

# A Lay Perspective of Lay Ministry

[Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention, WELS, Wisconsin Lutheran High School,  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 7 and 8, 1988]

by Kent Raabe

## Introduction

I have continued to wrestle with this essay topic. While possible approaches were explained to me, I found the opportunities for expounding on this subject to be limitless.

The word “perspective” left the door wide open. It did not have to be a research paper. My role was simply to give my point of view. Those who know me have often said that I seldom have a problem doing this!

It also meant I was to give a “subjective evaluation of relative significance”. Simply stated, give a personal examination of a matter at hand of importance. I could not agree more fully with the importance of lay ministry today and for tomorrow.

I question whether the words “lay” and “ministry” have the same meaning to everyone. Let’s be honest. Don’t the majority of members of our WELS congregation equate ministry with the pastor? Do they view themselves as having a different and even inferior purpose for their life of service in the Lord’s Kingdom relative to their pastor’s? Do our members really know lay ministry as personal and *active* involvement in *daily carrying* out God’s will for their lives?

My focus requires change. Change in the vision of our churches. Change in our view of ministry. It shows that it is time for us to get “real” about our rapidly changing society. It’s time to put in a process for improving our methodology of ministry.

I have heard and read the many reasons for being careful about change. “Be careful of offense”. “There just isn’t enough time”. But, I am not talking about change for the sake of change.

I am talking about change because our delinquent lists keep growing. Our memberships are stagnant or shrinking. The world around us increasingly is crying out for help. The numbers of those lost eternally keeps growing every day. I am talking about changing our approach to change—prioritizing.

It is my contention that the very future of our congregations, as we know them today, depends on how our pastors, and members alike, first understand the meaning of lay ministry, and second, by the grace of God, unleash its power.

## I. Mission = Ministry = Lay Ministry

### A. Mission

The mission (purpose) for the church must be first among equals with ministry and lay ministry. Mission simply cannot happen without spiritual leaders who have vision. It also cannot happen without active members of each congregation *daily* living their faith.

Much has been written and disseminated recently as to what is the true mission of the church. As with any group that gathers together and organizes, unless each individual congregation can focus in on its purpose, set goals, and work to that end, it will flounder for direction, lack the support of the majority of its members, and struggle for survival in its present form.

Simply stated, I see the purpose for our churches as twofold. First, we organize. We come together to worship and to be strengthened in our faith through the Word and Sacraments. We

then take that out into our everyday secular life proclaiming and living that Word, serving our fellow man, and leading others to that same one true faith in Jesus.

Have you recently reviewed the mission for your congregation? I know of one WELS congregation that begins their constitution with the words, “In response to our Lord’s command, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’, we \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church declare our intention by the grace of God to continue the establishment of our Christian congregation”.

Where is the emphasis in this sentence? Is it on God’s command or on the intention to continue the establishment? Perhaps the preamble in this constitution was appropriate 100 years ago for a fledgling German congregation. What message does it send out to its members today?

Is it any wonder that churches are often viewed by the average person as an institution that has to be maintained, rather than a gathering of Christians personally at work carrying out their mission in life?

Often churches lose sight of their reason for existing. They seem to get so concerned about their building, their organizations, and their budget that they have lost the zeal for the real purpose for which they exist. This vigor can only be revitalized if each congregation is filled with members who see themselves in the same way as that of the early Christians in the New Testament of the Bible.

Every congregation needs to rethink its basic goals, create a new sense of direction—service and outreach vs. maintenance and survival. This has to come from within. Focus develops when members are living their faith daily through all situations in life.

The pastor and the lay members of the congregation must form together as a *mission* team to renew the congregation. Through spiritual renewal they will naturally go out into their community (and the world) with the joy and confidence that comes with a faith life centered on God’s love, exemplified through Jesus our Savior.

## **B. Ministry**

The pastor is the spiritual leader, teacher, trainer and shepherd of the congregation. (He is also a *member* of the congregation). His difference from his fellow congregational members is his office (full time occupation), not his calling or his mission in life. That (mission in life) is the same for all Christians.

The pastor cannot be *the* answer man. In many areas *he* may in fact, be the layman. He may not be blessed with administrative skills, financial analysis, public relations talents, human resources management, (or even vision).

His function in the context of the congregation is as spiritual overseer. He must lead the congregation into a deeper understanding of God’s Word and His will for the Christian life.

The pastor’s role as leader, teacher, and trainer is critical. Only when all of the members realize that as true Christians we all are ministers, only then will everyone begin to *live* accordingly.

Make no mistake about it, the pastor is key. He can let his members simply exist on a church roll, or he can enlist them to be active fellow ministers. Do many of our pastors hesitate to ask for more than church attendance? The pastor, by his actions, can actually discourage or limit the available co-workers, or he can ask, motivate, direct, and use his fellow ministers according to their God-given talents in an organized manner.

It involves a willingness to openly and regularly communicate personal concerns, desires, goals, and will for the congregation. It requires acknowledgment of a co-ownership with the lay ministers of the purpose and mission of the individual congregation.

It also means acknowledging to the membership that they are human. Everyone, all Christians, live with the same sinful doubts, fears, weaknesses—pastors and members alike.

It is the Christian responsibility of the other members of the congregation to also minister to their pastor. Many members of a congregation also have the need to maintain confidences in their daily occupations. Pastors must realize that they need friends and confidants that they can go to within their congregation, the same as all other members.

When working together, a consensus can be built as to the mission of the congregation, resulting in personal ownership of the goals of the church by all members. Only then will every function, organization, and dollar spent be focused toward achieving the purpose for the churches' existence.

### **C. Lay Ministry**

Before members can truly be actively involved in understanding and living the mission of the church, they must understand, know, and live the purpose for their personal life.

Ask the members in your congregation to list the reasons why God created them. Seldom will you find a large majority that understands God's three-fold purpose for our lives—To love, worship, and serve Him, to serve our fellow man, and to spread the Gospel (witness) to all people.

Where then do we begin? How can we expect our church members to respond to the mission of the church when they have yet to focus on their own purpose for life? Unless the average church member has a sense of being called for a mission for his every day life, the feeling will be to leave it up to the pastor.

Almost all church members admire and respect their pastor, and rightfully so. They also seem to think that to be a real minister you have to be an ordained pastor. Where did they get this impression? The word minister is used almost 200 times in the Bible and yet does not seem to ever refer to the pastor of a church as used in modern language. What happened? Have our members been led to fear that they might not profess their faith correctly? That they will only be ridiculed? That they must be able to repeat memorized passages?

We *all* are called by the Gospel. A pastor is called to the preaching/teaching ministry. But Christian service is just as important regardless of whether a pastor or lay person carries out this service. Everyone who has faith in Jesus as their Savior is a minister!

In many churches much of the laity is often simply a passive audience. Or perhaps they are engaged in some housekeeping tasks. How often does their own congregation give them the impression that this is their role?

Look at the roles often associated with being a member of a congregation -gather funds, keep an eye on the budget, help clean the facility, teach or administer programs such as youth, men's, women's, singles, couples... that are involved in a variety of service to the church or community. They are not involved in ongoing processes, which I will discuss later.

How many of our members look to their church as a place of solace, not work? Often church is an escape. An opportunity to be a passive listener, away from the stress of the world created by how they personally view their job, finances, family...

Someone once remarked to me that they could not understand our church. They said it was the only place they knew where you could be a member and not have to do anything—(I'm not sure where they got the idea!) Did not have to come to any gatherings (services or meetings), did not have to pay dues (contribute) and did not have to do any work (committee member, hours of service, etc.)

Before you disagree, check how many delinquents are on your membership rolls that have not been in church in years. Perhaps lack of purpose for their personal life and lack of mission for the church is part of the reason. How we share responsibilities of ministry among our membership may also be one reason why we give this impression to people outside our church.

Church membership requires an active response to God's love. Faith in Jesus cannot be confined to "membership". It is taking God's word out to where people are at. It is even more than volunteering for service at the church. It is realizing that we are called to daily express and live our belief.

It is the laity, who through their daily lives and occupations, that interacts, mingles, and socializes with all members of society. We must be the force behind the church's true mission. The church does not exist to only serve its members. It exists to bring the lost to Christ Jesus.

#### **D. Summary**

The understanding of mission, ministry, and lay ministry as equals will only come about as congregations change and revise their structures. We must begin to lead and train our people not to be institutional maintenance men and women, but God's messengers, seeking disciples for Him (and not just members of our particular congregation) every day of our lives.

I wonder what Martin Luther would think about us today. How he advocated and lived change! He opened the Bible to the laity. He used a *new* form of sharing God's truths—the sermon.

He pointed out that the worst trick of the Devil was the idea that service to God takes place only in church and by works done therein. How he longed for the whole world to abound in services to the Lord in the home, workplace, and everyday relationships.

There can be little argument to the fact that everyone in life needs a purpose for life. God's great commission gives us that calling, that focus, each and every day. If we agree that many, many of our members have not found the meaning for life that comes from this purpose, what can we as ministers do differently, by God's grace, to instill an understanding of mission and ministry, and lay ministry throughout all of our membership?

## **II. First, Get Real About the Changing World in Which We Live**

Thank God that He never changes. His Word and Truths give us eternal guidance and direction. Our Triune God is, and always will be, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

God has, however, placed us in an evermore rapidly changing world. I have heard it said that there is now more change every 10 years than it took 50 years in the past.

If things around us are, in fact, changing so rapidly, we must change our form (methods) of ministry as well. This in no way means changing God's Word! It may mean changing our traditions and practices that may now quickly become outmoded.

Much has been written about change. Change is often viewed as risky. Risk creates fear. Change, therefore, is associated with fear and because of this, we try to find comfort through maintaining the status quo. Yet, if we do not adapt to the changes that will continue to go on around us (whether we like it or not) we may be looking at our methods of ministry someday as everyone looks upon the Amish today.

We must change our methods for strengthening our outreach as the world changes. As long as our changes are in the areas of man-made traditions and methods, we can have no fear. God's promises are real. He will bless our efforts.

In order to facilitate change, we must understand what is happening around us today. It is imperative that we understand this change and begin to change our ministry accordingly. Below are 6 trends currently fueling the winds of change.

### **A. The Breakdown of the Family**

I cannot tell you something here that you do not already know. I can only ask: Are our congregations still organized on the basis of the traditional family structure?

Note once more these facts: Fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. Fifty-four percent of all young adult couples are living together outside of marriage. Family size is decreasing to the point where our population may grow only 1% annually. One out of every three people is now affected in some way by alcohol or drug abuse, whether by themselves, a parent, or a child. (Over 10% of our population is now *personally* abusing alcohol/drugs). Single parents may soon be in the majority. Respect for parents by their children continues to decline. Child abuse continues to grow rapidly.

Dramatic changes in the past 20 years! Are Christians affected in the same way? Of course. Have we changed our ministry to respond accordingly?

### **B. The Spending Spree of the 80's is Over**

For the first time in history, the current generation of 30-45 year olds will not live better financially than their parents. Pay levels are being depressed. An era of more careful spending, increased savings, and lower personal debt is forthcoming.

How many of our members are blue collar? Many don't know if they will have a job tomorrow. This is a change that has only taken place in the past 5 years. Have we looked at our ministry (and budgets) to change accordingly?

### **C. The Growing Distrust of Authority**

Most people have been greatly disappointed or even "burned" by those in whom they have put their trust. The recent scandals among TV evangelists have added fuel to this fire. There is a downward trend in the confidence people have towards their leaders. There no longer is confidence in the people who run our major institutions, from investment bankers to our government.

People are looking for someone in whom they can put their trust. Never before are people searching as they are now. We have the answer to their search. Are we changing our ministry to effectively share the Good News we possess?

### **D. The Graying of America**

Social demographics are rapidly changing. With a continuing decline in the birth rate, our society is aging. This offers opportunity in addition to a need for us to change our ministry.

Currently 73 million Americans are over the age of 45, 28 million over the age of 65. By the year 2000, 100 million people will be over the age of 50—40% of all Americans.

If you look at many of our congregation's budgets, you find as much as half of the budget going towards the Christian Day Schools, when often it serves only 10-20% of the souls within the congregation.

With the aging of America, significant changes will abound. Everything from increased time for retired workers, to more people on fixed incomes. Will we change our ministry focus accordingly?

## **E. Cocooning**

People are becoming stressed out! We all hear about how we have no time. As busy as I am, I still find myself as a couch potato 2-3 times a week, simply to check out from the hectic world.

It is said that the home is now starting to provide the haven from the pressures of the outside world. People look out at the raging world—leaders lying and cheating, crime running rampant, nobody seems to care about anyone anymore, companies closing down on them, employees dissatisfied...so people are closing their doors and cocooning with family and friends.

Eighty percent of people surveyed said the *home* meets their basic emotional and psychological needs! And are we changing our ministry?

## **F. Cultural Illiteracy and the Video Generation**

The baby boom generation was known for self-centered interests. What about the next generation? Today most unchurched people still profess a church denomination. What about their children 15 years from now?

Children today do not read very much. They watch TV. But even this is changing. It's no longer network TV. No news programs, that's for sure. It's now Video Recorders. Even the school curriculums are filled with computer training and educational videos.

Current teenage girls are already being called the second woman of the house. Mom is working, so they now do the shopping and care for the younger siblings.

Study? Graduates of high schools (and even colleges) cannot spell, write, or read effectively. The statistics on the percent of Americans that will be functionally illiterate by the year 2000 is staggering.

We are going to have to adjust how we communicate to the upcoming generation. It is becoming a whole new world. Are we changing our ministry to adjust accordingly?

## **G. Summary**

The list could go on. My purpose is to not simply acknowledge that change is occurring. Everyone seems to do that. My purpose is to point out that we need to change our ministry accordingly. With every change or with every problem comes opportunity. Current changes in society open for us incredible opportunities for ministry to reach out to the lost with God's saving Word.

# **III. Changing Our Ministry**

## **Introduction**

The previous section shed light on the society in which the Lord has placed us to carry out His work; one of significant and constant change. We must use the means He has entrusted to us to the best of our God-given abilities to carry out His will in this environment for our ministry.

We must once more answer, what is our purpose? What do we want to accomplish? I pray that all of us focus on one main objective—Salvation for lost souls through the message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

I see, then, one of the first goals, a change in our current approach to mission, ministry and lay ministry. This can be accomplished through better communication, training, and implementation of new means to revitalize all members for the main objective.

Each congregation must develop a systematic methodology to accomplish the goals of ministry. These goals and strategies must be communicated to everyone. Responsibilities need to be given to the leaders of the congregation along with guidance and freedom to implement change. A new congregational structure must be designed that continually focuses on the objective and goals.

Change is often never undertaken because there is no focus. The task seems overwhelming.

I have outlined a seven step approach to a change in ministry.

The approach is one of improvement. This means taking a step-by-step approach that is not overwhelming. Second, it is a process—meaning it should be never ending.

### **Congregational Improvement Process (Involvement of all members in ministry)**

1. Staff/Leadership Commitment to Change and Improvement
  - Utilizing a Formalized Mission Statement that is Communicated and Lived.
2. Leadership Team
  - Process Planning and Administration incorporating a time/schedule plan of implementation with a 5-7 year goal of a change in the current congregational culture towards ministry.
3. Awareness/Communication
  - At every opportunity, every service, every meeting, every publication.
4. Education/Congregational Commitment
  - All members involved.
5. Goal Setting
  - All Boards/Committees/and Members establishing goals.
6. Change/Corrective Action
  - Formal System Established
7. Recognition
  - Formal System Established

#### **1. Staff/Leadership Commitment**

**Purpose:** This step begins with the pastor and/or other leaders with vision for the church. It involves the development, communication, and education of the statement of mission. It requires that these key people make it clear where they stand on the mission of the church and that they understand their role in the supporting process. (Lack of pastoral attention will be the number one cause for lack of improvement).

**Objective:** To communicate to all members the staff's/leadership's position on mission. To communicate that a process is being implemented and established to change the prevailing view on the church and the individual's role in ministry and membership within the church.

**Actions:**

- a. Decide that you want it.
- b. Announce a clear, specific mission statement.
- c. Display commitment to it in all actions.

- d. Help establish the formalized organization to carry out the Improvement Process.
- e. Require job descriptions for every staff, board or committee members (Most have no idea what they are supposed to do) along with job purposes, requirements, objectives, and goals.
- f. Ensure that every leader, virtually every member, understands the purpose (mission).
- g. Help ensure that a change in resource allocation is utilized to cause a change in every facet of the budget toward the mission.
- h. Prepare a sermon/talk on the commitment to the mission and then include brief reviews on the top of every agenda! (Over and over and over again).

## **2. Leadership Team**

Purpose: To manage the improvement process by formalizing the team, creating a charter, putting a step-by-step plan in place, and monitoring that the steps are implemented in an effective manner.

Objectives:

- a. Provide a framework for overall coordination of the process.
- b. Be the vehicle to remove the roadblocks to improvement.
- c. Provide the formal communication medium to ensure that the efforts are coordinated throughout the congregation.

Actions:

- a. One representative from each board of the church who desires a change in focus and improvement in ministry should be selected.
- b. Oversee the 5 remaining steps.
- c. Develop an implementation plan. Meet regularly to administer the plan and review progress.
- d. Have all boards and committees implement the plans in their respective areas.
- e. Monitor the implementation status and make adjustments as necessary.
- f. Do not allow any meeting to be held without a written agenda and a time limit to the meeting. (People need to know why they are meeting and for how long).

## **3. Awareness**

Purpose: To provide a method of raising the personal concern felt by all members toward the mission of the church and their personal ministry. (This is one of the most important steps. Members are made aware of the need to change, the status of the process and the continuous commitment. It creates the Communication Vehicle).

Objective:

- a. To develop a plan to share information on the process including how are we doing, blessings received, etc.
- b. To establish a mechanism to encourage that all organizations of the church discuss the mission and improvement process regularly.

Actions:

- a. Convince all boards and organizations of the church that everyone is dependent on each other.
- b. Collect and publicize the blessings (decrease in delinquents, increase in membership, number of adult confirmands, number of people in special Bible classes, etc.)

- Communicate continuously the reasons for everyone to actively be involved in personal ministry.
- c. Ensure that all boards and committees know how to conduct meetings and can communicate on the subject.
  - d. Develop visual reminders and examples as to the importance of what our mission and ministry is all about.
  - e. Conduct surveys to ensure and monitor how everyone is being informed.

#### **4. Education**

Purpose: Provide the type of spiritual training all members need to use their spiritual gifts (again a continuous process starting with the staff and working its way through the entire congregation).

Objectives:

- a. To provide a common understanding on Biblical truths for mission and ministry.
- b. To ensure that all members are educated in this area of God's Word.
- c. Teaching specific skills.

Actions:

- a. Develop a formalized plan for ongoing Christian education (because of current structure, emphasis should be on teens and adults).
- b. Provide specific training for leaders.
- c. Train all members in their individual ministerial role and their use of the Corrective Action (item 6) system.
- d. Establish a new member assimilation program to include mission and ministry.

#### **5. Goal Setting**

Purpose: To turn commitments into action by encouraging members to establish personal goals. (A rudder to steer and a compass to monitor. Establish goals and publicize those that are met. Special blessings should become common knowledge throughout the congregation. All boards, committees, and organizations need to establish goals to guide their process of change for ministry improvement. Goals need to be measurable for communication purposes and so that they are understandable).

Objective:

- a. To assist members in setting and attaining personal goals (stewardship of time, talents, and treasures; prayer, witnessing, etc.)
- b. To show that changes are achieved incrementally over time.
- c. To enable every member to participate in goal setting.

Actions:

- a. Review the purposes and objectives and goals with all leaders.
- b. Recognize boards, committees, and organizations for their improvements.
- c. Ask all members to participate.
- d. Post goals and step results.
- e. Be positive Christians. The Lord is the one who accomplishes what He desires.

#### **6. Corrective Action**

Purpose: To establish a method for individual members to communicate to the leadership, situations that make it difficult for the membership to change/improve. (This is not a suggestion

program. It is a formalized procedure that provides a systematic way of identifying problems that prevent people from being involved in ministry). All problems must be taken seriously. Often simply communicating will eliminate the problem or will enable the individual to know that it will be put on an agenda).

Objective: To remove obstacles that keep members from committing to changing their attitude toward ministry.

Actions:

- a. Design a simple form for describing a concern.
- b. Ensure that the system is understood, its purpose communicated.
- c. Analyze and respond to the needs of the members.

## **7. Recognition**

Purpose: To show open and visible appreciation for the efforts of those who are carrying out their purpose in life.

Objectives: Establish a formal recognition program that places emphasis on participation.

Actions:

- a. Use all congregational media—bulletins, newsletter articles, special handouts, meetings and church services.
- b. Encourage frequent informal recognition and recognize whenever possible. Serving the Lord is rewarding and fun! Let's celebrate it!

## **Conclusion**

These implementation steps are not to create a short term motivational program. They are based on a structure that involves an ongoing process that I believe will require 5-7 years simply to change the old "culture" of the congregation.

When truly acknowledging the changes occurring in today's society in combination with the realities of our congregation's lack of mission zeal, the above framework outlines a process for change that can assist in fulfilling our mission, ministry, and lay ministry.

It is not another program to lay on the pastor. Our pastors must want it to happen, but it requires dedicated lay ministers who have a vision of what our churches can be.

The process explained above works. It gives a structure for change over a period of time. If we are unwilling to attempt change, we will continue to flounder. We must commit to it. By God's grace, we can do it.

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." II Timothy 1:7.

## **IV. Personal Anecdotes on Areas of Ministry**

If there is no staff and/or leadership commitment to the improvement process, it has little chance of being implemented. I am not naive. This will be the case in many of our congregations.

I may not have focused as much on personal lay ministry as the essay committee desired. It's because I have trouble separating it from mission and ministry.

If many congregations will not commit to an overall change in mission and ministry, what then can we as lay ministers do? Push for change in specific areas that will assist us in our daily ministry.

## **A. Church Services**

As noted before, Luther was an innovator, a changer. He drastically changed ministry during his life. In the changing world in which we live, would he not be aghast at how we have stayed with tradition and have little changed our church services over the past 40 years.

Most people who have fallen in love with the liturgy have fallen in love with a form that probably has less, rather than more meaning with each repetition.

If our churches are being filled with stressed-out people, “video illiterates”, and many simply coming for solace, we need new participation methods in our services. Church should be a preparation for going out and sharing, not a dismissal that is forgotten only eight hours later.

How many people have difficulty concentrating through a 20 minute sermon? Sinful flesh struggles with the worries of job, family, and yes, even church work. Does the format need to be changed after all these years?

(Studies have shown that over a 20 minute period, usually only the first and last 3 minutes are remembered!)

Someone recently asked me, isn't it interesting that with every other class, meeting, or seminar that you attend, everyone takes notes to assist in remembering and implementing what you are learning? When have you last seen someone taking notes during a sermon?

Bible texts are often read and not heard. The technique of using the Bible to follow along and participate with all the readings reinforces what is being read and studied.

A portion of every service should be set aside to simply communicate what has been happening within the congregation. The great blessings should be expressed verbally so the joy and excitement can be felt, so everyone feels an important part of the mission. This could be one of the simplest vehicles for many of the steps in Part III above.

## **B. Communication/Publicity**

Many of our congregations are big and our memberships far-reaching. We must improve communication. Simplicity, repetition, and quality are the key words.

Message/Bulletin Board centers need to be placed where they cannot be missed. Messages need to be colorful, simple, and changed so that the material is new every time.

Newsletters should be frequent, short, and of a quality appearance. No article should be longer than 2-3 short paragraphs.

Verbal communication is key. Lay visitors, phone trees, and weekly verbal communication within the church service can continually reinforce and build lay ministry.

All of these can be handled with lay ministers.

## **C. Evangelism (Lay Evangelism)**

In the early church everyone preached the Word. Today, the calling of five hundred members often is the work of a single pastor. In reality there is much more credibility from the witness of a lay person who is not “paid”, like the pastor, to share his faith.

We need all of our members committed to evangelism. We need to train people how to naturally talk as a witness, not how to memorize a series of passages. To be a normal part of one's life with friends, relatives, neighbors.

It has been said that non-Christians have heard too many polished, memorized speeches about Christianity. They need to hear sincere expressions from the heart of what Jesus means to us and how He makes a difference in our lives.

I honestly do not have a week go by where I do not have the opportunity to witness. Something as simple as “I have a church meeting tonight,” often opens the door to “Oh, what church do you belong to?” People today are longing for truth, for a constant, for that something they can put their trust in. They want to talk about their need. They listen willingly to a joy-filled, confident witness about Jesus Christ.

It begins with building awareness in a congregation. Little things such as greeters, visitor parking signs, a nursery, and a Bible Information class (a class that is simply that, not a “pre-membership” class) can let people know that we truly care about people on the “outside”.

It requires a focus of all areas of the church to this mission. I recall one congregation that took 15-30 seconds after each communion table to say, in a different way, “go now and tell others about the peace, forgiveness, and life you have through Jesus”. No one could have attended that church and not known what its mission was. People there witnessed naturally. If they could not speak, they drove cars to pick up guests, stuffed envelopes with on-going mailings to non-members, etc. They were taught how to live their faith and given opportunities for using their spiritual gifts. (And, yes, they had a Minister of Evangelism/Outreach to teach, lead, and guide).

#### **D. The Constitution**

Review it. Change it. Institute a Board for Evangelism. Prioritize. What if a Board of Elders, Board of Education, or Board of Church Properties did not report at a congregational meeting? Everyone would be upset. What if the Evangelism Committee (if there is one) does not report. Does anyone notice? The Board for Evangelism’s first task—Awareness of the mission. The structure of a congregation usually tells where a church is at relative to its mission.

#### **E. Voters Meetings.**

Put Evangelism first on the agenda. (Put the budget somewhere near last). Be sure when each board reports that they include what they are doing for the church’s mission. The agenda (and time spent on each item) also tells where a congregation is at relative to its mission. Push to change the meeting agenda and structure. Shorten the meetings. Keep committee work out of congregational meetings. Use time limits in each area. Focus, Focus, Focus.

#### **F. Budget**

Does the vision drive the budget, or does the budget drive the vision? Look at a budget and again you quickly can see where the congregation places its priorities.

A new catch phrase is “Kingdom balance”. It has a lot of meaning. Do we prioritize for institution and maintenance or service and outreach? We, the lay ministers, can be the force behind a change in our budget’s priorities.

We need to become fiscally responsible. Yes, the Lord wants us to boldly commit to growth in our ministry. However, if soon the deficit becomes the driving force for our service work, (Why do most members know right away why we are visiting them even though we really don’t “talk” about money that often), then does our ministry constantly show that our lack of money, and need for it, is at the focus of every meeting, committee, etc?

If our mission was refocused, I am convinced the money would take care of itself (God sees to it!)

#### **G. Stewardship**

Proper stewardship is a way of living. With a faith filled understanding of one's purpose for life, proper stewardship is an extension.

### **H. Family/School**

We need to ask the question. In the past, did the strength of the family result in the "success" of the school? It is my belief that it is impossible for the school to be "successful" without the family.

The home is critical. The church now competes with all outside activities, like never before, (in addition to cocooning). A ministry to youth/family is now a necessity.

### **I. Lay Visitors**

Push for them in your congregation. Begin communicating with all of your members—specifically shut-ins and the sick—that we are all ministers and that a visit from a fellow member is as important and rewarding as a visit from the pastor.

We are all called to minister to those in need. Simple training can result in substituting much of a pastor's time with lay visitors.

### **J. Lay Led Bible Classes**

Did you ever try to find materials at our Northwestern Publishing House to lead a Bible Class? Often, in the past, many pastors felt uncomfortable with a lay person leading a Bible class.

With proper materials, and an understanding to direct difficult questions to the spiritual leader of the congregation, why not?

Often people are more willing to open up and discuss needs in this type of a format.

### **K. Topical Bible Classes**

Today, more than ever, people need Bible classes directed to the concerns of day-to-day life.

While reviewing a full book of the Bible is important, having various topics that might be exactly what someone needs at the time, may create more enthusiasm. These, again, can be taught by lay ministers.

### **L. Spiritual Gifts/Participation**

*Participation* in one's faith is critical. We need to enlist practically everyone in some form of ministry.

Example—Go '87. At Trinity in Waukesha, over 250 people were involved, whether stuffing envelopes, canvassing, bringing doughnuts, etc.

It enabled members who felt ignored to be in the limelight and get special training for supplying service.

People accept responsibility when they understand the vision.

### **Conclusion**

I could go on and on forever with my perspective. My theme is obviously one of change. But it is more one of setting priorities.

Everything we do must ultimately be centered on reaching as many lost souls as possible with the resources we have available. This cannot be accomplished through a program. It

involves every facet of our ministry. For every project, every expenditure, the question must be asked, “What does this have to do with our mission, our purpose? Is it self-serving or is it to reach out to save the lost?”

An active ministry becomes a natural way of life. As a witness, we tell what we know. If we’re fired up about what we have to share, we don’t have to be an educated authority. We simply need the confidence found in faith, centered on Jesus our Savior.

In every congregational function, every gathering, the sharing, living of one’s faith must become the focal point. Only through constant emphasis on mission-minded ministry will we create awareness, enthusiasm and involvement in carrying out our individual purpose for life, and, ultimately, the very real purpose for our church.

God has placed us in a time filled with incredible opportunities. It is exciting. Times are changing dramatically! We as a church body are also beginning to change.

As we focus our priorities on mission, our ministers will prioritize their time and efforts on training and organizing the lay ministers. As ministers, we will go out in masses, daily ministering to the world around us and bringing more lost souls into eternal happiness.

May God help us to this end.