

**THE BOARD FOR HOME MISSION BOARD'S PLAN TO SET UP NEW
MISSIONS WITH THE CURRENT FINANCIAL SITUATION**

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Summary of the Interview.

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The following is a summary of my conversation with the Board for Home Missions (BMH) administrator, Harry Hagedorn, regarding the state of WELS Home Mission efforts.

With the current financial crisis, it is hard to know whether or not the Board for Home Missions (BHM) will be able to continue to plant new churches and open up new missions in the years to come. Since the global market is contracting, a lot of our ministry efforts are left in limbo and it leaves us wondering, "Where do we put our hope?" The answer is simple. We put our hope in the same God who has already blessed our country and our synod with so many opportunities to spread the gospel. There is no certainty that new churches will be started. There is no certainty that all of the seniors will receive a call come May. There is not even certainty that the WELS will be around in next fifty years. Yet, what we can be certain of is that God's church will not fall. This is God's promise to us -- that even if heaven and earth pass away, his Word will never pass away" (Mt 24:35). Therefore, our confidence is not in money, but in Christ who rescued us from the greatest debt with his blood. For this reason, no matter what happens, the Board for Home Missions is determined to do its part in spreading the gospel to the un-churched in our country and all over the world.

One of the ways that the BHM intends to carry out this mission is by setting high goals. The BHM always projects more new mission starts than they have money for. For example, the BHM's goal for the years 2009-2011 is to start 20 new congregations and 75

new mission enhancements. This goal was set up with the idea that they would receive an expansion of funds from the Congregational Mission Offering (CMO) -- money that they would receive in March and April. Since the BHM never knows how much they will receive from the CMO, the BHM is never sure if their goals are realistic, but they aim high. They project their goals by what they have received in special offerings in the past. They also make plans according to what they have in their operating budget in the present. Often these goals are not met because the BHM does not receive the money it had projected from the CMO. As a result, the BHM is forced to take from its operating expenses to help cover its debt. The more the world-wide financial system contracts and the less money the BHM receives from the CMO, the more it has to take from its operating funds to pay off the debt. The more the BHM digs from its operating fund, the less money it has to support and plant new ministries. This does not mean that when funds are lacking, the BHM will scratch all plans to start new ministries. Instead, they keep the plans on the table, knowing that God in his wisdom may provide money through a special gift. These special gifts are given by people who are moved to help a congregation where the BHM can not. The BHM is thankful for the contributions made by these faithful individuals.

The fact that the BHM sets such lofty goals does not mean that these goals are merely pipe dreams. These goals are made with the intent that the BHM will follow through on them. Money is set aside in the budgeting process, so that if things go as projected, the BHM will send the necessary funds to help a congregation with their mission plans. The money is only set aside in budgetary planning, but is not directly in hand.

The BHM knows this can be frustrating for God's people -- those who are working hard on a congregational and a district level to plan for mission enhancements. Yet the BHM feels that it is better for a congregation to have a plan so that when God does supply the money, the congregation will be ready to act and put their mission plan into effect.

Another huge factor in all of this is the Year of Jubilee Offering. If the Jubilee offerings reach their goal and eliminate the debt, the BHM will have an extra \$2.5 million in its operating budget. Then the BHM will not have to deal with the negative debit against the synodical budget, and they can keep their funds within their operating budget. With \$2.5 million in their operating budget, the BHM will be able to support 20 new called positions for home missions alone.

One of the biggest ways that the BHM deals with the ever-changing economy is to change its approach and strategies of starting new missions. This begins in the way that the BHM deliberates on which ministries are of primary and of which are of secondary importance. The BHM determines this by evaluating the mission plans of the congregations and the District Mission Board (DMB) for their new mission -- a plan for how they are going to carry out their work. If a congregation requests a man through the DMB, the first question that needs to be answered is, "How are they going to use him?" Once that is determined, the BHM can decide what type of man is needed for that area. The members of these congregations also have to demonstrate a willingness to serve. There has to be a core group of people who are willing to support their mission effort with their time and talents.

Since this core group is vital in facilitating new ministries, the BHM determines that there always has to be some kind of a team present in order for a congregation to receive any funding. This group must be a purposefully identified support system. This strategy would keep a pastor from a "lone ranger" philosophy, where he would try and do everything himself. Instead, the pastor would work with mission counselors, an enabling pastor, or an encouraging congregation. The reason the BHM decides that the pastor needs this kind of support system is to make sure that the pastor and his people are making visits, setting up events, staying with the ministry plan. The BHM has noticed that often when the pastor works alone, at best he would plateau at 70-100 members and not move on to the next stage of ministry or he would get frustrated and not stick with the ministry plan.

In these uncertain times, the BHM sees how important it is to make ministry a partnership with the DMB and the congregation, with the pastor and a mission counselor, with the pastor and his people. With this cooperation in ministry, you can have many different people with different skills sets working towards one goal. This gives ministry a better chance of success and puts funding to better use.

One of the results of partnering up mission work is that more responsibility falls upon the District Mission Board to be involved in planting and assisting new ministries. This is because the DMB knows their pastors, their congregations, and areas of ministry very well. And because the DMB has worked in their district for some time, it is better able to make decisions on where and how to develop new ministries. The DMB is responsible for identifying new mission opportunities, working with congregations to start mission plans, and encouraging pastors and lay men in their mission plan.

The DMB gives encouragement through a program known as the "Barnabas program." Through this program, the DMB is constantly communicating with a growing ministry, giving them counsel on what strategies need to be put into effect and how to run them. This also means that all new mission efforts are to be realized and dealt with first on a district level. This enables the congregations within a district to pool their resources and keeps them from doubling up in mission efforts. This also enables the local congregations to see that their own mission plans are part of a larger purpose and goal.

After the District Mission Board has worked with a congregation on a mission strategy, they bring their requests to the Board for Home Missions (BHM). The BHM will then determine which missions have the best plan to carry out successful ministry. This is not always how missions were started. At one time, the BHM would send money to certain promising areas hoping that these areas would produce fruit. These were known as exploratory missions. The BHM decided to remove these types of exploratory mission and enable the local congregations to survey and explore an area with the help of their DMB. This approach benefits our synod financially because there is less guess work. The BHM no longer has to spend money to see if mission work will happen. Instead, the congregation and DMB have already done the exploratory work, they've surveyed the area and now they need help carrying out their plan. The down-side to this type of mission partnering is that it takes time. And as a result, the WELS can not open as many new missions as quickly. A plan has to be developed, before mission dollars can be approved. The problem that arises from this is that the synod has fewer mission positions to fill and many men who need to be placed. This may be a temporary problem as these plans start to take effect. The hope is that our synod will be able to do a few

home missions well, rather than many without a plan. And with time, God will use this work to open up more positions for ministry in the future.

After a congregation (core group) works with the District Mission Board to issue a plan for new ministries, they can request a grant from the Board for Home Mission (BHM). These grants can be requested in four levels. The first is a level one grant, which is usually given at a phase when a congregation wants to expand their ministry, but does not know how. This is what the BHM describes as the "encouragement phase." At this level no actual money is given to the congregation for assistance, only advice on how to start a plan and on what kind of ministry is needed in a certain area. The second phase is the mission "enhancement phase" where very little funding is given. The support might only be materials needed for advertisement or events. These grants are given between 1-3 years to see if this ministry has potential for bearing fruit.

After the "enhancement phase" comes the "establishment phase." At this level, a man is called to help put the mission plan into action. The Board for Home Missions usually will extend this grant to a total of three years. Then they will evaluate whether this mission effort is producing fruit or if the monies could be more beneficial in another area.

Finally the congregations can request a grant for what is known as the "development phase." This funding may last anywhere from 3-7 years. The hope is that at this stage a congregation will be on its way to becoming self-supporting. If a congregation would go through all of these levels consecutively, they would expect to receive some sort of assistance for around 10-12 years.

The last type of grant a congregation could receive is an "enrichment grant." This would be when a donor wants to give a special offering to support a specific mission plan

or effort. Even though this money is given through an independent agent, this grant still needs to be funneled through the Board for Home Missions.

Although these grant levels show a progression of a ministry plan, a congregation does not have to begin with a level 1 or 2 grant before it can request a grant for a mission establishment. It sometimes happens that a congregation begins with a level 3 grant because they have already carried out their new mission efforts on their own, but are not able to complete it without some sort of assistance.

With the current financial crisis, the problem is the Board for Home Missions is not able to assist in all missions. Choices have to be made and some congregations may have to lose support. The decision to take away funding from a congregation is one of the most painful parts of the job of the BHM and its chairman. Before they decide to pull support, they look for whether or not it is at all possible that a mission can survive on its own. If a congregation will suffer, but can remain and do ministry without support from the BHM, they will be the first to lose assistance. The other factor is, if a mission has been around for long enough and is not producing any results, the BHM may pull the plug so that the mission dollars can go where the gospel may be producing more fruits.

Finally the BHM chairman, Harry Hagedorn, says that America has become a tough place to do ministry. Yet even though there are so many struggles, God promises that his church will endure, and it is the knowledge of this hope that drives the BHM to reach out to the un-churched with the gospel. They truly believe that if we stand together, led by Christ, we can continue to do the work that God has called us to do, within the establishment of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod or without it.