the work of the Commission director in his efforts to prepare materials and programs, work in congregations and with called workers, identify and train consultants, and represent and promote the services offered by the Commission.
4. *Oversee and contribute to the work of the consultation service known as WELS PA.*

5. Work in harmony with the other commissions of the Congregation and Ministry Support Group (CMSG) and Congregation and Ministry Support Council (CMSC).
6. Be concerned for the well-being of the Commission director, consultants, and staff.
7. In general, be interested and involved in all efforts carried out by the Commission through its director, consultants, and staff.

Director Assignments

The director shall be responsible to the Commission for evaluation, research, program development, personnel training, and administration in order to

1. Develop various programs and approaches that are able to serve a variety of congregations and ministry situations.
2. Develop written materials designed to lead congregations through a process of self-analysis and long-range planning.
3. *Oversee and work with the consultant who carries out the consultation service known as WELS PA and work with him to identify when this service is well-suited to a congregation's needs*
4. Identify and train consultants and advisors who will carry out CCC programs in congregations.
5. Communicate with congregational leaders to monitor progress and assist them to identify and overcome challenges.
6. Partner with the presidents of the districts and the district circuit pastors to identify congregations seeking counseling and to monitor the congregation's progress in carrying out its ministry plans.
7. Encourage and coordinate the services of the other commissions of the CMSG when their input would be valuable to congregations in carrying out assessment and planning.
8. Monitor programs offered by other agencies of WELS that duplicate services offered by the CCC and encourage coordination.

Relationships

1. The director is accountable to the Conference of Presidents through the synod president with immediate supervision by the Commission on Congregational Counseling or its executive committee.
2. He coordinates planning and program development/implementation with the directors of the other commissions within the CMSG under the advice of the CMSC.

3. He oversees and coordinates the work of full-time and part-time CCC consultants.
4. *He oversees and coordinates with Parish Assistance consultants and part-time consultants.*
5. He involves and communicates with district presidents and circuit pastors in congregational counseling endeavors.
6. He is responsible for any support staff provided his office according to the personnel policies of the Synod's Administration Building and the principle of Christian love.
7. The director and his office function under the policies established for cooperative ministry within the synod's administration under the supervision of the president of the synod.

Administrative responsibilities

1. The director establishes and maintains an efficient office that is responsive to congregations and called workers of the synod (e.g. records, communication procedures).
2. He works with the chairman and members of the CCC to carry out the commission's decisions and to enable the commission to make decisions wisely and well.
3. He carries out ongoing research of congregational needs and program effectiveness.
4. He develops strategic plans to assist congregational leaders (both called and lay) assess and expand ministry.
5. He supervises and participates in the development and implementation of programs and the production of resources.
6. He selects, trains, and provides assistance to full-time and part-time consultants.
7. He develops and manages a budget according to the format and policies of the synod.
8. He promotes the value of congregational assessment and planning and the programs that encourage them within the administrative structure of the synod as well as to conferences, congregations, and called workers.
9. He encourages and assists staff, colleagues, district personnel, and whatever committees or ad hoc groups are working in ministry associated with congregational counseling.
10. He implements the policies and resolutions of the Conference of Presidents with the guidance of the Commission on Congregational Counseling and the CMSG and CMSC.

Qualifications

The director of the CCC

1. Is theologically trained
 2. Possesses a strong commitment to nurture and outreach
 3. Is able to think analytically and creatively
 4. Has the gift of administration
 5. Is a good listener with strong people skills
 6. Has ability to write clearly
 7. Is a quality teacher/trainer/mentor
 8. Is an ongoing learner
 9. Has broad experience in the synod
 10. Has a positive, encouraging spirit
 11. Is flexible, adaptive, and patient
 12. Is able to work through others
-

¹ The committee suggests to the COP that it appoint the five members of the committee to serve as the initial CCC Commission. The committee also suggests that the COP appoint one of the five members as chairman of the commission.

The committee further suggests that the appointed chairman serve until the 2013 synod convention when a pastor is elected to serve as Commission chairman. We suggest that a new member be appointed to the Commission over the next five years replacing one of the members of the committee.

² It is unclear at this time whether the COP and WKW will accept the recommendation of the committee. References to the consultation service known as WELS PA are in italics.

Congregational Profile Introduction

Objectives

The objectives of preparing this congregational profile are:

1. To help determine historically where your congregation has been.
2. To help discern accurately where your congregation is now.
3. To help provide visibly a ten-year database for self-study.

Sources of Information/Data

Hopefully, all the information requested in this congregational profile will be available in your church and/or pastor's office. You may discover, however, that you'll need to look elsewhere and dig deeply to ferret out all the information that will be useful to us and to your congregation for the purposes of our analysis. Some resource materials may be hardcopy only, while others may be stored electronically.

It is important that you fill out this congregational profile as completely and accurately as possible. Someone in the know should review the data and look over the congregational profile form prior to submitting it. The more reliable the information, the better we will be able to understand your congregation and serve you and your church.

Suggested Process

- ✘ Appoint a team consisting of the pastor(s) and several knowledgeable lay leaders to complete this profile.
- ✘ Some portions of the profile are simply data gathering. Anyone can fill this out.
- ✘ Other portions are more subjective. Go through each question or statement together.
- ✘ Discuss the answers to these questions together before filling them out.
- ✘ Take your time and openly share your individual perceptions.
- ✘ Try to form a consensus on each question or statement and record your response.
- ✘ Write clearly please.
- ✘ Make sure your responses are based not on what you would like the situation to be, but on what is real at this time.
- ✘ Strive for answers that are complete, yet concise.

Congregational Profile Form

| | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Congregation: | City/State: |
| Date Completed: | |

Section One – Historical Background

Date first service was conducted: _____ Number of Years Ago: _____

Date mission status was granted: _____ Number of Years Ago: _____

Date congregation was incorporated: _____ Number of Years Ago: _____

Date congregation became self-supporting: _____ Number of Years Ago: _____

If you are not self-supporting, how many years of subsidy are left?

We originally worshiped at _____ (location/building) for _____ years.

Since first meeting there, we have moved to the following locations:

Number of Years: _____

Number of Years: _____

Number of Years: _____

Number of Years: _____

Our present facilities were constructed:

(Year) _____ (Description of Facility/Addition)

(Year) _____ (Description of Facility/Addition)

(Year) _____ (Description of Facility/Addition)

(Year) _____ (Description of Facility/Addition)

The most recent discussion on expanding our facilities occurred in _____ (year). The general conclusion of our leadership at that time (concerning future expansion) was:

These resident pastors (include current pastors) have served our congregation since its inception:

1. from - or years
2. from - or years
3. from - or years
4. from - or years
5. from - or years
6. from - or years
7. from - or years
8. from - or years
9. from - or years
10. from - or years
11. from - or years
12. from - or years

Average Tenure: years

Number of other called workers that have served our congregation:

Lutheran Elementary Teachers (including principals)

Vicars (Years:)

Staff Ministers (Ministry focus:)

Others:

Please list the two most significant events or changes (positive or negative) that have impacted your congregation in the past three to five years (e.g. growth or decline, new pastor, change in the community, budgetary stress, internal conflict, etc.) and comment briefly on their impact.

- 1.
- 2.

Attach additional information on these blessings/challenges if more space is needed.

Section Two – Current Info/Statistics

Membership of our congregation as of _____ (date).

Communicants (Confirmed)

Souls (Baptized)

Ave. Weekly Worship: _____ or _____ % (for 20 _____) based on a membership of _____ souls.

Estimated percentage of current active (attending at least twice a month) membership:

% Members for more than 25 years

% Members for 10 to 25 years

% Members for 5 to 10 years

% Members for less than 5 years

For each of your weekly worship services, provide the following information:

| Day | Time | Ave. Attn. | % of Souls Attending | % of Seating Filled | % of Parking Lot Filled |
|-----|------|------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| | | | % | % | % |
| | | | % | % | % |
| | | | % | % | % |
| | | | % | % | % |

Our sanctuary comfortably seats _____ people.

Our parking lot accommodates _____ vehicles (including _____ visitor and _____ handicap spaces).

Our land site comprises approximately _____ acres. Does the church own other property?

Explain:

Provide Approximate Figures for the Following:

The percentage of your adult membership that has completed at least:

- % 8th Grade (Elementary)
- % 12th Grade (High School)
- % College (Four Years)
- % Graduate or Post-Graduate School

The percentage of your adult membership in the following vocational categories:

- % Blue Collar (Production/Service Sectors)
- % White Collar (Professional/Managerial)
- % Unemployed (Seeking Employment)
- % Homemaker
- % Other:
- % Retired

The percentage of your church families in the following income categories:

- % Less than \$20,000 per year
- % About \$20-35,000 per year
- % About \$35-60,000 per year
- % About \$60-100,000 per year
- % About \$100,000 or more per year

The percentage of your members who:

- % Are life-long WELS Lutherans
- % Came from “other Lutheran” background
- % Came from “other Christian” background
- % Came to know Jesus through your congregation

Your Congregation’s Prospect List:

Number of households (family units) currently included on your church prospect list:

Percentage of prospect households that are: % “Good” % “Fair” % “Tough”

How are most prospects added to the list?

Who “owns” and “works” the prospect list?

Describe the prospect follow-up plan/process:

Membership Gains:

| | Children Confirmed | Adults Confirmed | Profession of Faith | Transfers In |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Year-to-date () | | | | |
| 1 year ago | | | | |
| 2 years ago | | | | |
| 3 years ago | | | | |
| 4 years ago | | | | |
| 5 years ago | | | | |
| Totals (All =) | | | | |
| Percentage of total new members | % | % | % | % |

The approximate percentage of our adult confirmands in the past five years:

- % Relatives or friends of our members.
- % Unconnected strangers visiting or gained through our outreach activities.

Ave. number of visitors in worship per month: (They're mostly).

Membership Losses:

| | Deaths | Transfers | Releases | Removals |
|------------------|--------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Year-to-date () | | | | |
| 1 year ago | | | | |
| 2 years ago | | | | |
| 3 years ago | | | | |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 4 years ago | | | | |
| 5 years ago | | | | |
| Totals (All =) | | | | |
| Percent of total losses | % | % | % | % |

Over the past five years, our congregation had a net (select one) Gain or Loss of communicant members.

Comments/Observations:

Section Three – Congregation and Community

Rate how well your congregation matches your community? *(Double click to select your answer)*

Economically: Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Well

Ethnically: Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Well

Educationally: Not At All 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very Well

Which of these statements (double click to select one) most accurately describes your people?

More than 50% of our members have one distinct ethnic background (e.g. German, Swedish, African-American, Hispanic). Indicate the majority group:

Less than 50% of our present members come from one ethnic group. Nevertheless, our church can be identified with one dominant group, especially among the leaders. Indicate the name of the dominant ethnic group:

There is no distinct ethnic identity at our church. The lifestyles of our members and the expressions of their Christianity represent our diverse local culture.

Our members (in percentages) live at these approximate distances from our church:

1. % 0-1 mile
2. % 1-3 miles
3. % 3-5 miles
4. % 5+ miles

Approximately % of our member families are related by marriage to other families in our congregation.

Comments/Observations on Any of the Above:

What reputation does your congregation have in the community?

Supply the following current information on age, gender, and marital status. Be aware that having this information helps us better understand the makeup of your congregation (as compared with that of your community), gain greater insights on the worship patterns of your members, and more. **Please do your best to provide accurate data.**

| Age | Males | | Females | | Total | | Marital Status | | | |
|---------------|-------|---|---------|---|-------|---|----------------|---------|----------|---------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | Single | Married | Divorced | Widowed |
| 0-4 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 5-9 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 10-14 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 15-20 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 21-29 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 30-39 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 40-49 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 50-59 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 60-74 | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| 75 + | | % | | % | | % | | | | |
| Totals | | % | | % | | % | | | | |

How many current members (souls) are missing in this chart? or % based on our soul membership of as of (date).

Of those that are missing, would they be from one or more specific age group? Yes No

Explain:

Section Four – Preschool/School Information

Please supply the following information on your preschool and/or elementary school, if you have one or the other or both.

If you have neither, simply skip this section.

Fill in the number of students enrolled:

| Preschool | This yr. | 1 yr. ago | 2 yrs. ago | 3 yrs. ago | 4 yrs. ago | 5 yrs. ago |
|------------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Members | | | | | | |
| Other WELS | | | | | | |
| Non-Churched | | | | | | |
| Other-Churched | | | | | | |

| Elementary School | This yr. | 1 yr. ago | 2 yrs. ago | 3 yrs. ago | 4 yrs. ago | 5 yrs. ago |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Members | | | | | | |
| Other WELS | | | | | | |
| Non-Churched | | | | | | |
| Other-Churched | | | | | | |

Supply the various annual fees/tuition charges:

(Use amount for first student in the family.)

| Preschool | This yr. | 1 yr. ago | 2 yrs. ago | 3 yrs. ago | 4 yrs. ago | 5 yrs. ago |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Registration/Book Fees | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Tuition: Members | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Tuition: Other WELS | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Tuition: Non-Members | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |

| Elementary School | This yr. | 1 yr. ago | 2 yrs. ago | 3 yrs. ago | 4 yrs. ago | 5 yrs. ago |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Registration/Book Fees | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Tuition: Members | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Tuition: Other WELS | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Tuition: Non-Members | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |

Comments on Preschool Ministry: (health, reputation, staff, church ownership, support, etc.)

Comments on Elementary School: (health, reputation, staff, church ownership, support, etc.)

If you have a daycare ministry, please provide info on enrollments/fees and add your comments.

Section Five – Membership/Attendance/Enrollment Trends

Complete this table using data from the last ten years. *(Compare with WELS Statistical Reports.)*

| Last Ten Years | Bapt. Mem. | Comm. Mem. | Ave. Wkly. Worship Atten. | Ave. Wkly. Bible Class Atten. | Ave. Wkly. Sun. Sch. Atten. | Luth. Elem. Sch. Enroll. | Preschool Enroll. |
|----------------|------------|------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| 20 | | | | | | | |
| Today | | | | | | | |

Section Six – Financial Data/Information

Complete this table using data from the last five years.

(Please use black ink.)

| Last Five Years → | Year One <u>20</u> | Year Two <u>20</u> | Year Three <u>20</u> | Year Four <u>20</u> | Year Five <u>20</u> |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| See Your Congregation's Records – Last Five Years | | | | | |
| Total (Calendar/Fiscal-Year) Budget | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Total (Calendar/Fiscal-Year) Income | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Total (Calendar/Fiscal-Year) Expenses | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Year-End Balance (+ or –) | +\$ | +\$ | +\$ | +\$ | +\$ |
| Salaries & Benefits | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget |
| Mortgage Payments | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget | \$ % of Total Budget |
| See WELS Statistical Reports – Last Five Years | | | | | |
| Congregation Home Purposes | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed |
| Synod Budget (WELS CMO) | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed |
| Synod Non-Budget (WELS) | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed |
| Other Outside Purposes | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed | \$ % of Total Contributed |
| Total Contributed All Purposes | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| Ave. Worship Atten. | | | | | |

Comments/Observations:

Financial Year-End Summary

Please Note: Provide the following financial data for the last (*select one*) fiscal (20 -20) or calendar year (20). All contributions should be entered below only once so the Grand Total of All Giving is accurate.

Given by members for:

\$ General Operating Fund – Based on Budget
(Include envelope offerings and loose plate, but do not include tuition/fees, interest.)

\$ Other/Special Giving for Home Purposes (List or group causes below.)

\$
\$
\$
\$
\$

\$ Bequests/Memorials

\$ WELS CMO (Congregational Mission Offering)

\$ Other Giving for Outside Purposes (List or group causes below.)

\$
\$
\$
\$
\$

\$ GRAND TOTAL OF ALL GIVING

\$ Current Debt as of (most recent financial report)

\$ Current Budget Balance as of (most recent report)

Summary of Giving

Instructions: Please provide the following summary of congregational giving (based on giving units) for the last fiscal (20 -20) or calendar year (20).

Total Number of Giving Units (husband/wife generally count as one):

Grand Total of All Giving (not including tuition/fees or interest/similar sources): \$

The top 5% or of our giving units gave \$ or % of our income.

The top 10% or of our giving units gave \$ or % of our income.

The top 20% or of our giving units gave \$ or % of our income.

The top 50% or of our giving units gave \$ or % of our income.

 % or of our giving units gave \$0 (nothing).

 % or of our giving units gave \$.01-100.

 % or of our giving units gave \$101-500.

 % or of our giving units gave \$501-1,000.

 % or of our giving units gave \$1,001-3,000.

 % or of our giving units gave \$3,001-5,000.

 % or of our giving units gave \$5,001-10,000.

 % or of our giving units gave \$10,001 or more.

100% or (total number) of our giving units.
The largest amount given by a single giving unit was \$.

Comments/Observations:

Section Seven – Measuring Participation

Criteria by which you determine when members are “inactive”:

Provide the following data for your congregation, current as of _____ (date):

- ◆ Of our **souls**, _____ or _____ % are inactive.
- ◆ Of our **communicants**, _____ or _____ % are inactive.
- ◆ Of our **high school youth**, _____ or _____ % are inactive.
- ◆ Of our **Sunday school children**, _____ or _____ % are inactive.

_____ members are currently served as shut-ins at their homes.

_____ members are currently residents of care centers or other institutions.

_____ members live outside of their daily driving distance (_____ miles) from our church.

Adult & Teen Bible Study Opportunities:

Identify with an asterisk () those that are held in homes or in the community (e.g. restaurants).*

| Class/Description (Indicate: e.g. meets weekly) | Location (e.g. Library) | Presenter (Pastor/Lay) | Day & Time (e.g. Mon. 7 pm) | Ave. Atten. (e.g. 7, not 5-9) |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| 5. | | | | |
| 6. | | | | |
| 7. | | | | |
| 8. | | | | |

Our average weekly Bible study attendance (including adults and teens) in 20 _____ was _____ and approximately _____ **different people** participated.

Member Service:

Number of communicant members involved in some type of service role or task (e.g. greeter, usher, councilman, choir member, youth leader, committee member, etc.):

or % of our members (or % men; or % women)

Which ministry areas (e.g. outreach, regaining the staying) have sufficient member participation?

Which ministry areas have insufficient member participation?

Group Life and Fellowship:

Number of communicant members involved in some type of fellowship group (e.g. support groups, bowling league, mom's group, softball/basketball team, teen group, ladies' group)

or % members (or % men; or % women)

Which church groups appear to be the healthiest (e.g. meet regularly, well attended, growing)?

Section Eight – Diagnostic Questions

Outreach

1. Yes No – Is there an evangelism/outreach board or committee? How many people serve on this group? How often do they meet?
2. Yes No – Is there a lay director of evangelism organizing outreach efforts?
3. Yes No – Is there a consistent follow-up strategy for those who visit worship? Who does what?
4. Yes No – Is there currently an active prospect list? If yes, how many families (households) are you seeking to nurture through it?
5. Yes No – Do you have a process/strategy (e.g. mailings, emails, phone calls, visits) for nurturing prospects? Who does what?
6. Yes No – Do you have a method for discovering and contacting new people who move into your ministry area?
7. Yes No – Do you offer two or more Bible information (adult instruction) classes each year? When? How many lessons?
8. Yes No – Are members regularly asked to submit names for invitation to Bible information classes? How often?
9. Yes No – Was there a community survey (cavass) within the past 2 years? If one is being planned, when will it happen?
10. Yes No – Are there sufficient off-site road signs to clearly mark your location? If not, have you thoroughly pursued the issue with local officials? Yes No
11. Yes No – Is there effective publicity for your ministry in the community? What do you currently do to present yourselves in a positive light?
12. Yes No – Do those responsible for evangelism annually develop a written plan with specific goals and objectives? When is the annual plan designed?

13. Yes No – Is there a definite amount budgeted annually for evangelism? At this time our budgeted amount is \$ _____ for _____.
14. Yes No – Is the budgeted amount enough to carry out an effective, well-rounded program of outreach? If not, what approximate amount would be needed? \$ _____
15. What is the greatest strength and weakness of your congregation's outreach program?

Strength:

Weakness:

Nurture

1. Yes No – Are there regular, formal public receptions into membership for all new members (transfers, confirmands, and professions of faith)? How often?
2. Yes No – Is there a planned program for integrating new members into the life of the congregation? Describe:
3. Yes No – Is there a procedure for monitoring your members' participation in worship that allows you to detect early signs of inactivity? Describe:
4. Yes No – Do you have specific goals and strategies for involving members in spiritual growth opportunities? Describe:
5. Yes No – Are all of your elected leaders involved in weekly Bible study? If not, how many and what percent are involved? _____ out of _____ or _____ %
6. Yes No – Is there a process in place to help members discover and use the gifts God has given them? Describe:
7. Yes No – Is there an organized and ongoing effort to provide training so more members are better equipped to serve? Describe:
8. Yes No – Is there a sufficient number of diverse opportunities for service, in and through your congregation, that all members could be involved in some role or task? Explain:

9. Yes No – Are there enough different groups in your congregation to meet the fellowship needs of all your members? How many groups are there? What new group is most needed?
10. Yes No – Is there an organized and functional program to reach out to members who are straying? Describe:
11. Yes No – Is there a structure to ensure that members are cared for in time of need (e.g. a birth, a death in the family, an illness, etc.)? Describe:
12. Yes No – Is training in stewardship principles a regular part of your on-going ministry? Describe: How is planned giving promoted?
13. Yes No – Do communications in your congregation keep all your members adequately aware of what is taking place? Describe:
14. Yes No – Are there regular Sunday School teachers' meetings? How often are meetings held? How is time at meetings invested?
15. Yes No – (If there is a Lutheran elementary school) Are faculty members visible and do they participate actively in congregational life? Give examples:
16. Yes No – Do you have unique programs in your church that serve and/or involve members?

Planning & Administration

1. Yes No – Do you have a clear mission and vision – in written form – which guide planning and administration? Please attach copies and describe how they are used.
2. Yes No – Do you have an annual planning process in place which includes regularly measuring results? Describe:

3. Yes No – Is there someone who oversees volunteer recruitment and placement?
Describe how volunteers are recruited, positioned to serve, and trained.
4. Describe how ministry programs are normally initiated and evaluated:
5. What established positions in your congregation are vacant and why?
6. Describe any organizational structure of the congregation that varies from your current by-laws.
7. What new ministry programs were developed in the past three years? Are there any new ones being planned?

Comments/Observations: