

The Changing Profile of Public Ministry

[A paper prepared for presentation to the Southeastern Wisconsin District of the WELS, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin, June 11-12, 1991]

by Daniel H. Koelpin

In 1970 when Alfred Toffler published his book *“Future Shock”* his first paragraph proclaimed, “In the three short decades between now and the 21st century, millions of ordinary, psychologically normal people will face an abrupt collision with the future... For them the future will have arrived too soon.”ⁱ What he meant by those words is becoming more apparent to each of us with every passing year.

Future shock can perhaps be better understood by comparing it with its cousin, culture shock. When a U.S. citizen begins work in a foreign culture he recognizes significant changes in the way every day things are done. He notices that normal conversation, a simple function in his native language, now requires great effort because it is in a new and different tongue. He soon learns that a mere trip across town can be a frightening experience given foreign driving habits and street patterns. He finds out that it takes much longer for people of different cultures to understand each other and form friendships. Finally, he discovers that enough changes of this sort when experienced over a period of time can cause disorientation, stress, isolation and exhaustion—culture shock.

In a similar way when people become disorientated, stress filled and isolated by the impact of the day-to-day changes brought about by vast economic, social, technological and political upheavals they also experience a kind of shock, a trauma referred to by many as future shock.

Change has always been a part of life and history. Yet never, since the dawn of time, have changes taken place on such scale and scope as in our own lifetime. Because of modern communication and technology the consequences of each change impacts instantaneously around the world making enduring changes no longer regional but global.

Not only are the directions of these changes significant, but so also is their pace. The futurists talk about the cycle of discovery—application—impact—and further discovery propelling the accelerative thrust of change with such rapidity that the “institutions of industrial society can no longer contain it.”ⁱⁱ

Among many there is an uneasy mood, a suspicion that life is getting out of control. Doctors, executives and other professionals complain that they can’t keep up with the fast-breaking developments taking place in their respective fields. Manufacturers purchase high tech equipment that often becomes obsolete almost as soon as it is installed. The business competition in corporate America and around the world is so fierce that it is literally consuming the lives and souls of many involved in it. Millions speed through life in a blur of activity for which there seems to be no central meaning or purpose. “Why is it,” people wonder, “that with more time saving devices than ever before there seems to be less time?”

It is alarming to reflect on the overwhelming changes presently occurring in our world. We don’t like the thought of our lives being shaped by forces over which we have no control. We aren’t particularly comfortable when hearing daily about bold new frontiers like genetic splicing or behavioral modification through brain surgery with their vast potentials for good or evil. It is unsettling to consider the number of problems like drug abuse, inner city decay, AIDS and worldwide hunger for which there seems to be no effective solution. The sinful trends in our

society have become more than merely commonplace and accepted; they have a shocking boldness about them. Like Lot, many righteous souls are vexed by the wicked environment in which they live and have valid concerns for the spiritual welfare of themselves and their children.

In the midst of all of these changes how important to remember that we Christians have some wonderful and assuring constants. We have a Lord who does “not change” (Mal. 3:6); a Savior who is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8); a Holy Spirit who comforts us and “the Word of our God (which) stands forever.” (Is. 40:9) Freedom from sin and life eternal were guaranteed for us on Calvary’s cross and having those things by faith we can face everything else. Though we are living in days when men’s hearts are apprehensive of what is coming on the world, we share Paul’s conviction that “...neither the present nor the future, ...nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that’s in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38,39)

In the security that is ours in Christ we who are in the preaching and teaching ministry can cope with change, even the overwhelming changes of our time. Coping, however, will require a faith that Christ is indeed in control of a world which seems out of control and that the events of our times are factored into his master plan for his church. Sweeping economic, societal and political changes have been used by God in every age to refine his church and make it a more fitting instrument for his aims. Distressing eras have also been used by the Lord to enhance the progress of the Gospel message. Rather than being terrified of societal upheavals, we can consider in faith that the Lord may be uprooting the foundations by which the worldly make themselves secure, so that they might learn to find their real security in him. Man’s extremity often becomes God’s opportunity.

As we believe this it will make a difference in our attitude toward change. Instead of ignoring the changes taking place in our society, we will seek to understand them and their effect upon the way we do our work. Rather than reacting to changes, in faith we will want to use them or respond to them in a way that will enhance the interests of our soul saving mission and ministry.

Such is the purpose of this paper “*The Changing Profile of the Public Ministry.*” The first half of the paper will attempt to show some of the changes that are impacting American life and therefore the way we do ministry. The second half will deal with changes our church is wrestling with as it seeks to proclaim the Gospel into the 21st century and beyond. For the purposes of this paper, I think we all understand the term “public ministry” in the sense that we are accustomed to using it as referring to the office of pastor and teacher and the qualifications that go with it.

To catalog all the changes that are occurring in our world and the “chain of reaction” impacts they are having on our society would be to record life itself. Futurist books have proliferated in the past two decades. They include *Future Shock*, *The Third Wave*, *Megatrends*, *Megatrends 2000*, *America in Perspective*, and *Forecast 2000*. Every one of these books make for fascinating reading and a fairly enlightened and accurate walk into the future. We have to remember that in the outlook of those born before 1945 change represents risk. Those 50 and older tend to see themselves as survivors. To all those born after 1946 (the Baby Boomers) and 1964 (the Baby Busters) change represents opportunity, the best avenue to new possibilities and breakthroughs. So there is a different perspective on how people see change. As a summary of some of the things contained in these books the following trends continue to stand out.

Materialism—an obsession with money and things

U. S. citizens have just lived through the most prosperous era, the most outrageous wealth binge, mankind has ever known. Many of the elderly who lived out the Great Depression and/or the Second World War felt they deserved this indulgence; most of the others who were born after 1945 never knew anything different. Propelled by easy credit, cheap energy and little competition (particularly from '45-'69) Americans lived off the fat of the land, the fat of the world. Continually revising our expectations upward, as a nation we spoiled our children, squandered and spent as though tomorrow would never come. In the process we were bitten by "wantitis"—a mounting craving for more—more money, more possessions, more expensive homes, more fine dining, more good times. This obsession to consume and acquire goods and to spend money in a self-centered way continues to be fueled to this day by a multi-billion dollar advertising industry that knows the American people better than they know themselves. Advertising works to the point where many believe that the consumer is "conditioned" to spend beyond his means.

Though we now live in an era of increased foreign competition, rising costs and dwindling resources most people still do have considerable amounts of discretionary income, but because of their higher expectations they tend to see themselves as defeated by prices, taxes and family expenses. For some greed has taken a slight turn from a "desire for more" to a determination "to hang on to what they have." Yet, no matter what form it may take materialism continues to have a strangle hold on our nation and on a good many of the people in our churches. It is seen in so many areas: in the downsizing of the family for the sake of the good life, in the abortions for socioeconomic reasons, in the paltry church offerings, in the extravagant purchases at the auto dealerships, appliance stores and shopping malls.

What is particularly alarming is that the great materialistic expectations of today's parents might take a "quantum leap" in the next generation. What will be the expectations of children whose parents take them out to eat two or three times a week? How do you meaningfully communicate stewardship principles to kids whose dad and mom have just popped for \$150 tennis shoes?

Although materialism remains a major problem from whence many others flow, there is in our Synod a new determination to communicate the Biblical concepts of discipleship, stewardship and the mission of the church so that men might in faith use their wealth for godly purposes. To do this as effectively and thoroughly as possible will remain one of the main challenges facing called workers in the '90s and beyond.

Break-up of the Family—the fragmentation of society's most basic unit

Like materialism the break-up of the family is nothing new, but it is still ongoing and its after effects will have to be addressed. The divorce rate is expected to continue near or above 50% for all marriages. People will not consider it unusual to be married two or three times during the course of life. Remarriage will occur most commonly during transition from one life stage to another. Age will become less of a factor than the ability to satiate our physical and emotional needs at that stage of our life. Young people will be more mobile and self-sufficient than ever (at least monetarily thanks to their parents). According to present day secular trends young people experience sexual intercourse for the first time at age 16. Teenagers, as a group, receive \$50-55 billion in income each year. Less than 30 minutes per week is spent by children in meaningful conversation with their parents.

Unless the Christian church provides creative and forceful arguments on behalf of the family structure designed by God, it is unlikely that the gap will be filled by any other

institution. The church will need to provide more extensive and valued premarital counseling, do a better job at explaining relationships within the home and celebrate successful marriages as role models for others.

Privatization—flight from the rat race into the maze of self

Francis Schaeffer in his book *“How Then Shall We Live?”* indicated that the impoverished values modern man most seeks are affluence and personal peace. Affluence we have just discussed, but personal peace Schaefer describes as “just being left alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people—whether across the world or across the city.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We are living in a time when many are absorbed with themselves to the exclusion of others. Cocooning, the attempt of a family to shut out the world, is but one symptom of this. Yet even within the family unit exhausted family members often find it hard to give of themselves. Modern American culture places great emphasis on self, independence and personal fulfillment. Overworked and self-centered family and church members who are very wrapped up in their own private world are often found to be very reluctant to make commitments to relationships or organizations. People are increasingly using phone answering machines merely as a tool to screen out unwanted intrusions into their life.

The implications of this trend are already becoming apparent. Many are seeking religious satisfaction in the electronic (TV) church which allows them to escape responsibility to a local church or the need for relationships with others. Others want to claim Christ yet not be a part of His body, the church, i.e. not attend worship, nor contribute, nor care what the church is doing.

In response to this, today’s church leaders will have to reaffirm the need for unity, mutual caring and cooperation. It goes against the very nature of a biblical understanding of the body of Christ that people should consider themselves separate from it (I Cor. 12:21). To facilitate healthy interaction more networking may have to be done to bring distant people in and more relevant Bible instruction will have to be offered on the subject of the nature of healthy relationships at home, church and work.

Pluralism—a matter of conditioning to acceptance of choices

Just a generation ago there were only three television networks, three major auto manufacturers, identical interest rates at all banks and the same fares on every airline. Today the choices are mind-boggling. Airline fares change thousands of times every month as computer programs constantly adjust to fares posted by competing carriers. Almost every bank has a different interest rate; televisions with cable offer a 110 channel capacity. To each his own is a very accepted ethic in present American culture.

There is, however, a down side to all of this diversity. Tolerance of choice has spilled over into the area of religion. According to a number of analysts pluralism has crept into many Christians’ belief systems so that they now consider it intolerant to condemn non-Christian beliefs or life styles as wrong. Acceptance of all religious belief systems is somehow being translated into the idea that “all are valid and equally worthwhile.” There is also a syncretism which wants to blend the best of all religions together.

Pace of Life—the treadmill is moving faster

We are living our lives at the fastest pace the world has ever known manufacturing in seconds the week’s work of last century, traveling distances in hours that used to take our forefathers months. Some are saying, “Stop the world, I want to get off.” others like the pace and

feel they want to do it all. By *all* a person would have to include to—excel at the job; take time for personal and professional growth; have a regular exercise program; take care of the home; have the kids enrolled in soccer, basketball camps, etc.; volunteer for community service; keep current on news; have time for shopping; dining out; provide for quality family time and marriage time; attend weddings, graduations, funerals, etc. faithfully; work with the kids on school projects; keep current with friends; relax and unwind; attend worship services regularly and be an active church member—by the way don't go over the speed limit when going from one place to another; factor in time for personal grooming; personal Bible reading; family devotions; meals and potty stops—and remember your spouse is now also working full time to make ends meet.

A schedule such as the one I've just described is not uncommon for many of our church members, but it too has its implications for churches and church workers. One of them is that time is a very precious commodity, one that can never be taken for granted. We are starting to realize that when we ask for a church member's time it better be for something worthwhile. Poorly organized meetings, work projects that are not pre-prepared or time consuming-additions to worship services are not appreciated in our present era of hectic schedules.

People who don't understand today's time pressures are feeling more and more isolated all the time, because all they want to do is have a casual conversation and they can't understand why everyone seems to be running away from them. They tend to translate a "get to the point" demeanor as arrogance and rudeness or they find it humbling and awkward to stand in line to speak to a pastor or teacher. In such an atmosphere the art of little courtesies (the smile, the total attention when you are with them, the remembrance of names, the art of breaking off the conversation on an upbeat note, the sincere interest at chance meetings) are valuable skills.

In an environment of time pressure everyone becomes focused on their own goals and tends to consider themselves more pressed than others; delegated tasks are seen as easy, one's own as difficult. In the midst of fast pace little irritations start to become big problems; small favors a lot to ask. Warning: Don't make big plans for other people's time unless you have first sold them on the worthwhileness of that investment. This warning has some big implications for member ministry which is supposed to be the wave of the future.

Coloring of America—increasing cultural diversity

"In 1980 there were 14.6 million Hispanics; by 1995 they will total 26.8 million. The 26.5 million black Americans will grow to 35.8 million by 2000. Those of Asian descent increased from 3.5 million to 5.1 million between 1960 and 1985 (almost 50%). By 2000 the total could be 10 million. At the same time the Anglo population is static or slightly declining. Persons once referred to as 'minorities' are increasingly designated 'persons of color,' referring to Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and other 'non-whites'."

The populace of the U. S., surrounded by vast oceans and a world unto itself, has not always been as aware of the international community as it might be and this tendency was also reflected in the mind-set of many U. S. church members. Today, it's almost as though the Lord is now laying the nations of the earth at our very doorstep and saying, "Wake up to your world wide mission!" The churches that are not reaching out to ethnic groups beyond their own will become increasingly identifiable. The enormous challenge facing churches is how to assimilate persons of color and still encourage ethnic identity.

Black theologian and sociologist James Earl Massey writes:

“Quite contrary to the concern of the late 1950s and early ‘60s to blend us all into the larger cauldron of American stew, the succeeding decades have underscored the point that a true democracy does *not* demand absorption of differences and distinctives.”^{iv}

In other words churches, who want to include other ethnic groups will have to allow for ethnic customs while still retaining their own. The battle for broad-based acceptance of this premise is still being waged, but churches with healthy evangelical attitudes will strive for racial diversity in the make-up of their membership—not for the purpose of trying to be with it, but in an effort to do the Lord’s work and communicate the truth that the Gospel is meant for all.

Graying of America

For the first time in our history, there are more Americans over 65 than there are teenagers. The over-65 senior citizen group has increased 50% since 1950, and it will increase another 75% over the next four decades as baby boomers move into retirement. The fastest growing age group in America today is the age group over 85. By the year 2000, 100 million people, 40% of all Americans will be over the age of 50.

These older Americans hold increased economic and political power. The majority of the wealth of America is controlled by persons over 50. The elderly vote more and move less, resulting in disproportionate political clout. Public policy is responding to their interests and will increasingly do so. Less money is being spent on schools for the young and more money is being spent on health care and nursing homes for the elderly.

Here again the church of tomorrow will be making adjustments. The shut-in loads in some churches will double, the trips to the hospital will take more time, the nursing home ministry increased. Churches will need to be conscious of easy access to worship; in some cases, this will mean the installation of elevators or easy access for wheelchairs. It will mean more attention to the process of aging as well as “life and death” issues in sermons and Bible classes. We may also be seeing more conversions of elderly people than in previous years.

Yet, the elderly also offer great potential for tomorrow’s church. They represent a pool of experienced and increasingly healthy workers who have more time available. If they can be motivated, trained and involved it could be a satisfying partnership for both church and senior citizens.

Mega-Churches—striving to be all things to all parishioners

On May 13th of this year the Wall Street Journal ran a front page article on Second Baptist Church of Houston, Texas, a 12,000 member mega-church which has parking lots named Jericho, Nazareth and Bethlehem. Its octagonal sanctuary is the size of a basketball arena and its entire quarter mile area is surrounded by stained glass; it seats 6,000 and has place for a 400 voice choir.

Big as Second Baptist’s sanctuary is, it is still only a corner of a million-square-foot complex that offers the faithful not just space in which to pray, but to play, lift weights, shoot pool, eat lunch or catch a Broadway-style show with a religious message. There is a small restaurant which offers menus for “saints” (low-cal) and “sinners” (all the fixings). Attention to quality control produces church services in which computers regulate the temperature and lighting. A corps of parking attendants empty a 2,500 car lot in 30 minutes flat while shuttle busses whisk late comers to and from the facility.

Love them or hate them, mega-churches are the hottest thing on the American religious scene and they are sucking members away from surrounding traditional churches like vacuum

cleaners. Even those who bemoan the trend toward larger and bigger usually end up taking their business to larger institutions and companies for one simple reason: service. To many in our consumer society, service is more important than size and that applies to banks, shopping places and churches as well.

More and more Americans are opting for “full service churches” that can offer quality and variety in music, extensive youth programs, diverse educational opportunities, a counseling staff, support groups, singles’ ministry, athletic activities, multiple Sunday morning services, a modern nursery, etc. While not every one will feel comfortable in a mega-church and not every church is willing to pay for such services, even traditional churches cannot afford to totally ignore the service concerns of its parishioners.

In stating this, I don’t want to give the impression that the motivation for providing service is the preservation of our churches as institutions—the real motivation would be to remove perceived obstacles and barriers to gospel proclamation.

Women—changing lifestyles and expectations

Today 55% of American women work outside the home, and the Labor Department estimates that the figure will ultimately rise to 61%. In 1987 for the first time over half of the new mothers went back to work within a year of giving birth compared to 31 percent in 1976.

As more women assume greater responsibilities in the workplace their past role as the volunteer force for churches, school activities and community services has become less possible. Women who work are not available in the day and when they do come home they are usually occupied with the many responsibilities which remain at home. Single mothers rather than being volunteers may even need a volunteer to help them. What some older women and church leaders perceive as declining volunteerism because of lower commitment is often lower volunteerism because of increased commitments elsewhere. Perhaps we are at the end of an era for women’s organizations which meet monthly; an era when funeral luncheons and short notice meals were provided by a core of women who loved to cook.

With greater latitude in the workplace women continue to look for meaningful participation in church life, a participation which will allow their talents and acquired skills to be used. Trend watchers talk about how the church used to be about 50/50 male/female, but now speak of the feminization of the church with a 60/40 female/male division. It will be important that ways be found to not only inform them of the local church’s mission and ministry, but to allow for their input and involvement in it. To do this without violating the concept of headship is, in my opinion, one of the more serious challenges and opportunities facing our church body. It is gratifying to see that our Synod continues to seek doctrinal clarity and agreement on these important issues.

Information—too much can be almost as big a problem as too little

We all know that we are living in the age of information. Availability of information is not the problem; our ability to absorb, organize and interpret it all is. As the church heads into the 21st century a premium will be placed on concise writing and communication skills. Sharing of information in bulletins, newsletter and after service announcements will have to be streamlined. KISS (*Keep It Simple Stupid*) has become a popular and apropos by-word of our day. Improved use of visual aide, clear examples, and to the point analogies will be appreciated by today’s audiences whether we’re speaking of the worship service, Bible class or class room.

Other trends such as the move from rural to urban, the increasing threat from lawyers who see the church as their “last frontier,” the New Age Movement, the resistance against authority mentality,—all of these things have been brought to our attention at one time or another and will also have impact. The list is endless, but it does give an overall message that tells us to be prepared and above all to be relevant. This brings us to the question that pertains to the second half of this paper: How will the profile of public ministry need to change if it is to give a relevant Gospel message to an ever changing world?

In 1961 American author Joseph Heller published a best selling novel about World War II air force pilots entitled “Catch-22”. The title refers to an absurdly paradoxical Air Force rule by which a pilot was considered insane if he kept flying combat missions without formally asking to be relieved; if, however, he did put in such a formal request, he was judged to be sane and therefore could not be relieved. Since that time “Catch-22” has become proverbial in American terminology to describe a “no win” situation. Other definitions are: 1) a frustrating situation in which one is trapped by contradictory conditions, 2) a system set up in such a way that it appears to make the obvious solution aggravate the problem.

Many are feeling that the WELS preaching and teaching ministry of today is in a “Catch-22”. At just that point in time when congregations are reluctantly admitting the need for more called workers they are discovering that fewer of them are available. Those demoralized churches and schools which most require extra staffing are often those least committed or able to support it and so they deteriorate further. After investing heavily in elementary schools in part as an effort to shore up the family by providing spiritual training for children, we watched in horror as families frequently disintegrated for lack of spiritual attention for parents and teens. Brilliant programs and fantastic strategies have been presented with much enthusiasm, but often break down in the execution because they assume armies of highly motivated volunteers that just aren't there. As the proliferating, time-consuming problems of our sin-sick society continue to cry for more attention, the already over-extended worker has less of it to give—or even when attempting to give it, ends up giving it less and less effectively. As fantastic home and world opportunities beckon, we're discovering that many sitting in our pews can scarcely find compassion and love for the members of their own household, much less for members of the household of faith or the lost around the world.

When seeking an explanation for the kind of problems just described there is always the temptation to either point a blaming finger at some causative factor in the present or to start a running denigration of the past. Both courses of action waste a lot of time and energy and end up creating division that the church can ill afford. There are no simplistic explanations for the frustrations of contemporary church work. We must remind ourselves that the difficulties we face are not unique to the WELS, but are reflected in most church bodies throughout North America. This strongly suggests that the changes affecting contemporary society have also had a significant effect upon people's perception of God, church and church forms irrespective of denominational allegiance. While that does not mean that we in the WELS have done everything right, it does seem to imply that neither were all problems due to our own shortcomings. Still the church that does not seek to be responsive to societal changes will be seen as increasingly irrelevant in American society. What will be important for the future is to be able to identify “core problems” and to adjust or alter ministry, if necessary, to that which can best serve the message and purpose of the church in our changed, and ever changing culture.

Every called worker whether professor, pastor or teacher is uniquely different in regard to congregational circumstances, talents, philosophy of ministry, personal health, level of

experience and spiritual maturity. I respect those differences and realize that what I may be identifying as core problems and possible solutions may not necessarily fit your situation. Each person in the public ministry must ultimately define his role in the setting to which he has been called and seek to determine to what degree he can most effectively enhance ministry. I will try to confine my observations to those that are more generally applicable. If I miss some important ones, and I'm sure I will, please feel free to bring them to the attention of the conference.

Core Problems

1. Large numbers of our church members who are spiritually and biblically ill equipped to resist today's worldly influences.

Our synod in convention (1987) concurred that there were numerous evidences of spiritual weakness within our congregations and determined "that spiritual renewal is a major continuing need of our Synod."^v There are significant numbers of our church members who need to be reminded of who they are and renewed through Word and Spirit in their understanding of their part in the church's mission and ministry. Some of them are delinquents. Others are infrequent attenders who haven't seriously been into Bible study since their confirmation (8th Grade or adult), and even then much of what they received may not have been understood or seen as relevant to their lives. Most of this grouping were never fully assimilated into church life after joining the parish. A number of them are actually fighting with serious problems, alcoholism, drugs, sexual promiscuity, but are not having those problems addressed with long term counseling, therapy or religious instruction. There are many who are in mixed marriages with a spouse (unchurched or other churched) who gives no encouragement to church life. Others still feel isolated because of their personal circumstances such as singles, single parents, divorcees, etc. Generally speaking there are more members of this sort in the larger church because it is more difficult to get at all of them.

An honest recognition of the amount of time and personalized, specialized attention that this grouping actually needs can blow out the circuits of one's imagination. Many of these people are hurting badly. Their special problems need to be addressed, but not with short-term fixes. Delinquents need to be confronted and either put out of the church if unrepentant or set on a new (long-term) direction if they are to be reclaimed. This may mean re-instruction or instruction pertaining to their problem area. It may also mean ongoing group support, long term counseling, clinical therapy and steps toward involvement in the church's life.

2. The Sunday morning worship service can't carry it all.

I don't mean to imply that the worship service is no longer to be a central focus of church life or that it isn't worthy of our best effort. I do mean that if we want to get serious about helping people to grow in an understanding of God's Word that is relevant to their lives, the Sunday worship and sermon is not enough. Perhaps it never was enough, but there may have been simpler days when the Sunday worship covered "more ground" because God's truths were more widely known, accepted, and lived. According to studies in national surveys and consultations with congregations within our own Synod, many sitting in the pews are biblically illiterate and surrounded all week by unspiritual influences. Others in today's worship assemblies may have a certain knowledge of Christianity's basics, but are hurting badly for an

“in depth” biblical understanding of issues like sexuality, parenting, life ethics and relationships—and they’re not going to get all they need in 20 minute sermons.

There are those who believe that today’s churches are increasingly perceived as irrelevant not because they aren’t preaching the Gospel, but because they aren’t proclaiming it enough in extra Bible classes dealing with contemporary issues and needs; and aren’t enabling people to respond to the Gospel in ways that are relevant to their circumstances. Church attenders may be motivated through a Sunday sermon to pray and read their Bibles, but having never been taught to do either may give up before they get started. They may be encouraged on Sunday to do good to the household of faith, but then aren’t enabled to do so within the church in a way that is in keeping with their time, talents and interests.

In this regard assimilation and involvement are seen as essential keys to relevancy. The current proverb, “Tell me—I’ll forget, Show me—I may remember, Involve me and I’ll work for you and with you” remains pertinent to church work. I believe that the more well defined structures and forms provided for member ministry, the more willing and fulfilled workers our churches will have. It is a unique pitfall of the pastoral ministry to confuse means and ends when it comes to their favorite, the Sunday sermon. Too often Sunday enthusiasm and compliments over a well delivered and “powerful” sermon are interpreted in the minister’s mind as having achieved ends, but the Gospel is the *means*. If Gospel information is not leading to transformation of lives and motivated faith is not enabled to express itself can we be satisfied that all is accomplished?

3. The ministry we are not getting done is hurting us more than we know.

The Bible classes that are not being offered, the delinquents that are not being visited, the structures that are not being set up to involve more people in ministry, the special problems that are not plugged in to long term solutions—these are but a few of the things that may be hurting us in the long run more than we know. When a church has a large minority of spiritually weak members, it throws an unbelievable burden on the faithful workers. They not only have to do extra, but are often demoralized at the shocking indifference they find in their fellow members. The larger the contingency of spiritually weak and uninvolved members, the greater the possibility that there will be time-consuming emergencies (divorces, sexual problems, alcoholism, etc.) for which the pound of cure will be required leaving no time for the ounce of prevention to stave off the next wave. Indifferent, spiritually weak and uninvolved members can lower the morale and standards of an entire church and give a poor example to the community. They make everything we wish to do in the church from teaching in the classroom, to every member visits, to simple fellowship occasions, more difficult. If enduring, long term solutions are not found for placing churches on more positive footing the casualties may be the dedicated lay leaders and called workers.

On the need to confront, provide bible training and involve I have an added thought with a somewhat different twist. There has been a lot of criticism of the church growth movement coming from our circles. While most of it has been valid and fair, I think we all have to be careful. One of the criticisms of the church growth movement was its concentration on numbers, or as one man put it “They’re more concerned about growing large churches rather than growing people.” This statement is probably true about the movement, but I hope it isn’t true about us. If we’re only content with growing attendance, church memberships and school enrollments, and

we're not intent on growing people in their relationship to their Savior and their responsibilities over against their fellow man we can hardly be throwing stones.

4. Pastors and teachers can't do it all alone.

Let's not kid ourselves, to accomplish what is expected and needed in church work today we're talking about tremendous numbers of working hours, many more than those that now are able to be provided by our over-extended called workers. There are many dedicated and talented men and women in our present preaching and teaching ministries who are accomplishing a lot under very trying circumstances. Most of them are concerned about the health of their congregation and/or school and so are throwing more at their work—more hours, more time away from home, more excellence, more programs—but there are limits.

Pastors and teachers can't do it all by themselves and it was never the Lord's intention that they should. If we aren't equipping others for the work of the ministry, including the teaching of God's word with some approved materials, then we may end up limiting the extent of the ministry that is done by confining it to what we ourselves can do. That would not be healthy for either ourselves or our church. Jethro's words to Moses apply "What you are doing is not good." (Ex.18:17) Being faithful doesn't only mean working hard, it also means working as effectively as possible for the health of the church. These churches aren't our churches they're Christ's churches.

5. Member (lay) ministry has some working problems.

There are a few flies in the ointment of member ministry. One of them is that just as the idea of lay volunteers is becoming popular, there is the realization that lay people are also being pressed by time constraints in their professional and personal lives and therefore may not be able to pick up the huge loads we'd like to dump on them for indefinite periods of time.

Another challenge is that in order for many members to have a positive experience in member ministry it has to be within their "comfort zone," i.e. in the time niches they desire and in the work area they find fulfilling. To facilitate this takes a much attention to detail and again much time.

The third fly, and probably the most overlooked, is follow through. Much of what is done in the church these days could be called the story of "Great Beginnings." Everyone loves those beginnings. That's when the charismatic pastor or lay leader makes it sound so simple, so worthwhile. So in a frenzy everyone grabs their spears and goes charging up the hill. Yet, if the truth be known, the troops can tire very quickly in the effort and the church cannot afford to have too many of its soldiers discouraged. Campaigns often die for lack of follow through and accountability. Things work best when someone is hovering nearby to monitor and give encouragement and this too calls for time and manpower.

The fourth challenge is to find new blood. Someone must be concerned about doing this. Someone who has the judgment to identify talent in the rough, the salesmanship to recruit it and the "Menschenkenner" sense to empower only the stable personalities. Some person or groups of persons must take ownership for this vital area if member ministry is to succeed.

6. Shortages of called workers for our present structure.

Not too long ago Time Magazine reported that as of 1990 there was one priest for every 1,000 parishioners and that by the year 2020 there would be one priest for every 2,000 parishioners. What is happening in the Roman Catholic Church is happening throughout all of Christendom in the U.S. As expectations for the ministry continue to rise fewer feel qualified to meet them. Declining are the numbers of young men who are willing to leave the plush curtain of prosperity for a life of sacrifice and service in the kingdom of God. In our own Synod demand will outstrip supply for as far as we can look into the future.

What Can Be Done?

A formula for frustration is to understand the enormity and complexity of our ministry problems, yet at the same time lack the spiritual courage and vision needed to address them. It might seem easier not to get at these messy deep-seated problems, but are we being responsible when the health of the church is at stake? There are still some options and ways by which these difficulties might be approached, if we are determined under God to deal with them.

A changing profile for the public ministry might include:

An honest look at more staffing, creative staffing options, new forms of staffing

Staff ministries have been a part of our Christian schools for quite some time, we still call them faculties. Yet, only recently have pastoral staffs of two or three become commonplace in our circles. The initial reaction to this style of ministry has been very favorable. Congregations like the diversity of personalities, age and style. It also is assuring to congregations to observe that staff ministers are capable of working together in Christian harmony. Coworkers in church and school can find mutual help and comfort from each other and in their different perspectives on various issues they help to round out one another's opinions.

For staff ministries to work well the job descriptions must be clear. If confusion exists in the minds of members even staff ministries can end up being counter-productive. Healthy staff ministries call for a shared philosophy of ministry and good communication. Given the "ragged" individualism of WELS pastors, clergy staffs of four or five might start to become a little awkward. With a developing manpower shortage many feel it would be poor stewardship to have four Hebrew and Greek "experts" in one place.

There are, however, different supplemental forms of public ministry which could help pastors and teachers alike. They include: Minister of Family and Youth, Minister of Evangelism, Minister of Administration, Deaconess, Minister of Music, etc. This year's *Book of Reports and Memorials* (pp. 175-187) a Conference of Presidents Report and Recommendation on Staff Ministry describes the nature of these different forms of ministries and the qualifications required for those serving in them.

When this paper was assigned last year I thought I would be doing a fair amount of work on the biblical backing for our term "public ministry" and the biblical considerations pertaining to different forms of public ministry. Frankly, the Conference of Presidents (COP) report on Staff Ministry made my job much easier. I agree with every word they say. Please consider their report as an extension of my paper for discussion purposes.

What I did discover is that the COP report allowing for different forms of the public ministry was not really brand new thinking in our circles. The 40th Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod approved on its thesis on Ministry, Point 6 the following statement. "There is, however, *no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry.* The one public ministry of the Gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand.

Acts 6:1-6. The specific forms in which Christians establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need... In spite of the great diversity in external form of the ministerial work, the ministry is essentially one...'

Antithesis: 'We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation (Pfarramt) as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of the public ministry.'^{vi}

While separated from the preaching and teaching ministry in terms of qualifications, there appears to be nothing prohibiting the development of different forms of ministry to serve the church's needs. There is much "administrivia" which consumes a great deal of the time and energy of our pastors and teachers and of key lay workers as well. Perhaps a day will come when the office of the treasurer, financial secretary, purchasing agent and general overseer of custodians would all be combined into a full time job and taken care of by a retired Christian who is willing to supplement his Social security income, but for whom the congregation would not be required to purchase a home. Other key church officers might then be freed for more spiritual work.

Additional options to consider would be a Minister of Assimilation and Spiritual Gifts who would spend all his time identifying talents and placing them together with needs. A Minister of Music might provide for the needed research into diverse kinds of music, the development of new talent and advance planning for worship specials. Our Synod's worker training system will have to respond to the needs of the church if some of these new forms are to be widely accepted.

A concession on the importance of assimilation and involvement.

While not all have conceded the importance of a great deal of time and effort being given to getting everyone involved in ministry, consistent studies have shown that new members when assimilated tend to stay with their church and older members once involved find their church life more fulfilling. If the high sounding truths we speak on Sunday morning are to be lived in our midst, we may have to be providing better ways to enable that to occur.

More time spent on the education of congregation and key church leaders of the long term structural changes needed for the spiritual health of the congregation.

Even church leaders will not know how much ministry needs doing unless pastors and others "in the know" inform them. Time spent on educating the congregation and its leaders on the steps that will help the long-term health of the congregations is well spent. People can be helped to see the value of administering the pound of prevention rather than the tons of cure.

Will call for more and more specialized needs being addressed by para-church organizations.

Counseling on the long term serious problems such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and divorce can be terribly time consuming for the busy pastor, especially when there are agencies that can do it on our behalf. WLCF&S is now operating strategically throughout the Metro-Milwaukee area and freeing busy pastors of many counseling hours. Lutherans for Life and

WLCF&S combined to form the care-liners hot-line for pregnancy counseling and other emergencies. They received over 90 calls this last month; more importantly ministry is being done by not only the pastor, but members of his church. WELS Kingdom Workers, OWLS, LWMS and other organizations may increasingly enrich congregational life rather than be seen as taking from it.

Will call for greater cooperation between congregations in a given area.

In a day of dwindling resources why can't churches do together what they can't do alone? Why should we practice the doctrine of fellowship only in terms of those whom we exclude, and then neglect to affirm our oneness in real terms amongst ourselves? Not every congregation has to have an expensive family retreat; maybe one can offer the family retreat and another the singles ministry and a third a special ministries program—and pack the house for each with members from all three. Congregations in a given area can share the expenses on joint advertising, evangelism projects, Reformation festivals, mission speakers, etc.

Will see increased use of time saving and effective tools.

Just as things get complicated beyond comprehension, the Lord provides some effective tools with which to cope. The computer is the right tool for church work in our time. It can quickly identify special age and interest groups and generate talent lists with which to fill needs (or around which to create needs). Up to date membership directories, special worship services, unique newsletters are all possible with greater speed using the computer.

Stored forms can be up-dated and provided in seconds and financial information generated for enlightened decision making. The possibilities seem endless. Yet churches are among the last organizations to accept new technology. In 1990 less than 50% of the churches owned and/or used computers.

Another effective tool is the video. Our own church produced one for a fund drive at a cost of about \$5,500.00. It enabled us to tell our story directly to congregational members and made it easier for members to do their visits. We tried not to date it so we could use it for quite some time. The Board for Evangelism's "Soul Search" can enable witnessing to go on by merely sharing a video with an unchurched friend. "Communicating Christ" which is being developed through the WELS Kingdom Workers is basically a Bible Information Class based on O. Riess's "What Does The Bible Say?" What's dramatically different is that the entire class is on video so instruction can go on without the pastor and then the lesson reviewed and discussed later. The benefits of this in terms of adults who have missed a class session is fantastic. The possibilities for this tool when translated into a foreign tongue are astounding.

Will call for greater unity on every level for the welfare of the church.

Within the congregation ministry we will need to become more balanced so that all ministries can be done. In the past the Christian elementary school has enjoyed a privileged position budgetarily. It is now becoming increasingly apparent that we cannot afford to ignore adult and teen ministries without undermining the long-term goals of the school. If we want to keep our schools healthy, creative ways will have to be sought to fund them so that other

ministries are not slighted. Tuition is one means that is being increasingly used by congregations to keep quality education and help support other ministries.

Will call for a host of Bible classes of every kind.

Area teachers and professors can and should be used to supplement bible classes, they also should be compensated. Variety can strike a very responsive chord. A two-year Bible course entitled “God’s Ways” which required both time and monetary commitment was filled to capacity before it began. It’s teacher, Ron Heins, has experienced this phenomenon repeatedly because it was promoted to the parishioners as being worth it and it was. Standard classes in evangelism, premarriage training, spiritual gifts and lay visitation can be supplemented with many other one-time shots. People often delight in the unusual choices and are willing to contribute to quality presentations by good teachers.

Transition

If we’re serious about making some substantive changes in our structure, form and function tracking a firm yet evangelical path will not be easy.

If pastors are going to spend time selling the congregation on the worthwhileness of setting up structures for involvement, getting extra staffing, and developing new tools something else will have to give in the schedule and the congregation as a whole will have to be willing to pay the price for meaningful change. Age old traditions like once a month visits to the shut-ins may have to be re-examined.

Meaningful transition will call for taking “church discipline” seriously. This is one area that can’t be stressed enough. What the church accepts by way of behavior has become what the church expects in the eyes of many of its members as well as outsiders. In this area churches may have to cut their losses. They can no longer afford to burn out good men chasing after 5 to 6 year delinquents while those who could be reclaimed are ignored. The criteria for those dealt with by letter might be the following: 1. They do not allow elders or pastor to speak with them. 2. Their family is trying to cover for the delinquent and keep the church from doing its work or 3. They have consistently shown a pattern of weak response only after the ultimate was threatened and then quickly returned to old ways; such people have lost credibility. We can’t help them if they won’t allow us.

On the upswing, more time and care will need to be taken to achieve understanding about mission and ministry with those coming into the church. Many churches are starting new member orientation classes, not only for adult confirmands but transfers as well. Many pastors are also beginning to meet personally with the confirmand and his parents prior to confirmation.

Staffing additions and structures for ministry will probably have to be done piecemeal by adding a low budget part-timer here or a retiree there until people begin to see the benefits of this course of action. Our church body cannot afford to have the congregations of Synod put their support of Synod’s ongoing program on hold because they believe staffing and renewal in their church a priority. Proceeding with patience and caution will be vital, but in my estimation that we do proceed will be critical.

Keep your eyes on the prize—a healthy church. When you’re up to your backsides in alligators its a little hard to remember that your original purpose was to drain the swamp. Have a

tough skin. There are plenty of people who will not understand what you are seeking to do regardless of repeated explanations.

The kind of people we are (conservative Lutherans) means that we will struggle more with the process of change, but it also means when we finally do make changes they will be better changes which will not sacrifice one word of God's truth. God's Word does have the answers upon which we all can agree. We will need to cooperate with each other by using the gifts of administration in our midst and by building role model congregations which provide for more spiritual growth opportunities and many outlets for expressions of faith. May our gracious God enable us to find the proper path for "No longer are points given for predicting the rain, only for building arks." Even though we are in a ministry which is constantly changing to adjust its forms to changing world, may our changeless God continue to be with us!

ⁱ Eckert, Paul G., "*The Leadership Role of the Pastor in the Congregation*," presented at Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: June 8-9, 1982.

ⁱⁱ Gay, Kathlyn, *Changing Families: Meeting Today's Challenges*, Hillside, New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1988.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henkelmann, Ervin F. and Stephen J. Carter, *How to Develop a Team Ministry and Make it Work*, St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1985.

^{iv} Kelm, Paul, "*Achieving the Purposes of the Church through Parish Education*," June, 1989.

^v Kelm, Paul, "*Achieving the Purposes of the Church through Parish Education*," June, 1989.

^{vi} Levitan, Sar A. and Richard S. Belous, *What's Happening to the American Family?*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.