

Keys to Evangelical Congregational Development

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It is a time of peace. Things are going well in our circles. We watch at a comfortable distance as other churches and church bodies try to wriggle out of the mire of their own doctrinal aberrations. While they struggle with false ecumenism, social gospel concerns, declining memberships, debates on the status of homosexuals, the ordination of women and the involvement of church in the affairs of state, we have found other things to do. We struggle to staff our blossoming foreign mission fields, build chapels for an expanding home mission program, produce literature for a hungry laity, open new day schools and area high schools, and seek to be responsible stewards of the gracious outpouring of gifts from a capital funds offering. It is not gloating. It is more a humble acknowledgement that God always keeps his word. We have a little strength and an open door because by his grace we have kept his word.

But this is not heaven. Day after day our parish pastors have struggles of their own. Most larger congregations and too many small ones have to be satisfied if as many as half of the souls in their care worship every week. The money stewardship of our people under the new covenant of grace is barely a quarter of what was required by tithe under the old covenant. Our homes and families have forsaken the family altar and suffer from divorce, materialism, secularism, mixed marriage, lack of loving discipline, child abuse, drunkenness and drug abuse. A recent unpublished study suggests that congregations in our fellowship lose two out of three of their young people between the time of confirmation and age twenty-five. We have our faithful people, but for the most part the laity is uninvolved in the life and work of the church outside of public worship.

In spite of the multiplicity and complexity of the problems which face today's parish pastor, his bigger predicament can sometimes be weeding through all the solutions and answers that are proposed to him. The shelves of evangelical bookstores are lined with how-to books for the minister. Everybody who knows an eager publisher has given his solution to turning around your congregation and beginning a dynamic ministry. Time management schedules, ministry workshops, leadership seminars, lay involvement courses, evangelism and stewardship programs, and mail-order curricula could keep a pastor occupied full time deciding what to do if he were not so busy figuring out how to do it.

I think most of us feel that there is a common denominator to be read between all the lines that have been written and spoken on the practical management and administration of the parish ministry, and that is, simply, common sense and hard work. Yet as we struggle from day to day we rightly sense that there is also a spiritual dimension to our problems. We all imagine that we work hard and have common sense. But when our parishes become sluggish by human measurements, when worship attendance levels off or declines, when families fight, when the stewardship of our people does not meet the needs of the kingdom work among us, we suspect that there is something else which the Lord wants us to do that we are not doing. We know that these are the end times, that the devil is working, that the sinful world is weaning our people away, and that the sinful flesh is working against the Word in our congregation. But that does not keep our consciences from self-examination. We wonder, am I doing something wrong? Could I be doing something better or different to serve my Lord and his people in my care?

The answer of course does not lie in some new exotic formula for ministry or some cleverly developed program for parish renewal. It lies in the Word. The Word of God is not only the tool by which God crushes the old Adam and ignites and fuels the fire of faith in the heart. It is also the instruction manual as to how that tool will be used by Christ's undershepherds. I believe that understanding this is a part of the appreciation of the Evangelical which is our middle name.

Church renewal, parish administration, ministry management—whatever we want to call it—is nothing but the work of touching the Word to the soul. The Word is powerful, it is pure, it is the voice of God, it is truth, and it cannot be broken. But the Word is efficacious only when it is touched to the soul. It converts, quickens, enlightens and sanctifies only when someone hears it. So the work of the ministry is not to convert, to change,

to renew. God does that by the Word. The work of the ministry is to touch the Word to the soul as often as possible, to as many as possible.

It is from that perspective that I suggest the following keys to evangelical congregational development. None of the suggestions is an attempt to make the Word more powerful. Each is rather the acceptance of a direction from the Word to apply the Word to as many and as often as possible, to touch the Word to souls.

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.” Acts 20:20

Personal contact by the pastor with his people is essential. Neither the telephone nor personal correspondence are adequate substitutes for looking people in the face. This is especially true when beginning your work at a congregation. We are all aware of the custom of the pastor making his get-acquainted visits when he first comes to a new congregation, but few actually carry them through to completion. Some pastors ask members to come to their office by appointment. This method runs a distant second in value.

Touching the law and gospel to the soul is not only a matter of keeping your doctrine straight. It involves knowing your people well enough to know what law to preach, how much law to preach, and in rare cases whether to preach the law. The formal atmosphere of an office with the pastor comfortably behind his desk and the parishoner appropriately dressed and on his guard doesn't always afford an honest look at what is happening in individual lives and families. The home, its pictures, its books, its choices of recreation and entertainment, its decorum or lack of it may speak more loudly about what is going on in the hearts of those there than the words of polite conversation.

Being a good pastor involves more than hanging out the shingle, ringing the bells and including catchy graphics in your newsletter. Personal contact must characterize the whole ministry. The most important part of administration is ministration. Not just the shut-ins and the wayward, but the new member, the troubled, the grieving, the erring, the offended, the uninvolved. There have been many pastors who were no better than average preachers and downright poor administrators who have nevertheless been loved by their people and served the Lord's kingdom well. All this because they made regular efforts to sit with their people, listen to them and minister to them personally.

We must admit that it is easier to stand behind the pulpit and lectern and sit behind the desk than it is to open yourself before your members. It is easier to communicate with the strong, regular, supportive member than it is to speak with the weak, the troubled and the critical. But it is just that kind of more difficult work that anticipates and prevents even more difficult problems and weaknesses in families and in the congregation as a whole.

Personal, private contact serves to touch the Word to the soul. It doesn't have to be said that when people meet you in their homes, when they know you care, when they see the Lord in his representative come to them, they are more willing and apt to come to the Lord's house to meet him. They will be more willing to listen when they come. And when they listen, the Word is touched to the soul. Then God works his miracles: faith, love, service, gifts and prayer.

Personal contact also serves to touch the Word to the soul from the pastor's point of view. Being with his people and hearing them talk and watching them work improves his communication to them. He knows their spiritual needs. He knows their sins. He learns to know how they try to justify their errors and thus how to preach and teach accordingly. He knows their strengths so he knows how to encourage and direct their service. He knows their sorrows and doubts and fears and thus directs his gospel preaching at their hearts.

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

This is the classic passage about “dividing” the Word of truth that has often been applied to the pastor's handling of the law and gospel. We have lost the heart and the soul of the Lutheran Reformation when we do

not clearly distinguish between the law and the gospel in our preaching. Although none of us graduates from the seminary and enters the ministry without the technical and doctrinal distinctions between law and gospel, it is quite another matter to carry through those distinctions over to the tenor, clarity, emphasis, direction, conviction and applications of our sermonizing.

Perhaps our greatest weakness is the tendency to preach to the man in the pew as a unified whole. True, the Christian, both sinner and saint, is an individual. But properly distinguishing between law and gospel means preaching the law to the old man and the gospel to the new man. The law loses its bite and its force if we preach it as though the old man has been partially sanctified. The gospel loses its comfort and peace if we speak to the new man as though he is still weak and not in possession of the full pardon of God until he straightens out.

So you see, we may be distinguishing between law and gospel and preaching both, but in such a way that the contrast is lost. This is not the preaching of the prophets, nor of Christ, nor of John the Baptist, nor of St. Paul, nor of Luther. And it should not be ours. God is a jealous God. The soul that sins will die! Repent or the axe will be laid to the tree. Sin no more so that something worse does not happen to you. I tell you, as I have warned you before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Damn the sinner. Drown the old Adam; don't just squirt water at him. Several years ago a secular psychiatrist wrote a popular book suggesting that at the bottom of the malaise of our modern society was our unwillingness to call a sin a sin. A recent *Newsweek* article noted that among Lutherans and Catholics in Minnesota, the most dramatic change in thinking in the last ten years has taken place in the refusal of the individual to admit personal sin. Martin E. Marty commented that this ten-year shift in moral thinking is greater than that which has taken place in two millennia preceding. He may be right, and not only about Minnesota.

We must be cautious, however, when directing the sharp, pointed preaching of the law to the man in the pew that we do not fall into the many traps the devil sets for us. Proper distinction between law and gospel does not allow for legalism, moralism, the failure to include ourselves as objects of God's wrath, sarcasm, dwelling on pet peeves, damning the sins of the world outside to leave the hearer with a false sense of justification by comparison, or belaboring the treatment and application of the law to the weariness of the new man. It is possible to preach a lot of law and end up failing to accomplish its main purpose to point out sin.

Yet, after all, the law at its sharpest is only a servant to the gospel. And the contrast and comfort of the gospel is lost or diminished not only when the law is not bitter enough, but also and especially when the gospel is not sweet enough. The failure of liberal churches is not only that they have lost their moral conscience and ceased convicting the soul of personal sin. They have stopped preaching a personal Savior from sin.

When I was a student at the seminary, a fine gentleman from one of our congregations wrote a letter to the Homiletics Department. My professor read it to our class. The gentleman complimented the seminary on the high caliber of young men it was sending into the ministry. But he suggested that too many new pastors were preaching about the gospel, rather than preaching the gospel. He heard from the pulpit that God loves and God saves, but he did not hear how and why. Or he heard the doctrinal and mechanical details of salvation but the pastor left Jesus two thousand years and ten thousand miles away.

The gospel is personal. It is warm. It is comforting. It is directed to the individual. Another frequent complaint about pastors just entering the ministry is that they use the personal name of Jesus too infrequently. Instead they speak exclusively of his title, Lord, or his office, Christ.

Perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to allowing the full peace of the gospel to rest upon the heart comes from the frustration of our own sinful flesh and our impatience with the sanctification growth of our people. We are almost afraid at times to dwell on the beauty and grace of the gospel out of concern that our people may take it as a sign of leniency. We want to push. We want to see change. And the old Adam says law. Or, if we catch ourselves leaning on the law, the devil would have us deploy the Roman and Reformed efforts of conditioning the gospel. A wise and aged mentor suggested a way out of this tendency. He said that every sermon should clearly set forth objective justification. God loves all. Jesus died for all. There is forgiveness for all. There is no condition. When we preach that gospel, no sinner wonders whether he has been saved or how much he has been saved. He is a part of all. That message works in the heart the faith that apprehends the justification of God subjectively.

A boring sermon does injustice to both the law and the gospel. Oh, I know that many people tune out and are bored no matter how much work I put into a sermon. I know the efficacy of the Word rests with the working of the Spirit, enthusiasm, outlines and snappy stories add nothing to the power of the gospel. But I also know that appealing to these truths can be a salve to my flesh when the lack of interest in my sermons detracts from the gospel.

Let's say that proper preparation is a given in the formula for an interesting sermon: text study, use of original languages, careful translation, use of study helps, and clarity in outlining. But there is more to a sermon than that. A sermon is more than a study or lesson. It is a talk, an invitation, a story, an appeal, a conversation. It is the dialog of a representative of God-with God's people. The servant of God must speak to his people where they live. Jesus, the master preacher, did. Remember his parables, his figures of speech, his rhetorical questions, his sharp scriptural retorts, the Beatitudes? He taught deep spiritual truths, but not in theological language. He spoke of tares, coins, vines, seeds, kings and servants, sheep and shepherds, camels and needles, fatted calves and banquets, beggars and widows, yeast and bread, foxes and fish. Did this lower the level of his preaching? No, in fact the people were amazed that he taught with authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. He was interesting. Nor need we be eloquent, dynamic or forceful to teach with authority. But we do want to talk to people in their own terms, and we do want to be interesting.

“It was he who gave some to be ... pastors ... to prepare God's people for works of service.” Ephesians 4:11, 12

It was never God's plan that there should be one guy in the congregation who does it all, and all the rest support him by paying and praying. Yet that is what the ministry boils down to in practical terms for many of us. And it's probably mostly our own fault. There is always more than we can do, and we plod along from day to day with one emergency after another making our priorities on a worst-first basis. Training our laity to do volunteer work, make visits, canvass and evangelize and encourage each other in stewardship work stays on the back burner. We don't feel guilty, even though Paul tells us our work is to train God's people for works of service; because we honestly don't have time to teach them. Or we tell ourselves that we are actually training them by our sermons, but nobody listens.

But this whole situation is a chicken and egg kind of thing. What comes first? Do our laity go untrained because we are so busy, or are we so busy because we haven't trained our laity? I remember Clifford Warnken when I was in fifth grade. There were two grades in our classroom and we always had a study period after each class while our teacher taught the other grade. Right after each lesson, Clifford would go right after the assignment and complete it. He was ready well in advance of next day's lesson. I was always behind. I was always hustling to get the math problems completed for the lesson coming up in twenty minutes. Clifford always got A's. I always got something less.

I knew Clifford was no smarter than I was, but he was wiser. One day I decided to follow his example. I began doing the next day's lesson as soon as the assignment was given. Of course, the first day I turned in all incompletes. But ever after that I was prepared in advance. My grades and my whole attitude toward school changed for the better.

God has given us the assignment as pastors to train God's people for works of service. As long as we put off that assignment we will always be behind in all of our work. To begin with, we may have to turn in some of our other work incomplete. But when we have begun to teach and train the laity, we will find that many more of our assignments in the ministry are completed on time.

It is not hard to start. There is an unwarranted apprehension on the part of the poor, humble parish pastor that training of the laity for service in the church necessitates program, redrawn constitutions, seminars, cassettes, new organizations. It doesn't. Start with one. Choose men of high Christian character and spiritual interests, not necessarily officers. Take one along on your hospital calls or shut-in visits. Take another along when you go to meet new members. If it is appropriate, take an elder along on your call to an erring member. Talk to them about the nature of your visits. Explain to them why you used a certain portion of Scripture.

Inform your leaders in advance of what you are doing, so that those who serve in the name of the congregation may do so at their bidding. Ask your elders to do something besides ushering. Let them prepare the worship service, receive communion registration, prepare the readings and visit the sick. Seek volunteers for your nursing home services to prepare for worship and bring in the infirm.

Our lay people, on the whole, lack neither zeal nor knowledge. But we have our reservations that they may not do things as perfectly as we do. Those reservations too can be laid to rest without fancy programs or endless training time. The most important requisites for public ministry by laymen are a heart of faith and knowledge of the Word of God. No one should be asked or elected to public ministry who is not a regular worshiper. Why not require of elders that each attends the full sessions of your adult class? Why not a guest speaker on personal evangelism at your next mission festival with a film following the potluck? If your members are not interested enough to speak to the soul next door, will they give lovingly and generously for the missionaries in Africa? Every elders' meeting or council meeting should allow time for study time apart from the opening devotion for matters vital to the understanding of their work, such as stewardship principles, Means of Grace, church discipline, evangelism, marriage and divorce. It saves endless time when your leaders are doctrinally knowledgeable about these things before they become formal matters before the congregation. Most lay people are highly motivated. Many want to do the work of the church. They need only be taken by the hand and shown. When the example of the New Testament church is followed, we need not have the fears that it will get out of hand. Choose men of good report. Fill them with the Word of God. And make a careful distinction between the lay ministry that is the service of every member of the communion of saints and the formal public lay ministry that requires the good order of a call from the congregation it serves.

Equipping the saints is an important key to evangelical congregational development. It is an assignment to the pastor from God. Putting it off will hurt in the long run. God will bless your ministry and your congregation through the work of your lay people. I have found that elders who have experience and training in evangelical discipline do not lay aside their gifts when they retire from the board. They take it upon themselves to speak privately to an offending brother as a member of the communion of saints. There is often a large turnover in formal evangelism programs. But former visitors take it upon themselves in their private Christian lives to witness to Christ and bring in prospects for Bible information class even after they no longer publicly represent the church. Volunteers in our nursing home services become interested in the spiritual needs of the sick, the elderly and the disabled and on their own make friendly, private, spiritual visits to the hospitalized. Equip the saints!

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Matthew 9:37, 38.

Very closely connected to equipping the saints is the need for more pastors for our parishes. I don't know of a single congregation in our synod that is overstaffed. How can we ever convince our people that we need more called workers if the people themselves don't know how much work there is? And how will they ever know unless they see the work first hand and are a part of it? Once our laity sees first hand all the counseling that needs to be done, the wandering sheep that need to be brought back into the fold, the hungry souls that need to be taught, all the unchurched that need to be invited, all the children who need to come to Jesus, all the old and lonely who need evangelical ministry, they will push you to accept more help. Until then they will wonder what you do all week except write a sermon. Until then they will question out loud why a congregation that got along for a hundred and ten years with one pastor all of a sudden needs two.

A big part of the problem is with ourselves. For reasons not always right we want to be too busy. We want to be pitied. We want to do it all ourselves. We do not want to be thought incompetent. We don't want change. We don't want comparison between ourselves and another called worker. We are content to let the laity think that all the work of the kingdom is being done. What has gone awry, what is not being done we leave off the agenda. And nobody asks any questions.

Not every congregation needs another pastor, or a vicar, or a semi-retired assistant. But most of them do, including many small and medium sized parishes. Our Conference of Presidents is encouraging larger congregations to consider another full-time pastor. They are encouraging middle-sized congregations to apply for vicars. District presidents are eager to assist congregations in calling part-time help from among men of retirement age.

It cannot always be thought of in terms of money when we consider affordability. Can we afford not seek called help in spiritual terms. Can we manage our own families well when we are gone all the time? That, too, is a requirement of the pastor. Is our people's stewardship of time, service, worship and money lagging because we are simply burned out? Are our congregation's families falling apart because we have to wait for the divorce decree in the newspaper before we have time to visit the home?

God does not intend that we bear on our consciences all the sins and weaknesses of our people. Nor does getting clerical help miraculously I turn whole congregations around and allow time to put out every spark before it turns to flame. But it helps. The harvest is plenteous, and the workers are few -not just in Hong Kong. When we have lost a sense of urgency about the ministry, we are also in danger of losing our evangelical direction. The day is short. The night is coming. The sheep in our own flock are weak. And there are many who are not in the fold. Give honest consideration to your personal need and the needs of your flock. Then pray the Lord of the harvest.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” Matthew 18:15.

In matters of church discipline, pastors and congregations seem to tend toward two extremes. Either discipline is not carried out at all and the necessity is broached only when there is a messy divorce; or the discipline is carried out without repeated, sensitive, personal, evangelical contact, and people are dismissed with warnings over the telephone and pieces of paper in the mail. I suppose there is a third approach which is just as bad: people are allowed to drift away until we can't find them, or they don't want to find us. Then they are merely “dropped” by formal resolution.

There is a healthy, renewed interest in evangelical discipline in our circles of late. Conference papers, councilmen's conference discussions and stewardship workshops have all dealt with the subject in the last two years. A recent publication for elders' study from our evangelism people has a very evangelical tone to it.

That is all good. Carrying out an ongoing work of church discipline is the most difficult, uncomfortable work in my ministry. It is the only thing in fifteen years that has made me wonder whether I shouldn't have been an electrician after all. I live with the constant criticism of others and the suggestion of my own flesh that somehow it is unloving, unnecessary, or ultimately unworkable given today's amoral mindset.

But then I remember that it was the King of Love who commanded it. It is the loving Jesus who tells us exactly how to carry it out. It was the chief of the apostles and the great evangelical missionary Paul who carried it out in his own congregation at Corinth. I think of the people I have had the joy of receiving back to the Church after they had been handed over to Satan and their sinful nature destroyed. I think of the strong witness excommunications for despising the Means of Grace in my congregations gave to those who were tempted to think lightly of stepping underfoot the Spirit of Grace. Then I consider that the Lord Jesus is right after all, and go back to the work of speaking to the sinning brother.

A regular, ongoing work of church discipline is definitely one of the keys to evangelical congregational development. Perhaps from the first years of diligent work in this area you will see changes more dramatic than from any other individual effort of building up your people. Church discipline has such a harsh sound, but it is really the work of seeking the straying, being concerned about the individual sheep, personally caring about one of the members of the household of God. When it is carried out evangelically according to the command and with the heart of Christ, it will also leave the impression with the congregation as a whole that this is the work of a loving God. Although some will be excommunicated, the vast majority will respond by the prompting of the Spirit and renew their commitment to worship and Christian life.

Getting started is always the hard part. Pastors often find even their most committed and long-term officers squeamish and reluctant to do disciplinary work. On the other hand, the pastors themselves might be a little reluctant to accept the overzealousness of a few who want to “clean up the membership list” and “clear out the dead wood.”

Thus an evangelical disciplinary program will always start with education. You must have the knowledgeable support of your church leaders to be able to carry through the work to a God-pleasing end. The purpose and motivation of disciplinary work must be made clear to them by thorough study of Scripture. I conducted studies with the voters over a period of time before the first specific case was known to them or brought for their consideration. It doesn't hurt either to bring up the subject in Bible class, society topics, and newsletter articles.

As with most effective, regular church work, evangelical discipline does not require a large formal program, reorganization, or even a board or committee of elders. Going and doing it with Bible in hand is the main thing. When you take a man along for the call, make sure it is someone who will err on the side of love. Take him on a few calls, then take another, and another. When you have a few good men who are experienced, concerned for the individual soul, evangelical in their approach, and whose efforts have been blessed by the Spirit and are sitting in church on Sunday, then you may want to organize, program, rewrite constitutions and form committees and boards.

“Do the work of an evangelist.” 2 Timothy 4:5

Starting the formal work of evangelism in your congregation is the same as starting the work of discipline or of any lay ministry. It has been described above. We have a right to expect that seeking the lost would be a spontaneous, loving fruit of faith pouring out of the hearts of all of our members. We might expect that private Bible reading, home devotions, the gospel from the pulpit, our day schools and Sunday schools and all our catechism instruction would send out an army of missionaries into the world who cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard. But it doesn't. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

There is still some apprehension in our fellowship about formal programs to encourage personal witnessing. Programs and materials produced by the Evangelicals have had their weaknesses. There is an underlying suspicion that a fruit of faith which naturally flows from a gospel-motivated heart will deteriorate into an elitist attitude in those who become a part of special training. There is a potential of offense and of having a zeal without knowledge; but certainly that potential exists in the area of evangelism no more than it does in stewardship, administration, church discipline work, or for that matter, among those who produce arts and crafts for the rummage sale.

Just because of the potential for problems, evangelism work done on behalf of the congregation does need structure, formal training, cautious study of methodology and even program. Here as in all formal training and public ministry in the church, the results of our efforts guided by the Holy Spirit and his Word will filter down into the everyday private lives of the saints. What joy there is over one sinner that repents! What patience and trust there is in the Holy Spirit to work his miracle of faith where he will, when door after door is closed to the canvasser, when the more likely prospect closes his heart to the Savior, and, above all, when the house we were afraid to visit is moved to receive Jesus with joy!

Seeking the unchurched is not an effort competitive with feeding the flock. It is parallel with it, synonymous, even identical. We will not want to preach that he died for all without practicing what we preach in our devotion of time, formal program, and philosophy of administration.

“If I speak in tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

I believe that a pastor's personality is also a key to evangelical congregational development. Maybe personality is not exactly the right word. I have to be careful what I say here. I do not think a "winning personality" is a kind of Means of Grace. Nor is the gospel enhanced by a people-pleaser. But there are certain personality traits or attitudes which can pose a hindrance to the gospel.

One of the things I can fall into so easily is pessimism. Pessimism has all kinds of brothers and sisters: cynicism, sarcasm, negativism, doubt, worry, defensiveness, and a stated belief in Murphy's law. We deal with so much sin, trouble, sickness, sorrow, so many mixed up lives, and disappointed expectations in the sanctification of our people that it seems natural to fall into a pessimistic attitude. We try to keep it inside, but it sneaks out in front of our family, in conversations with brothers in the ministry and most unfortunately in our dealings with members. Maybe self-pity belongs in this category too.

The venerable C.F.W. Walther said it all however when he wrote: "*Der Christ ist ein Optimist!*" Optimism is a blessing of the gospel. Not a false, fake polyanna complex. Not an on-again, off-again worldly optimism which rises and falls with the stock market index, sickness and health, good times and bad. The gospel provides an inner peace and confidence in God that infuses a godly optimism in every kind of personality, from the extroverted to the introvert, from the pusher to the plodder, from the meek to the macho. It is a confidence in the accomplished merits of Christ and his solid sure promises of eternal life. It is an optimism which agrees with the angel that nothing is impossible with God; with Jesus, that with God all things are possible; with St. Paul, that we can do all things through him who strengthens us.

This is an aspect of personality and attitude which is worked by the Spirit himself through the gospel. If it is not forthcoming from the heart and life and conversation of the leader of the flock, we need not be surprised when we do not see it in our people. It is nothing else but the confidence that the Lord will work his will through the power of his Word, perhaps not when we wanted it or planned it or expected it, but when it is best.

A Christ-like optimism works hand in hand with genuine humility and love. When our confidence is placed in his power, it is not so much placed in our own. We can take our ministry seriously without taking ourselves so seriously. We don't have to be so defensive of our office, our authority, our political persuasiveness in the congregation, our integrity, our image.

We may actually start to listen more closely to criticism. True a lot of criticism comes from simple pickiness, a lack of knowledge of the workings of the church, doctrinal ignorance, and a resistance to change of any kind. But I have found in every criticism of me by my people, at least - and sometimes more than - a kernel of truth. Humility allows us to see and swallow those kernels and to meet criticism with patience, instruction, explanation and understanding.

Humility along with a little common sense will also keep the pastor out of matters that are not spiritual in nature. Arguments about what color the curtains in the fellowship hall should be or about which bid should be accepted to repair the church roof should not elicit the pastor's most impassioned pleas. The pastor's heated involvement in things which do not affect the spiritual well-being of his people, many times adversely affects the willingness of members to listen to him when he is bringing the one thing needful.

The pastors in our fellowship enjoy a rich and deep camaraderie, fellowship and love based on their common beliefs and common training. Maybe it is because we fear losing that closeness that we are sometimes unduly critical of each other. We sometimes equate different practices and approaches with abandoning the faith. The *Augsburg Confession* allows wide latitude in matters of worship and other parish practices which are essentially adiaphora. We are living in a time in which there is much pressure for change in worship, language, and parish program. Because something is new, or because something was first developed and introduced in a heterodox setting, it may rightly raise a caution flag in our minds. But our final judgment for it or against it must rest on whether it is scriptural in the form it is presented to our people. Here above all, love - love for the Word and love for our brothers—will be exercised.

There are many "keys" to evangelical congregational development in addition to the ones I have presented here. This has not been a doctrinal treatment on the matter. Much of what the Bible has to say on this is in the form of example rather than precept. This presentation is subjective in that it includes personal opinion and experience. I hope you will receive it in that way.

At the same time, the pastor's approach to building up the people of God is not merely a matter of pragmatism. The word "evangelical" means being orientated to the gospel of Jesus Christ. While we can never in any way, by any methodology, through any force of personality, contribute to the power of the gospel, we can diminish the lustre of its guiding star by not making the best use of the gifts God has given us.

So, be personal in your ministry. Sometimes a short personal visit to a member might do more than an extra half hour of study for your Sunday morning Bible class. Clearly distinguish between the law and gospel in your preaching and teaching. Equip the saints. Involve your lay people in the spiritual work of the congregation. Carry on the vigorous work of church discipline and personal evangelism. Pray that God will give more workers to the church. And by the power of him who first loved you, work in love with your members and your brothers.