

# Bible Study in the Congregation

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According to the 1982 Statistical Yearbook, there are about 313,000 communicant members in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran synod; yet there were only about 27,000 people who regularly attended Bible class that year. According to my trusty calculator, that figures out to be only about one in eleven. Even in our South Atlantic district, the ratio is about one in four. When the scripture says, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God," these figures are nothing less than alarming.

In the days of the Apostle John, the church at Laodicea was described by the holy spirit as a "lukewarm" church, she was an indifferent church. one wonders what kind of statistics the pastor there might have been entering on his mission reports. If they had been studying the scripture as they needed to be, would the Lord have been ready to spit them out? In all likelihood, their sad spiritual status was linked to a lack of interest in a serious and sincere study of God's Word, as preachers and teachers of god's soul-saving gospel, we are called not to stand by, but to action, one wonders what responsibility the pastor and church leaders had that the Lord was ready to spit them out.

Before we even get into the body of this paper, I am not going to claim any expertise on this subject of "Bible Study within the Christian Congregation," in fact, the day I was asked to write this paper, I also received a call to a church in another district. While evaluating my ministry and the ministry of our congregation, I sought the counsel of members. One man, whom I respect (and still do in spite of what he said), felt that Bible Class was an area that needed improvement. In all seriousness, his observations were helpful and stimulated ideas for our church and for this paper.

## Why Aren't People Coming?

All of us have probably wondered why some don't seem to be interested in Bible Study. Whether pastor or teacher, the study of God's Word is comforting and exciting. God is speaking to us; he wants to comfort and console us; he wants to guide us and direct us. There is excitement in the studying of the Hebrew and Greek languages (even the little I know) to learn why the Holy Spirit used a certain word or said something in a certain way. Why don't some get excited about that?

Undoubtedly there is a lot of laziness. That's probably the most obvious answer to why people aren't coming, it's not the only answer. There are some justifiable reasons for people not attending. Our congregation noticed the following problems and tried to be more understanding and accommodating.

- **There is more Bible Study going on than we may think.** To say that all who don't attend Bible class are lazy and like the Laodiceans is easy to do. To assume that if they don't change their ways the Lord will spit them out of his mouth as he warned that church in Asia Minor can be done too readily, I've allowed my Old Adam to think the worst and, as usual, was led astray. Over the last few years, I have been pleasantly surprised by people who gave me insights into the scriptures from their regular study of the scripture. Yet some of these people don't come to Bible Class.
- The copies of meditations are gobbled up when they are offered; mothers and fathers are assisting their children with Sunday School lessons and catechism lessons. One family with whom I worked for over a year regularly consulted their son's catechism.
- They say they have some very worldly friends and often find themselves defending the faith and are driven to the catechism for answers. Lately they have called me about the meaning of certain verses from their

regular Bible readings. Another woman says she takes her Bible to work every day and reads her Bible during her lunch hour. When my son was ill, another member gave me some needed comfort from the book of Job, which she was reading. I mention these examples because none of these people attend Bible Class. I wish they would. I pray one day they will.

- A series of Bible readings for the week is included in our Sunday bulletin. We are using a “read-the-Bible-in-a-year” series. It was misplaced for a few weeks and didn’t get printed. I was surprised at how many members questioned me as to the whereabouts of those readings, a number of people were following them. The point is, there is probably more Bible Study going on than we think. The holy spirit has promised to be active among our people, driving them into the study of scripture. We need to acknowledge his promise and power.
- **Small Children.** Ours is a young congregation. Because there are so many small children, parents were kept away from Bible Classes. Needless to say, one of the best things we did was to begin a nursery, having a WEF discourages adding extra classes like a nursery, but we have managed and now we have ten children enrolled. We also started a nursery for our midweek Bible Class. Not all the children are nursery age, but the older ones take care of the rest, it’s a wonderful way for them to serve their savior. Since we began the midweek nursery, we have had as many as twenty-one people attend the class. I am happy with that!
- **Intimidation.** This is probably one of the most significant reasons for people not coming to Bible Class, intimidation occurs in several ways. People who have no background in the scriptures are especially intimidated. After their membership instruction, they still feel uncomfortable around more knowledgeable people who are more familiar with the scriptures. Some can feel intimidated and embarrassed by not knowing the books of the Bible and needing to use the table of contents. Still others stay away because they might be asked to read and don’t feel comfortable about reading publicly. Still others, especially from non-Lutheran backgrounds, might find the Lutheran vocabulary awkward to handle. when we throw around “subjective” or “objective justification,” they just don’t feel comfortable with it yet. At times, their own vocabulary gives them trouble. Our people are trained to identify questionable sounding phrases, when people begin to gasp for breath and clutch their chests upon hearing phrases used in “make your decision” theology, the people using those phrases can feel hurt and intimidated even if they might understand them correctly. I’m sure some here have had similar experiences.
- How do we deal with this problem of intimidation? I believe unfamiliarity and the uncomfortable feeling with the scriptures begin with our membership classes. The instruction books regularly used (*What Does the Bible Say, By Grace Alone, The Wonderful Works of God, That We May Know Him*) don’t require people to even crack a Bible if they don’t want to. Pastor David Beckman has developed a membership course where Bible Study is required (in an evangelical way). As far as reading in class is concerned, I ask the people in the back rows to read so those in front can hear, if some don’t want to read, they just sit toward the front, we must also remember Bible Class is not a time to show people how much we know. We must constantly monitor ourselves and make sure we are not talking over someone’s head. When I hear a term that might be unclear to someone, I try to turn it back to the class and ask what they understand by the word which was used. I let them answer (it also saves me the embarrassment of showing my stupidity). Also, I’ve asked some of our more “knowledgeable” people to go out of their way to invite some of the non-attendees and new people to Bible Class.
- **Insufficient facilities.** As grateful as I am to have a permanent place to worship, I feel the lack of education facilities is a real weakness of the WEF. We have had as many as seventy-five people attend education classes on a Sunday morning. In addition to the regular Sunday school, we have nursery, teen, and adult classes which need more space. We have had as many as thirty-two in adult Bible Class. We aren’t the only

congregation experiencing this problem. It's a nice problem to have, but the noise factor has hindered some from coming because they can't hear. Frankly, I don't blame them. As the teacher, I have also been totally frustrated,

- I believe that Bible studies should be conducted in such a way so as to allow people to take notes. If a book or workbook is not being used, weekly handouts should be made available on which notes may be written. I also believe class members should be facing one another so they can get to know each other. Instead, our people usually get Bible Class in the front pews (or cold chairs) facing me, looking over each other's heads, and balancing their books on their knees. Our midweek class sits around a couple of tables pushed together, people who didn't know one another now are very well acquainted. One person remarked, "I'm glad to see there are people who feel like I do." She opens up on Tuesday night, but on Sunday she never says a word.
- Our congregation began a midweek Bible class because we had such a problem with noise on Sunday. It also gives those people who might have difficulty sitting through Sunday school and worship another opportunity to attend. However, conflicting schedules prevent attendance by some members you would like to see at a midweek class, if we are going to continue to build WEF units, these problems need to be considered in advance. we didn't, now we have problems.
- Getting men to Bible Study. I have often wondered whether this problem went back through the ages. When Peter speaks about women setting a good example to win over the husband in I Peter 3, the early church seems to have had more women who were Christian than men. I don't know why. Perhaps, in discussion, women open up more than men and men feel uncomfortable with that. Although we haven't tried that yet, some men have suggested we implement a breakfast Bible Study once a month. It would be interesting to hear other opinions on that.

These are problems that our congregation has dealt with. As you can see, they don't necessarily deal with the old Adam's stubborn refusal to come. Maybe there are some justifiable reasons for not attending. Even if they are not necessarily justifiable, by going the extra mile, we could be more accommodating and remove an obstacle which hinders attendance, I believe our congregation has accomplished this in certain areas and we have experienced a marked improvement in attendance.

### **How can we get people to come?**

I don't want to give the impression that gimmickry is the answer to get people to attend. Bible Class attendance is a fruit of faith, which is created and strengthened by the application of law and gospel, regular attendance will come as a response of the new man who knows he is indeed forgiven and declared holy and blameless in god's eyes through Christ. On the other hand, there is a lot we can do to show that Bible Study and the Holy Spirit working through the Word is vitally important in the daily life and growth of the Christian,

- Face the problem.

If Bible Study attendance is a problem—deal with it. Don't be satisfied to teach ten or twenty when there are more that need enrichment. On the other hand, don't assume that the problem is entirely your own. It is a congregational problem, so let the congregation take part in solving it. I have felt the frustration of sitting through church council meetings and quarterly meetings and little, if anything, gets said about adult Bible Study. Yet budget matters will be discussed for hours. In churches with schools, the board of education will often discuss matters related to the school, but what about Christian education when the school years are over? Even if our congregations are small and we aren't operating a Christian day school, I believe there is a tendency to discuss the efforts of the Sunday School to the neglect of the other education programs, including adult

education. To attempt to remedy this problem, our education committee organized differently this year. We have a four-man committee. Each has a certain area of responsibility. One oversees Sunday School; another, vacation Bible school; another, the teens and pioneer programs; still another, adult education. Ideally, at each meeting each area of education gets discussed. None should get neglected. We haven't perfected our way of handling Bible Study, but we have taken a step in the right direction.

Every month, I also make a statistical pastor's report to the church council in which I include statistics which cover every phase of our church's ministries. These statistics are printed in the congregation's newsletter from time to time to keep the members informed. I include the number of people we have in adult Bible Study on Sunday and on Tuesday. These figures are also printed in the Sunday bulletin. If we can show lots of people attending and the non-attendees see these statistics, they might be inclined to believe they are really missing something valuable. Printing the numbers should be an encouragement that Bible Study is a vital part of our church's program. Posting the numbers on a very visible bulletin board might also be effective.

- Programs to induce Bible Study.

A few years ago, the South-Atlantic district board for parish education developed an eight-week program to create interest in Bible Study entitled "Continuing In His Word." The program is available through the board and includes a timetable and step-by-step instructions on how to proceed. There are people gathered here who have tried this excellent program and can expand further on it.

Our congregation has tried two major programs to promote Bible Study. I am not proud of that—two in seven years is not enough. The first was in connection with a stewardship program we conducted devoting one Sunday each to time, talent, and treasure. Under time, we provided each member with schedules and worksheets and asked them to keep track of their schedule during the week. We were very pleased to have fine cooperation, first of all, we wanted people to know they probably had time in their schedule for prayer and Bible Study. If not, they needed to make time. At the end of the three weeks, we passed out pledge cards which not only had room for gifts they wanted to give to the Lord, but also talents they wanted to use for his kingdom, Bible Study time, and prayer time. We tried to get a commitment from them for each. We have people in our congregation who are very much against pledging money, but when they saw it next to a commitment to Bible Study and prayer, they filled the whole pledge card—even treasure! I believe we miss the boat if we only ask for commitments of treasure. Purse strings are tied directly to the heart. Bible Study works on the heart and people grow.

The other program crescendoed to a Sunday just prior to the beginning of a new Sunday school and Bible class year in the fall. We were creative and named that Sunday "Education Sunday," about a month prior, our education committee distributed a lengthy survey to all confirmed members of the congregation. Although we did not ask people to sign their names, we did keep track of the people who returned the survey form. Those who didn't we pestered (in an evangelical way). The survey contained some very pointed questions we didn't beat around the bush. Our members were asked whether they attended: if not, why not; whether they would come if there were a nursery; what, where, and when they wanted to study: sections on a youth program, Sunday school, Christian day school, and pioneers. Answers were provided in a multiple-choice format so it wouldn't be necessary to fill in blanks if the member chose not to do so. It was lengthy and took some time to complete. On "Education Sunday" we invited the congregation to a breakfast of doughnuts, juice, and coffee. The survey results were presented using an overhead projector (other activities were planned for the younger children). An informal discussion was conducted inviting everyone to express their thoughts and conclusions based on the survey results, as a result of that one Sunday's activity, our education committee proceeded to buy more audio-visual materials; a youth program was started (and died); people became more aware of the objectives which our Sunday School has; we were able to get complete teams for teaching Sunday School; a monthly women's Bible class formed; and a midweek Bible class began.

One last thought about initiating a program to promote Bible Study -- as our congregation was gearing up for "reaching out," I was completing a Bible Information Class. One of the members began to ask a lot of

questions about the program and I informed her that she and her husband could expect a visit from our committee. Having been a Methodist, she asked whether she could expect calls by members of the church for other reasons than money. I told her that all she had to do was become a delinquent. In all seriousness, there is a lot of truth in that. The only time our people get visited by our members is when we are conducting a stewardship drive or if they are delinquent. I hope the next program we try will involve the education committee on a visit to each home, seeking commitments to attend education classes. There are doubtlessly congregations who have done this, but probably very few.

- Ongoing promotion

For 5½ years, the thought of a monthly congregational newsletter gave me a pain in the neck. Since my pain tolerance is low, I decided not to bother with one. We were so small anyway. Then the Lord sent a real dynamite couple to our congregation, (John Guse stole them from me and even he couldn't handle them. They have moved to New Jersey and are starting a WELS mission there.) The wife asked about a congregational newsletter. I tried to explain about this certain pain I get when I hear the word "newsletter," but the ache subsided when she said she would put it together and put out a sixteen-page newsletter every month. The best part about it was that I wrote very little. The newsletter includes a section in big black letters entitled "Bible Study." For the entire month, we outline what we are studying in our Sunday class, in our twice a month Tuesday class. In our monthly women's Bible Study, and our monthly LWMS meeting. Don't be satisfied to inform people they will be studying I Peter or whatever. Make the subject pointed and interesting. If the verses speak about predestination—then tell them; or the unpardonable sin—tell them. A reference like that might strike interest for someone and they might decide to come. Don't limit this information to your congregational newsletter, but also include it in the Sunday bulletin and/or a monthly calendar. Try bulletin inserts for several weeks prior to starting a new Bible class. If you have a bulletin board, why not use that too? Keep Bible class constantly before your members and be creative in the way you promote your topics.

- An entire-Bible Bible Study

"The Bethel Series" is a study of the entire Bible, put out in 1961 by the adult Christian education foundation from Madison, Wisconsin. One couple in our congregation took this course while members of another Lutheran church body and were turned on to Bible Study through it. The class incorporates some of the principles of Kennedy's "Evangelism Explosion." Laymen are trained to lead the discussion and lay leaders come from the discussion groups. It uses the pyramid principles to get more people involved. Churches which have used it have had hundreds of people in Bible Study as a result. Some of the more prominent churches in Atlanta have used it. What is attractive about this series is that it is a study of the entire Bible. A two-year commitment is required and homework is assigned. The participant studies the material at home and discussion is held in class.

I'm not advocating the use of "The Bethel Series." After reviewing the course, I saw a denial of creation and a lot of statements a higher critic would make. I do think, however, a study of the entire Bible geared for adults would find great interest in our own synod. In our congregation, we used pastor Anderson's *The Story of Jesus the Messiah: the Old Testament*, people were excited at the prospect of reading the entire Old Testament, but the questions were very tedious, besides being geared for Christian day school children. Adults want and need more thought-provoking questions. Pastor Anderson's workbook, as great as it is, was not intended to do that. "The Bethel Series" does a good job in presenting thought-provoking questions needed for maturing adults. With the "people's commentary" getting nearer to reality, it is my opinion that a worthwhile companion workbook geared for adults be printed with the commentary. Such a course might also be a good evangelism tool. When making calls, we often hear people criticize organized religions and different faiths for one reason or another. I stop people there and ask them whether they have ever really studied the scriptures in any kind of

detail. The answer is almost always a “no,” but they often say they tried but didn’t understand and became discouraged.

I believe there are a lot of people out there who have never read through the entire Bible, but would like to do so, these people are not necessarily members of any church anywhere. After I present the Law and Gospel on an evangelism call, I’m pretty bold about asking people whether they’d like to study the Scriptures in more detail. Maybe I’m wrong (if so, I hope someone will tell me), but I will offer them the opportunity to study the main teachings of the Bible with me, almost always, I’ve heard a phrase like, “I’ve always meant to study the Bible, but for one reason or another, didn’t.” I believe an entire-Bible Bible Study would work.

- Marriage retreat. Another couple in our congregation became interested in Bible Study at a marriage retreat they attended, as we would suspect, Bible Study was a big part of it. As husband and wife, they learned how important God’s Word was in their marriage. With churches relatively close together here in Florida, a circuit retreat might be possible. With three churches in Atlanta now, a retreat sounds not only beneficial, but possible. If such an activity were planned, I’d actively recruit those couples who are not involved in Bible Study to attend.
- Reverse the order of Bible Study and worship. Some churches, with great success, have placed Bible Study and Sunday school after the worship service and have seen a marked increase in Bible Study. My personal opinion is that this will hurt evangelism efforts. In the South, people are accustomed to coming to church at 11:00 a.m. Moving the worship service to an earlier hour will cut the number of visitors.
- Ask them when they want Bible Study. This is probably more obvious to you than it was to me. When we began our midweek Bible Study, I assumed a few things that I should not have assumed. I set the class for 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday evening and didn’t think I was being too arbitrary. With all the Wednesday night prayer meetings being conducted at local churches, schools generally avoided scheduling their activities in deference to the church activities. It seemed logical to choose Wednesday night . . . until I asked them. I handed out a questionnaire with a choice of three nights with three different times. No one chose Wednesday—no one chose 7:30 p.m. I am still not sure why Tuesday was chosen, but I do know why 7:00 p.m. was chosen. Parents wanted to be home to get their children in bed at a reasonable hour for school the next day. We have had as many as twenty-one at that Tuesday night class. The most we ever had on a Wednesday was seven. Merely by asking when Bible Study was desired, a congregation in Watertown, Wisconsin had their attendance rise from 35 to 300. For years, they had simply failed to ask what night was most desirable.
- Ask them what they want. Some might wonder whether there is a danger of the “itching ears” syndrome or that the whole counsel of God might be neglected by allowing members to choose what they want to study. On the questionnaire we used for “Education Sunday,” we listed twelve topics and asked they be rated on a scale of one to five. One was “not desirable” -- five was “most desired.” I added the totals on the questionnaire and had my entire Bible Study planned for two years. By using this method, I was able to control what we would study, yet the members were able to provide input. In general, it was interesting to note that our people preferred the study of selected books over topics.
- Try meeting bi-weekly instead of weekly for a midweek class. When we started a weekly Bible class, it was attended weakly. I was ready to drop it completely even though I had the impression our people wanted the class available. There had to be some middle ground. We decided to try meeting twice a month instead in an attempt to resolve several problems. Couples with small children were more inclined to hire a babysitter to attend class twice a month rather than weekly. Members found weekly midweek classes tedious when coupled with regular Sunday classes. Having two Bible classes a week to prepare became tedious for me as

well and the classes were admittedly poor. Needless to say, that's the best way to kill interest—have a series of poor classes.

- Bring Bible Study into organizations. Our women's group begins with a 30-45 minute Bible Study, some of which are conducted by the women themselves. It has been my experience that a lot of valuable time is wasted at organizational meetings. In many cases, the only type of Bible Study is a five-minute devotion at the beginning of the meeting, while fellowship is accorded much more time. These are the various approaches our congregation has tried, or will try, to get people interested in Bible Study. For the most part, they seem to be working although changes don't take place overnight. I've had to learn that gentle encouragement, patience, and prayer are all necessary. If you, as pastor or teacher, show enthusiasm for Bible class and treat it as vital to the church's ministry, I believe it will rub off on your members.

### **How can we keep people coming?**

We can be the greatest evangelist in the world, but if we have nothing to say to the people on a Sunday morning in a sermon, we have accomplished very little. This is also true in Bible class. We can promote it and get commitments from our people to attend, but if we have nothing to say to them or bore them to death, we have defeated our own purpose. Needless to say, the study of the scriptures deserves our best efforts. The following is a list of ideas to keep in mind to conduct an "alive" Bible class.

- Know your gifts.

Paul said to Timothy, a pastor "should be apt to teach," but some are better teachers than others. There are people in this room who should be here telling you how to teach. I don't consider the teaching aspect of the ministry my forte. During my vicar year, I served under a pastor who was a very gifted speaker. He could lecture for an entire hour and hold interest. He was well read; he had a way with words; he could illustrate; and use well-timed anecdotes. When it was my turn to conduct Bible class, he wanted me to do the same, I told him that wasn't fair. I feel more comfortable using a question and answer approach and to be less formal.

How do we know what our gifts are? there are people in our congregation who will tell us if we ask. every pastor has some people who can be very objective about which approaches you need to keep trying or which you need to avoid. sometimes the truth might be brutal, but constructive criticism is good for everyone. There are certain people I continually monitor in our congregation whom I respect in spite of what they tell me at times. Let others help you evaluate your gifts.

- Avoid lecturing

For several reasons, I believe this is a general rule that should be followed. First of all, there are so few who can lecture week after week. That became apparent to me when I listened to Dr. Becker speak on some tapes I was using for Bible class. I could listen to him for hours. But could people really put up with me when I don't lecture like that? Also, lecturing is not the best method of instruction. People retain much more if they are involved in questions and answers and good discussion.

The most important reason to avoid lecturing is to benefit our people. Who here hasn't had someone come and say, "I got into a discussion with someone this week and they asked why we believed..., but I didn't know how to put it into words." Everyone here knows that an evangelism presentation takes practice. When we went through the Seminary, we were taught to verbalize God's Word in sermons. It took practice. Hopefully, we are all getting better at it, if we continually lecture to our people about the truths of scripture, are we really helping them verbalize so they can "give a reason for the hope that they have?" Bible class is an excellent opportunity for us to teach our people to verbalize, by means of questions and answers, these truths and to feel comfortable talking about them.

- Preparation.

When I graduated from the Sem, preparing a weekly sermon intimidated me. It still does. Bible class was often put on the back burner. When a congregation grows and people want more of your time, when more meetings take place, and more calls need to be made, time for Bible class preparation may become scarce. A priorities must be established. Everyone here would agree that preparation is the key to a successful Bible class. We have a couple who come to our church during the winter months (snowbirds even come to Georgia). In Christian concern, they came to me and told me that they had quit going to Bible class because their pastor didn't answer questions. When I said I hoped they didn't expect me to have the answers to all their questions, they advised they didn't expect one to know all the answers immediately, but had hoped their pastor would have the answer at the beginning of the next week's class—but he never did. Preparation might not only be needed before class, but after class as well.

The best class I ever conducted was a six-week course entitled "How We Got the Bible." I listened to tapes, read three books, and numerous tracts and articles. I think I could have taught that class at Sem. Even my wife was impressed. I must admit I haven't studied for a class like that since.

It's no secret that preparation takes discipline. For the last couple of years, a faithful member of our congregation has done all my typing. She's a busy woman and has asked that I have all I need typed to her by Thursday at 5:00 p.m. To test her evangelical nature, I have given her material on Friday night, too. Her deadline forces me to get everything I want typed completed early in the week.

If your people don't have their own workbook or Bible course booklet, I believe there should always be a handout for the class members. A good handout takes good preparation and people appreciate them.

It would be impossible for anyone to determine a specific amount of time necessary for proper preparation. Subject matter is a primary factor to be considered, however, I can say this—Saturday night won't be enough, I believe a good Bible class takes as much preparation time as a sermon. Perhaps Prof. Jeske will tell us that tomorrow.

Remember, also, that ongoing promotion of your Bible class and preparation are directly tied together. If Bible class subjects or questions to be answered are going to find their way to newsletters or bulletin boards, a good deal of preparation will have to be done well in advance. Back to the Word, discipline!

- Homework.

I don't normally have homework for the class at the risk of turning people off. When we used Anderson's workbook, almost all enjoyed taking it home and filling in the answers, at first. After several weeks, the work became tedious. Some even quit coming. I also tried homework with the series on the four major cults. Worksheets were prepared on which I presented first-person statements which espoused the beliefs of the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientists and Seventh Day Adventists. I wanted the class to take them home and use their concordances to show where these beliefs were wrong on the basis of scripture.

- Use audio-visual aids.

Many here this afternoon are using overhead projectors with their presentations—which is great. Our congregation still can't afford one. I'm not sure I'd know how to use one if we had one, but I do think any type of visual aid you have available is good. Make sure you have a good set of maps to be able to point out Bible locations. A course on the missionary journeys of Paul is more enjoyable when the class can trace his travel routes.

- What worked for me.

I'm not that original when it comes to Bible Study and have borrowed ideas of prescribed subjects for many of the classes I have conducted. The different subjects you people have tried and found successful interest me a great deal. Our own publishing house presents certain subjects, but I often use them in a different manner. For example, I played a devil's advocate while studying *Different Gospels*. Class members were given worksheets speaking from a Jehovah Witness' point of view and were asked to take them home and use commentaries and concordances to refute their false teaching. The same approach was used with Dr. Becker's *The Person and Work of the Holy Ghost*, described later in this paper. I try to do as much as I can to stimulate thinking and not to spoon feed.

Following is a list of things that I have done which I felt turned out well. It's a small list for nearly seven years. Maybe the next seven will be the seven years of plenty.

**A.** "How We Got the Bible"—this was the people's choice. I had the course prepared about six weeks in advance, divided as follows:

1. Week One - "Old Testament and Inspiration"
2. Week Two - "New Testament and Inspiration"
3. Week Three - "Collection of the Canon"
4. Week Four - "Variant Readings"
5. Week Five - "Bible Difficulties"
6. Week Six - "Bible Translations"

At first, I thought this class was going to be a lecture, but I found that to be true only for the section on "Variant Readings." When studying "Bible Difficulties," I placed two passages side by side and asked the class to identify the apparent contradiction. If they could, I asked how they would answer as believers in inspiration of the entire Bible, "Bible Translations" was handled in somewhat the same manner. Various Bible translations and paraphrases were presented and, again, we identified the differences—even hapax legomena—and the Reform slant to some translations. I tried to allow the class to do as much as they could to see weaknesses or strengths of certain translations.

**B.** "The Person and Work of the Holy Ghost"— Prof. Becker wrote this course for Northwestern Publishing House. For our congregation, I didn't use the booklet, but used the same divisions and prepared a worksheet containing different statements concerning the Holy Spirit's work. Some were true—some were false. Mixed in were statements indicative of Reformed churches and Pentecostal churches. At the beginning of class, members were asked to agree or disagree with each statement. We then worked through a list of passages relative to the work of the Holy Ghost and returned to the true and false statements for discussion.

**C.** "What the Devil Can and Cannot Do"— What was interesting was the sheer volume of Bible passages on this subject.

**D.** "Differences Between Lutheran Church Bodies" — we have many people from other Lutheran bodies. Prior to starting this series, I polled the class and found that of about twenty-five people, only three of us had been WELS all our lives (none of our other WELS people attend class). We studied different Biblical doctrines, what the Bible said, the Lutheran Confessions, plus WELS, LC-MS, and ALC/LCA. A copier worked so well, I could duplicate published surveys and use them for handouts. The class was intended to last two weeks -- it went five and generated lots of discussion, I think our WELS people learned to appreciate that there are good Lutherans fighting for truth in other Lutheran church bodies.

As you can see, I like class participation. we are fortunate to have some people who aren't afraid to talk. one has to be careful not to allow a class to go on a tangent. I hope our discussion to follow will stimulate more ideas and topics for Bible Study and I'd like to encourage the sharing of materials.

### **Help Me**

This paper certainly does not cover everything we might want to know about Bible class and were afraid to ask. There are plenty of questions remaining. I would like to see this august body discuss some problems which I have.

What about teens? Do you separate them or not?

How do you handle the persistent talker?

Do you do anything about the ones who don't talk?

How do you handle the person who seems to have an axe to grind?

How do you make subjects like the Lutheran confessions interesting and down to earth?

Besides suggested readings in a bulletin, how can we encourage Bible Study in the home?

Does anyone print materials for private home study?

Undoubtedly, there are many other questions.

### **A Last Thought**

Three hundred forty years ago, a man by the name of Richard Baxter was called to serve a church in Kidderminster, England. Kidderminster was an impoverished town made up of underpaid carpet weavers. The times were trying. The years were marked by riot, civil war and plague. Kidderminster was notorious for its ignorance and general depravity. Baxter was only twenty-six when he began his work with a small but loyal group who had remained faithful to their Lord. He spent nineteen years there. His church, although empty at first, had to be enlarged several times to accommodate everyone.

How was such a change effected? Did he lure people into church through raffles and bingo? Did he become a political activist advocating social change through a social gospel he preached? Did he hire London opera stars for his church choir and hob nob with the wealthy mill owners of the town? Not Richard Baxter! He had a very simple and unpretentious program, day after day, he entered the homes of weavers and taught them how to read the Scriptures which alone reveal the Savior who saves and changes lives.

We, as preachers and teachers of the Gospel, need to be concentrating our efforts to training properly the people whom the Lord has given us. Part of that training is a proper respect and need for the Holy Scriptures. May his spirit drive us to this task. May he open the hearts of his people to regular study of the one thing needful.