

WELS—1980

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While serving as president of the Western Wisconsin District, my circuit pastor would periodically remind me, “Now don’t forget, when you’re invited somewhere as a guest preacher, it’s because of your office, not because of any particular ability or competence that you have.” We need men like that to keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. For that reason I’m equally certain that this essay was assigned to me not because of special ability or competence that I may have in this area, but rather as a result of the call which I received from the convention of our Synod last August 1.

But I have no quarrel with the assignment. I’m happy to be here today. Since I am constitutionally charged to “promote the interest of the Synod in every direction,” I welcome every opportunity to speak about our Synod and its work, not because it is the work of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, but because it is the work of our Lord Who has redeemed us and has called us to serve.

The events of this past year, however, have not suddenly made me an expert on the topic before us. Hence, this paper will not draw as heavily on what I have learned this past year as it will on what I have learned during my 32 years in the parish ministry where the real action takes place. Under girding all of it, of course, will be the inspired Holy Scripture, the inerrant Word of God, errorless and incapable of error in all of its parts.

I have chosen the theme, not particularly imaginative, of WELS—1980. The paper will deal with such broad questions as: “Where are we today? Where are we headed? How will we get there?” Specifically, I propose to speak, first of all, of our mission, dealing with the question: “What is the assignment that God has given us?” The second part of the paper deals with implementation, offering some practical suggestions for carrying out our God-appointed mission.

I. Our Mission

Twelve years ago I prepared an essay for the Arizona-California District Convention on the topic, *The Relevancy of the Church in the Modern World*. I looked at it again while preparing to write this paper and found that I had quoted extensively from an article that appeared in *The Reader’s Digest* about two years earlier, written by a Mr. J. Howard Pew. Mr. Pew was at that time chairman of the board of Sun Oil Company and a past president of the Board of Trustees of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. He had also served as chairman of the National Council of the Churches in Christ in the U.S.A. and was an elder in his local church at Ardmore, Pennsylvania. These struck me as rather impressive credentials, both in the church and the business world. His comments were obviously not the observations of some religious crackpot, but of a knowledgeable individual who knew his way around.

He wrote at that time:

“I worry when leaders of the Church show signs of jeopardizing its power and influence by taking it away from its main mission. To be specific: As an active churchman for more than 40 years, I am convinced that many of the church’s top leaders today—especially in what are called the ‘mainstream’ denominations—are sorely failing its members in two ways: 1) by succumbing to a creeping tendency to downgrade the

Bible as the infallible Word of God, and 2) by efforts to shift the Church's main thrust from the spiritual to the secular...

"Whenever any official church body relegates the Bible and its teachings to a lesser place in its program, it almost always turns to activity in non-church fields to fill the vacuum. Thus we see church leadership everywhere expending vast time and energy to push the Church into fields far outside its God-ordained jurisdiction.

"Evangelism, traditionally interpreted as the means used to bring men and women to Christ and the Church, has been given a completely new definition. Contemporary evangelism is now moving away from winning souls one by one to the evangelism of the structures of society. Or, as another modern churchman puts it: 'The heart of Christianity is not concern for the soul, but concern for the world.' ...

"No one would seriously deny that the individual Christian must relate his conscience to the problems of the secular society of which he is a part. It is plainly his duty as a citizen to express his Christian convictions in economic, social, and political affairs. Likewise, no one would deny the pulpit's right to speak out on civil issues where moral and spiritual principles are clearly involved. But even here the pastor had better exercise extreme caution, lest he confuse his personal predilections with the will of the Almighty.

... "But to commit the Church, as a corporate body, to controversial positions on which its members differ sharply is to divide the Church into warring camps, stirring dissension in the one place where spiritual unity should prevail. 'When I joined the Church,' wrote one layman..., 'I stated my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I was not asked to subscribe to any special political, economic, or social view.'"

That this shift in emphasis from the spiritual to the secular, this attempt to reform the world without first saving the individual was not just a passing fancy of the sixties and seventies, that the fears of the writer cited above were indeed well-founded, became apparent to me again just a few weeks ago. The Saturday, July 5 issue of the Milwaukee Sentinel carried an article by the paper's Religion Editor, James M. Johnston, with the headline: "Churches Have Advice For Politicians." He pointed out that "neither Republicans nor Democrats need hammer out party platforms 'without benefit of clergy.'" Representatives of the nation's umbrella organization for most of "mainline" Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the National Council of The Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., have volunteered their opinions about what America needs during the 1980's. The positions reflect policies adopted by the 266 clergy and laity who comprise the council's governing board. The National Council includes 32 Protestant and Orthodox denominations. The platform committees of both parties would do well, the council said, to consider these issues:

- a) *Slowing the arms race and moving toward disarmament.* Increased defense spending, said the council, is a trend that fuels inflation while also creating havoc in our own society by diverting resources from programs meeting human need. The council's board also opposed draft registration and any legislative effort to renew the draft. The paper also deplored the "tide of militarism sweeping the United States" and advocated ratification of the Salt II treaty rather than a huge military buildup, which could explode into armed conflict with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the paper contended, world security is imperiled just as much by the economic chasm between "have" and "have-not" nations and individuals.

- b) *Broadening and intensifying efforts to assure the human rights of all people, including immigrants, political prisoners, displaced persons and refugees.* The council's document calls for equitable treatment of Haitian refugees to the U.S. The plight of Haitians who have been deported or jailed upon reaching this country and those denied social services and permission to work needs special attention, it says. It also commends the government for its assistance to Cuban and Southeast Asian refugees.
- c) *Addressing the economic inequities of our time.* The National Council wants to see the Humphrey Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act implemented to alleviate the social and economic aspects of rising unemployment. It said joblessness increases human suffering and leads to loss of tax revenue and swollen welfare rolls. Unemployment hits blacks the hardest, the paper says. The nation must work to reverse the drift toward resegregation in public schools and in housing patterns.
- d) *Assuming more responsibility toward children, families and people of all ages under the stress of change.*
- e) *Acting to curb world hunger.*
- f) *Pressing for racial justice.*
- g) *Exploring the ethics of scientific advances, such as biological research and nuclear energy production.*
- h) *Protecting religions from government infringements.*

For answers to miscellaneous social problems the council advocated ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, upgrading the Food Stamp program benefits, welfare reform and expanded services for victims of family violence.

Mr. Johnston concludes that the council knows that neither platform committee is in a rush to put these concerns into party platforms. The council can already hear the response of platform writers: "These preachers should stick to their Bible and not mess with stuff like this that they know nothing about." Or, Mr. Johnston observes, maybe they hear them saying this: "These preachers know too much about society's problems, especially the ones that won't gain a whole lot of votes. But they're not running for election."

It must be more than a coincidence that the July 18 issue of *Christianity Today* carries a lead article titled: *Tomorrow's Missionaries: To Whose Drumbeat Will They March?* The writer states: "Potential missionaries today are picking up confusing signals on which tasks in the church's mission should take priority. As a result, some may be diverted from the primary task of making disciples of the nations and building the church. It is a case of too many drummers with too many diversionary drumbeats. The loudest of these drumbeats come from secular humanism and from religious liberalism...How difficult will missionaries find their task if social ministry and political action come to be considered more or less equal partners of evangelism and church development?"

We have outlined in some detail how the "mainline" denominations have come to view their mission in the last decade or two, a view that shows no sign of changing today. It's high

time that we reviewed, at least, briefly what the Scriptures teach concerning the church's mission. While it might seem unnecessary to do so for this audience, in view of what has happened in so many churches today, it will be time well spent.

St. Matthew summarizes that mission very clearly and very simply when he writes in the closing chapter of his Gospel: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:16-20).

St. Luke, the Evangelist, concurs when he writes in the opening chapter of the Acts of the Apostles: "And, being assembled together with them, (Jesus) commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:4-8).

And who can disregard the Savior's eloquent witness before Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered into the hands of the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36).

And that assignment, that message, that mission has not changed, not in the 20th century, not even in the decade of the 1980's. The Church is still the temple of God, the Body of Christ, made up of those who are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, who believe that Jesus died for their sins and rose again for their justification. The Church does not belong to man, but to Christ. It is His possession, purchased with His blood, called to serve Him and to fulfill His purposes. To this Church God has assigned the responsibility of calling sinners to repentance, of proclaiming forgiveness through the Cross of Christ, of encouraging individual believers in their Christian faith and life. The purpose is to lead the elect of God through faith unto eternal salvation. And the only means God has given His Church to carry out its assigned purpose is His Word as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Only by preaching the Law and the Gospel, sin and grace, the wrath of God against sin and the mercy of God in Christ, will people be converted and made wise unto salvation. And these believers, as new creatures in Christ, will then make their impact on the society in which they live as "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13,14)

Not that we should pretend that people have no bodily needs. Jesus was concerned about those needs too. But even when He miraculously fed 5,000 in the desert so that they wanted to take Him by force and make Him a king, He let them know that this was not His real mission. Even when He cast out demons, when He healed people who had various kinds of sickness so that they pleaded with Him to remain in their city and did all in their power to keep Him from leaving, He told them that He could not stay. He would have to move on to "preach the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also" (Luke 4:43). That is why He had been sent into the world. And turning to us He would say: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).

No, we are not to be indifferent to people's bodily needs. But we are to keep our priorities straight. We need to remember that even if we successfully feed and clothe and house people for the threescore years and ten that they live in this world and then let them be lost at the end of that time because we've been so busy reshaping and improving the "here and now" that we've forgotten to tell them that Jesus is their Savior from sin, then we haven't done them much of a favor, have we? And when a recent Gallup Poll revealed that only 62% of Lutheran clergymen opted for helping "win the world for Jesus Christ" as the Christian's top priority—the other 34%, chose priorities such as concentrating on the spiritual growth of one's family and self, joining groups and supporting causes that will improve the entire community, helping strengthen the local church, taking part in efforts to influence local, state, and national legislation on important issues, or were undecided—, when so many of the "mainline" denominations have apparently all but abandoned their God-appointed assignment, maybe this helps to bring the mission of WELS—1980 into the clearest and sharpest focus possible.

The mission of WELS—1980 is clearly set forth in a statement titled *Purpose, Objectives and Policies of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* adopted by the Synod in 1969. Since I have not seen this statement anywhere in print for a number of years, I am reproducing it here.

Purpose

The continuing purpose of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as a gathering of Christians, is to serve all people in God's world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures.

Objectives

The objectives of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are:

1. To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people.
2. To uphold the Truth of God as fully revealed in the inspired, inerrant, infallible Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions.
3. To provide a preaching and teaching ministry qualified to proclaim the Word of God faithfully, effectively, universally in accord with the Lutheran Confessions.
4. To assist in counseling and equipping all members of the Synod for ever greater service to the Lord, to each other, and to the world.
5. To assist all members of the Synod in being active in deeds of love toward our fellow men in need.
6. To foster confessional unity of faith among Christians throughout the world.

To achieve these objectives, the members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod commit themselves to employ their total, combined resources in the most God-pleasing and effective manner.

Policies

Under Objective No. 1: To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people,
It is WELS policy:

- 1.1 To promote personal Christian witnessing to the Gospel by each member of the Synod.
- 1.2 To press for continuing growth and development of World Missions.
- 1.3 To promote and expand home mission activity.
- 1.4 To establish and maintain a ministry to members in the armed services.

1.5 To establish and maintain a ministry to members on the college and university campuses.

1.6 To establish or foster other specialized ministries.

Under Objective No. 2: To uphold the Truth of God as fully revealed in the inspired, inerrant, infallible Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions,

It is WELS policy:

2.1 To exercise vigilant supervision of doctrine and practice.

2.2 To publish doctrinally sound literature, in response to the theological needs of the day.

2.3 To encourage and provide the opportunity for theological discussion, study and development among its pastors, teachers and laity.

2.4 To review critically current trends in theological thought.

2.5 To colloquize pastors and teachers from outside our fellowship who desire membership.

2.6 To require a quia subscription to the Lutheran Confessions.

Under Objective No. 3: To provide a preaching and teaching ministry qualified to proclaim the Word of God faithfully, effectively, universally in accord with the Lutheran Confessions,

It is WELS policy:

3.1 To prepare pastors and teachers in our own training schools to the greatest extent practicable.

3.2 To establish and promote programs for recruitment of potential church workers.

3.3 To subsidize a portion of the cost of training students entering the preaching and teaching ministry.

3.4 To make grants-in-aid to students preparing for the preaching and teaching ministry of the Synod.

3.5 To foster scholarship programs for those preparing for the preaching and teaching ministry.

3.6 To require teachers not trained in our schools to take the basic theological courses necessary for Synod certification.

3.7 To make the first assignment of calls to pastoral and teacher candidates.

3.8 To encourage and provide the opportunity for professional development among its pastors and teachers.

Under Objective No. 4: To assist in counseling and equipping all members of the Synod for ever greater service to the Lord, to each other, and to the world,

It is WELS policy:

4.1 To foster and support continuing Christian education for all members.

4.2 To promote Christian education through elementary and secondary schools maintained by congregations.

4.3 To promote the evangelic and stewardship activity of our members.

4.4 To produce doctrinally sound instructional and worship aids.

Under Objective No. 5: To assist all members of the Synod in being active in deeds of love toward our fellow men in need,

It is WELS policy:

5.1 To alleviate physical suffering caused by catastrophe.

- 5.2 To counsel and encourage its members in establishing and maintaining Church-related welfare agencies.
- 5.3 To alleviate endemic needs where necessary in our world mission fields.
- 5.4 To supervise and help finance a health insurance program for all called workers in the Synod and its congregations.
- 5.5 To supply supplemental support for retired and incapacitated full-time workers in the preaching and teaching ministry of the Church.
- 5.6 To maintain a non-contributory pension system for its pastors and teachers.

Under Objective No. 6: To foster confessional unity of faith among Christians throughout the world,

It is WELS policy:

- 6.1 To practice pulpit and altar fellowship with those who share our confessional position and to engage in joint worship and in joint church work with them, but only with them.
- 6.2 To promote and maintain theological interchange with groups and individuals who share our confessional concerns.
- 6.3 To present and interpret our confessional position accurately to the world through the communications media.
- 6.4 To extend financial assistance to groups which by upholding a Scriptural position have cut themselves off from their normal sources of support.

This statement still serves us well today, keeping the proper balance between the needs of the soul and those of the body. The mission of WELS—1980 is still to proclaim the whole counsel of God so that by the power of the Holy Spirit the sinner may be brought to repentance and faith in Jesus as his personal Savior and live with Him forever in heaven. Our mission is not to change society without first changing the individual by the power of the Gospel. It is not to try to make the godly more godly and the ungodly less ungodly apart from the regenerating power of the Gospel. Whatever changes for the better are effected in society will come through these changed individuals, new creatures in Christ who no longer live for self, “but unto him (Christ) Who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

II. The Implementation of Our Mission

In this part of the paper I propose to offer some practical suggestions for carrying out our God-appointed mission of serving the people in God’s world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. What should our emphasis be in the 1980’s and in the years immediately ahead? What are our priorities as a Synod? Self-evidently, as long as we retain a clear understanding of our mission it will greatly simplify the shaping of our priorities.

Without fear of contradiction I submit that our highest priority must always be faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. That will not change this year, or next year, or the next decade, or as long as God permits the world to stand and us to be a part of it. We must never lose sight of the fact that, under God, it is faithfulness to the Word of God that has made the Wisconsin Synod what it is today. The growth we have experienced in the last two decades has not been in spite of our confessional position but because of it.

Earlier this year *The Lutheran Standard* carried an article by Merton P. Strommen of Search Institute in Minneapolis. The institute is actively involved in analyzing trends in church and society). He foresees a religious revival in this decade and predicts that it will be theologically conservative and will produce substantial growth in conservative churches that

remain faithful to the Word of God. If this observation is correct, and there seem to be indications that some of the things that were turning people on in the 70's are losing some of their appeal, then God may well continue to bless our Synod with numerical growth in the 1980's. But even if this should not happen, it does not change the assignment that God has given us. "He that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully" (Jeremiah 23:28)

We may be lulled into thinking that this is an area in which we are safe. After all, our Synod took a firm stand based on God's Word in 1961 and we've been maintaining it ever since. But let's not kid ourselves into believing that the battle for pure doctrine is won. That battle is never won; it's an ongoing struggle. We do well to remember that a large percentage of our membership, pastors, teachers, lay men and women did not live through the confessional struggle of the 50's. (During the past ten years, for example, 522 pastors have entered our ministry, which means that 51% of our parish pastors and 45% of the total number of men with pastor training serving in the Synod have been in the field for ten years or less.) For those of us that lived through those years, some of the edge has worn off because 20 years have passed. That's all the more reason to be on the alert. There are plenty of churches that have all but forgotten their real mission. There are plenty of Lutheran synods with a watered-down confessional position. The quickest way for us to lose our identity is to identify with that kind of Lutheranism. We have an identity that needs to be preserved, because it stands for something. So our future strength continues to lie in our faithfulness to the Word of God, not because the statistics suggest that, but because God says so.

Yes, there will be some doctrinal problems in the years ahead. We have no reason to expect that there will not be, not in this world of sin. But the Lord has also given us the norm and standard for dealing with them, His inerrant and infallible Word. I know of no one in our Synod who is deliberately trying to lead us from the old paths. So when differing views emerge we have to give each other, the benefit of the doubt that we are honestly searching for the truth. We need to deal with one another as brothers and seek to avoid impugning motives. We have to guard against weakening our case by overstating it. We have to differentiate between things that we do not like and things that God has forbidden, realizing that what God has not forbidden is truly free. In all of these areas may the Lord grant us a rich measure of His Holy Spirit and show us a rich measure of His grace so that we neither command what God has not commanded nor forbid what He has not forbidden, so that we neither violate a clear Word of God nor endanger the freedom that is ours under grace.

Another high priority during the 1980's, as it must be in every period of the church's history, is the practice of responsible stewardship, as individuals, as congregations, and as a Synod. You are aware that the convention of our Synod last August adopted a six-year budget. An attempt to balance income and expenditures in one year would have meant about a 35% increase in subscriptions for 1980, something the Synod did not consider to be realistic. So in the early part of the six-year cycle expenditures will still exceed our income. As the cycle progresses, however, this will be turned around. To do so will require a subscription increase of 15% in each of the first two years and approximately 8% in the remaining years (a rapidly changing economy will, of course, have an impact on these percentages). The plan also includes special post-Easter offerings in each of the next two years.

You know that our congregations subscribed an increase of 16% for 1980, giving us an additional \$1,513,232. For this we are humbly grateful to the Lord from whom all blessings flow. Through July 31 the post-Easter offering had yielded an additional \$_____. I believe this is an indication that our people while they certainly expect the Synod to live within its

means—do not want to balance the budget by training and sending fewer workers. They want the work to continue, hopefully to expand.

The administration of the Synod is committed to living within the budget adopted by the convention. When the Coordinating Council and the Board of Trustees this spring approved additions to the operating budget amounting to \$106,080, they did so only after the various divisions agreed to reduce their present budgets in other categories by 1.1% or \$110,804. The divisions were willing to do this because they were convinced that these enlarged and expanded programs will enable them to carry out their objectives more effectively. The administration does not consider any part of our Synod's program to be untouchable in the sense that once in the budget it must always remain there. All programs must constantly be reviewed by the divisions to evaluate their overall contribution to our continuing purpose of serving the people in God's world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It may be that in the years ahead certain individual programs will be phased out. I hope this will not be done to balance the budget, but rather because sanctified Christian judgment tells us that our mission dollars will be better spent in some other manner. With the mission of WELS—1980 outlined so clearly and the number of those who still see that the church's assignment is to preach the Gospel so small, it seems to me that retrenchment is not normally a viable solution, at least, it should not be the first solution we reach for in balancing the budget.

Responsible stewardship must be a matter of high priority also on the level of each individual congregation and of each individual Christian. Having served as a parish pastor for 32 years I am realistic enough to know that the 15% in subscriptions for 1981 will not happen by itself. It will, humanly speaking, be much harder to come by than the first 15%. It will take prayer, much prayer; it will take work, hard work from every one of us, blessed by a gracious God far beyond anything we deserve or have a right to hope for. But remembering our mission, remembering the small number still committed to that mission, we need to go at it with all the faithfulness of which we are capable. With an average per communicant subscription of \$35.73 to the Synod's budget in 1980, ranging from \$58.80 in the highest district to \$29.14 in the lowest district, and that in an inflated economy, we can hardly say that the well is dry. For every proverbial teenager, widow, and old-age pensioner, who supposedly doesn't have 35 dollars (though in many cases that is debatable), there is someone out there who has ten times that amount and more if he or she can be brought under the full power of Christ's constraining love, the Christ who "died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). Responsible stewardship requires us to take a searching look at this area, first of all, to balance our budget.

Others have pointed out on numerous occasions that the percentage of the all-purpose benevolence dollar which the Synod receives is slowly but steadily shrinking. This trend must be arrested and reversed. The Conference of Presidents, which is charged with the funding of the Synod's budget, has given a great deal of thought to this matter. It has been suggested by some that the rapid growth in Christian education, both on the elementary and the secondary level, is largely responsible for this. While there are undoubtedly isolated instances to which one could point in support of that contention, it would be too early as well as an obvious oversimplification to fix the blame in this area alone. Yet, realizing that this is something that we need to watch very carefully as good stewards, the Conference of Presidents has forwarded the following resolution to the District Boards for Parish Education and to the synodical Board for Parish Education for their consideration in planning the expansion of our educational system: "*Resolved*, That congregations contemplating the opening of a Christian day school, or high

school associations contemplating the opening of a new area Lutheran high school should carefully consider the impact that such action might have on the budget of the Synod in view of the increased need for elementary and secondary teachers required to staff such schools, and continue to consider carefully the wisdom of utilizing manpower for staffing new schools with minimal enrollments.” Let it be clearly understood that the conference is not opposed to Christian education on any level; it vigorously supports it. It merely wishes to underscore that, in the interest of kingdom work balance, expansion in Christian education requires a simultaneous increase in our financial support of the Synod. Anything else is self-defeating.

What do we mean when we speak of kingdom work balance or program balance? Admittedly it's a concept that resists precise definition, but in its simplest terms it means that we are not serving the kingdom well when we do one area of the Lord's work at the expense of another. To illustrate by means of the subject introduced above, suppose that a congregation decides to open a Christian day school or to add a teacher to its staff, or suppose that a group of congregations decides to open an area high school, or to increase the size of its faculty to take care of increased enrollment. When the church finds that dollars are hard to come by, the temptation is very real to hold the line on our synodical subscription, perhaps even to lower it. At the time it is viewed as a temporary expedient to allow the congregation to adjust to the new situation. But temporary expedients have a way of becoming permanent fixtures. Activities such as these, desirable as they are, have a very direct impact on the Synod's budget because it means that, unless we are willing to sacrifice quality education, the Synod must train additional workers to meet these expanded needs. So these congregations will need to understand that while they are expanding this arm of the Lord's work, they must simultaneously and immediately increase their support of the Synod's work for the training of additional teachers. One conference of our Synod, which recently opened an area high school, this year increased its subscription to the Synod by 31%. This is kingdom work balance. Suppose it would have held the line, or perhaps even reduced its subscription because the congregational budgets in that conference were already much higher than the year before, this would be kingdom work imbalance. That conference would have been asking the Synod to subsidize its school. The same imbalance is created when a congregation, in its eagerness to be debt free, pays off a capital indebtedness at the expense of its synodical contributions.

Lest I leave you with a negative impression of area high schools, let me say that they are here to stay and there will be more in the years ahead. Let me further say that the Lord may be letting them “come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) as a potential source of great blessing for WELS—1980 and in the years ahead. Here too we need to be responsible stewards of a gift that God has given us.

All who have been charged with the administration of and instruction in these schools do well to remind themselves constantly that their goal is not so much to teach young people, the church of tomorrow, a lot of things *about* Christ as it is to help them *know* Christ. In this movement we do well to be reminded that we are not just operating a school; we're operating a Christian school. We're not just operating a Christian school; we're operating a Lutheran school. We're not just operating a Lutheran school; we're doing it under the umbrella of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to which the member congregations belong. Where that name is known, it stands for something; it communicates. The schools operated by the congregations of our Synod have the same obligation, to be known and respected in the community in which God has called them to serve for their uncompromising loyalty and faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Even though they were not started for that purpose, I see an excellent opportunity for these schools to promote the church's full-time ministry. I see an excellent opportunity for them to inculcate a Synod consciousness upon our youth so that wherever the Lord leads them in the future they will be leaders and active members of our congregations and, if God so wills, part of the nucleus for a new mission. Then this gift of God's grace, a gift that is all the more amazing because it seems to be reaching full flower at a time when our Synod is not exactly a youngster anymore, may serve us well as a handmaiden of the Lord in reaching the people of God's world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Another high priority item at this point in our history is the strengthening of the local parish. This is where the real action takes place, and this is a statement I feel qualified to make, having served as a parish pastor for 32 years. The decision on how far and how fast we go in our mission outreach is largely made at the parish level not at 3512 West North Avenue, not by executives, boards, committees, and commissions, though these have their place in the orderly and efficient administration of the Synod. But the mission of WELS—1980 to serve the people of this world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be best realized only when the local parish is strong.

In order to strengthen this area I send a monthly newsletter to each of our circuit pastors. This is intended to improve the communication between 3512 and the field, to provide these men with the information they need to serve effectively as an arm of the district president in the supervision of doctrine and practice. I am eagerly looking forward to the Circuit Pastor's Workshop planned for September 8 and 9. The circuit pastor, second only to the parish pastor himself, is the key man in the field who works most closely with our congregations. He is not a man foisted upon us from above, but rather one whom we have elected to serve us. I hope that we will always keep the importance of this office in mind in our circuit pastor elections, accord those elected the dignity the office deserves, and choose our circuit pastors on the basis of criteria other than simply having the time. When we consider that 51% of our parish pastors have been in the field for ten years or less, then I think we begin to see the vital role this man has in strengthening the local parish and the need for him to serve in his office faithfully with all evangelical fervor.

I see a need to further strengthen the local parish by going to multiple pastorates in more of our congregations. The parish ministry that I left at the end of 32 years is considerably more complex than the one that I first entered. The pastorates in our larger midwestern congregations are often filled only after a lengthy vacancy and repeated calling. The number of those who are willing and able to fill such a demanding ministry single-handedly seems to be growing smaller. When our schools grow, we add teachers. We take for granted that we have to increase the size of our staff. It's the only reasonable and sensible thing to do if we want to retain quality education. But when a congregation's membership grows, we do not automatically give corresponding help to the pastoral office. This is an area to which we must address ourselves. We need to keep these large congregations strong, because to a large extent they still determine the speed and scope of our mission outreach. Many of our congregations currently served by a pastor and a vicar will need to think in terms of two pastors so that somewhat smaller congregations will then become a more fruitful training ground for vicars. You can choose your own number of members that you feel one pastor can adequately serve. But the facts are that we have 14 congregations of 1,000 or more communicant members, 29 congregations in the 750-1,000 member range, and 82 congregations in the 500-750 member range served by one pastor. We regard a man with 50 communicants and less as being in the full-time ministry. Where does that

leave some of the others, whom we often ask to fill demanding assignments in the church at large in addition to what is already a full-time parish ministry and then some? Our aim is still to train good general practitioners rather than specialists, and this is all to the good, but we need to reshape our thinking on multiple ministries. It will enable us to use our manpower more effectively and relieve the frustration often felt by busy pastors because of work undone.

Someone will undoubtedly say that adding another pastor to the staff is not the way to go. The way to go is to equip the members for greater service. I would be the first to admit that we ought to be making much better use of our laity than we often do. But I also know from personal experience that a busy pastor doesn't always have the time or the inclination to equip the saints for greater service. So he takes the easy way out by doing it himself and what he doesn't do himself often doesn't get done. Strengthening the pastoral staff is often the first step needed to equip the saints for greater service.

There are many things that the right kind of lay people do well and willingly if only given the encouragement and the opportunity. But if our program for training pastors is even only half as good as we think it is, there are areas of ministry that a pastor ought to be able to do better than anyone else. If it is true that a pastor after 25 years in the ministry ought to be a better Seelsorger than he was in his first assignment—and something is wrong if he isn't—then there are areas of pastoral responsibility that simply cannot be delegated to one who has not been thoroughly trained to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). If they can, we should be able to reduce the demands of our pastor-training program considerably. We would not expect a layman to perform brain surgery or to pilot our jet across the Pacific, even though the worst that could happen to us is almost certain death. Does the care of the soul deserve less?

So what I am saying is that the church will suffer irreparable loss if we ever come to think of the pastor as a coach, whose primary function is to teach others to “do their thing,” rather than as a shepherd who ministers to the individual in the spirit of the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep. Strengthening the pastoral staff will make more time available for individual care of souls as well as for equipping the saints for greater service.

Another service that is now available to help strengthen the local parish is the Director of Parish Stewardship Services. The objective of this program, approved by the 1979 convention of the Synod, is to offer assistance on a fee basis to congregations and church related agencies of the Synod in organizing a special stewardship effort for budgetary, capital, or debt needs. We know that only the Gospel of Christ can move hearts and change lives. But we take nothing away from the Gospel's power when we gather its fruits through orderly channels (passing the offering plate, contribution envelopes, etc.). We hope that congregations, which are often deprived of much of the joy of their ministry by perennial stewardship problems, will seriously consider availing themselves of this service.

While reviewing the pre-budget subscriptions for 1980 it became apparent that the 16% increase was largely internal, not because of a corresponding increase in membership. Whatever modest growth we had was primarily in our Home Mission fields. Many of our established congregations remained static, perhaps even suffered a membership decline. The net growth in communicant membership during the past year was 2,318. Three districts actually suffered a membership loss. In the district that recorded the largest increase the acceptance of a new, sizable congregation into membership was a significant factor.

There may be some good reasons for these statistics. We know that some turn away because of our faithfulness to the Word. The Lord told us this would happen. But whenever it does happen we have to ask ourselves whether it is indeed the truth of God's Word that causes

them to leave or the manner in which we go about contending for that truth. In other words, we who have no choice but to uphold the truth of the Word must be doubly careful that our person does not get in the way; that we do not see our mission as one of simply enforcing rules, but rather that all of our ministry, whether as pastors or teachers or laymen, is conducted in the loving caring spirit of the Good Shepherd.

Perhaps our congregation is located in an area whose population is declining. That can always comfort us when we experience a membership loss. But let's make sure that it's not a false comfort. In spite of those who move away, there are still people living in our neighborhood, unchurched people who do not yet call Jesus Lord, people who may be nominal members of our congregation but consistently absent themselves from the life-giving means of grace. That's our field. So I see a need for a more concerted evangelism effort, not only in our new missions, but also in our established congregations, whether they are in a rural area or in a teeming population center, whether they are in the suburbs or in the inner city.

When I speak of evangelism I am not limiting this to talking about the Savior. The person who says: "I can't speak" is not excused from the Savior's charge: "Ye shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). The truth is—and this kind of evangelism would be especially effective in a rural, small-town setting where everyone knows everyone else that when you pick up your hymnal and head for church every time the bell calls you to worship, whether it's cold or hot, whether it's rain or sunshine, whether you're always feeling 100% or not, you're witnessing. When you take your regular paycheck and parcel out the Lord's share first according to a generous proportion that you have arrived at prayerfully at the beginning of the year, and you do this just as religiously as you pay the telephone bill or any other bill, you're witnessing. If you keep your cool when those around you are losing theirs, if you still do an honest day's work for a day's wages, if your language does not sound as though it came from the gutter, if by your conduct you leave a good example for your family and all others with whom you come into contact, if you cheerfully bear the cross that God has laid upon you, in these and a host of other ways you're witnessing. God has placed each one of us at some spot in life. In our work, in our neighborhood, in our social and business contacts, there are people with whom we come into contact. That's our pulpit, that's our platform from which we "show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9).

When a Synod has unlimited resources it can do almost anything it wants to. But when our resources are limited, and I can't imagine the day when we will have all the resources to do everything we would like to do, then we have to plan our work very carefully. In that way our budget crunch could prove to be a real blessing because it makes us take a more careful look at what we are doing, how we are spending our synodical dollars, how we are using our manpower. The result may well be that it will make us more conscious of giving top priority to the two things our Synod is said to do best—training workers and sending them into the field.

One of the real strengths is our Worker-Training system. Our pastors graduate from one seminary; the majority of them have attended the same college; many of them are also products of the Synod's prep school system, or graduates of an area Lutheran high school and elementary school. To a lesser degree the same is true of those who enter our teaching ministry. This provides for a kind of esprit de corps, the kind of harmony and unanimity that is the envy of many a church body. Providing staff and facilities for training a well-equipped preaching and teaching ministry remains a high priority for WELS—1980. This makes recruitment of students for our Worker Training schools an ongoing activity. With an expanding educational system, both on the elementary and secondary level, the need for teachers has not diminished. While we

have overcome, for the moment, the shortage of pastors that was hindering our work just a few years ago, we could be in trouble a few years down the road. We can no longer assume that everyone who enrolls at the Seminary will automatically become a pastor. We can no longer assume that everyone who accepts a vicarship will become a pastor. And, for a variety of reasons, we can no longer take for granted that everyone who enters the ministry will make it a lifelong profession. I expect that we will see more, not less, of this kind of attrition in the years ahead. So we cannot wait until a crisis develops before we react to it. We have to do something about it now by making student recruitment our ongoing concern, realizing that it takes 12 years after grade school and, at least, eight years after high school to train a pastor.

Having trained them, we need to send them. We need a goodly number to staff our established congregations. As larger numbers approach retirement age or are called home, as more congregations strengthen their pastoral staffs, the need in this area will increase. But, as someone has said, this is only the “spare parts” business. The church’s mission and business is the mission business. So we have a continuing need for pastoral manpower in our home and world mission fields and the worker-training schools that prepare them. As our secondary school system continues to grow, there will be an increasing need for more pastoral manpower here also.

This part of the pier would not be complete without saying something about the relationship between the Synod and its individual congregations. I’m certain that most of our congregations and members have a better understanding today of what our Synod is and does than was the case in earlier years. But in spite of that, in the minds of many the Synod and its work is not as personalized as it ought to be. There are still those who look upon it as a vague, abstract entity that need not greatly concern us. There are those who associate it with the establishment in Milwaukee and being associated with the establishment is not the way to win friends. There are those who think of the Synod as something that is interested only in what it can get out of us, like money, for instance. And each year it seems to want more.

But I hope that each year will help us see more clearly that our Synod is not something that takes from us, but rather something that supplies a vital need in our congregational life. In the last chapter of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he writes: “I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. For they refreshed my spirit and yours also” (I Corinthians 16:17,18a).

Anyone who does not treat the Bible with a holy awe might be inclined to think that these words are not very important. They make no mention of Christ. They say nothing about God’s plan of salvation. They talk about three people with the uncommon names of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. They had come from Corinth to Ephesus and their coming had made Paul happy. But before dismissing it as nothing more than a personal note let’s not overlook the fact that Paul says their coming supplied a need. Paul was separated from the Corinthians. These three men had come to Ephesus as representatives of the Corinthian congregation. Their coming supplied information about the congregation that had been lacking. It enabled Paul to write a letter which these three could take back to Corinth. So this little note serves as an example of the kind of communication, cooperation, and loving service so essential among those who are members of the Synod, who are “walking together” in a common cause.

Now what are these vital needs which our Synod supplies to our congregations. Let’s take a look at just a few of them! Suppose that the office of pastor becomes vacant in your congregation, or you need a teacher for your school or the area high school which the children of your congregation attend. How would you go about meeting that need? Would you run an ad in

the local paper? “Help wanted: Apply in person at St. John’s Church office. Favorable working conditions. Competitive salary and fringe benefits. Excellent opportunity for the right man.” You and I know what kind of misfits we might attract if we tried to get a pastor or a teacher in that way. But it’s, at least, one of the options we would have to consider if we had no synodical ties, if we were not in close communication and cooperation with others who share our faith and confession. But because of our affiliation with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, this is where we would turn for help. We could again expect to receive a pastor or a teacher of whom we would know in advance exactly where he stands, what he believes and teaches.

But our congregations have other needs too. Someone once said that the church is never more than a generation away from extinction. If that were to happen it would probably not be because all of its members had suddenly died a martyr’s death; it is more likely that it would be because we had failed to pass on the faith to our children. It has also been said—and rightly so—that a church which pays no attention to the training of its children doesn’t have to worry about the future because it has no future. The children of today are the church of tomorrow. The training we give them today in the day school, the Sunday school, the Vacation Bible School, the Confirmation instruction class, is an investment in the future. To aid us in the task we will need some Christ-centered instructional materials. No one congregation has the resources to produce these alone. We’d have to go to the open market again where we would probably have to settle for materials that come from the pen of those who deny the basic truth of Holy Scripture that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and that “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,” (Acts 4:12), except that of Jesus Christ alone. But because of your synodical ties, because of your close cooperation with those who share your faith and confession you have a place to which you can turn for instructional materials that boldly proclaim Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, mankind’s only hope for time and for eternity.

There is more! A typical Sunday bulletin in your church might carry the announcement of a pastor, teacher, or delegate conference, of an institute for Sunday School teachers, a meeting of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society, or a youth group. Do you suppose that such contacts with confessional brothers and sisters are not important? Then why is it that in our social life, our business life, we regard close contact with those with whom we have much in common as extremely important? The church is no exception. The fact that you have very close synodical ties, that you walk together closely with others who share your faith and confession gives you a sense of belonging. It encourages, strengthens, builds you up because it lets you know that you are not alone. If we have ever been in close contact with a congregation that was cut loose from a synod for confessional reasons and decided to remain independent for a time, you will understand the many problems such a group faces.

May these few examples suffice to show that our Synod is not an abstract entity that we don’t have to get too excited about. The Synod is people, people like you, cooperating and communicating very closely with others like you, walking together in a common cause, doing together what we could not do alone. The Synod exists for your benefit, it supplies a vital need in your congregational life. Without such an affiliation our congregations would not have the strength they do today. Many would not survive as confessional Lutheran churches.

The story is told of a pastor who was visiting in the home of a member one day. They sat in front of the fireplace and watched the coals glowing brightly. In time their conversation got onto the subject of church work. “I don’t understand why you are always promoting the work of the Synod so much,” the man said. “I can think of a dozen other ways in which we could use the

money that we subscribe to the Synod.” Without saying a word the pastor got up, took the tongs, picked a live coal out of the fire, and laid it off on the side by itself. You know what happened. The lone coal soon went out, while the others continued to burn brightly. “You don’t have to say anything,” the man said. “You’ve just answered my question.”

Unless a congregation is fortunate enough to have a layman who has served on a synodical board or committee, the Synod’s key men in the congregation will normally be the pastor and the teachers. By their words and actions, their attitudes and insinuations toward the Synod and its work, members of our congregations are greatly influenced. As pastors and teachers we owe a great deal to our Synod. With very few exceptions we received our early training in a congregation which owes its very existence and its doctrinal standard to the Synod. Almost without exception our training for the preaching and teaching ministry has been subsidized in schools maintained and supported by the Synod. Many of us are now in congregations that are being supported or at one time were supported by the Synod. Others may be called to such congregations at some future time.

But as pastors, teachers, and congregations we not only take from the Synod. We also have some responsibilities. In our democratic conventions we make certain decisions, we plan certain programs. We may not always agree with all of them. In our own mind we may have decided on a different set of priorities. But as long as our Synod does not ask us to deviate from God’s Word—and we ought to thank God for the men who act as our conscience and are quick to speak up even when they only vaguely suspect that something isn’t quite right—we don’t really have the freedom of choice in our autonomous congregations that we sometimes like to think we have.

Every period in the church’s history has its own unique problems. WELS—1980 is no exception. In addition to the ongoing need for doctrinal vigilance, there is another problem over which we have no control: inflation. That’s the one that threatens to cripple the mission outreach of WELS—1980. Almost any paper we pick up, any newscast that we hear reminds us how much our lifestyle is already being affected and how things are going to get worse before they get better. That’s why we have to guard against getting caught up in a kind of recession syndrome. While we certainly are in sympathy with a person who is unemployed, not by choice, it is nevertheless true that some of the unemployed, at least, for a while, are doing better than others who are working full time. Even in a period of recession there are some businesses and industries that continue to do well. And when we must do some belt tightening, who says that the first cuts must be made in our giving to the Lord? What’s to prevent us from making those cuts, first of all, in the lifestyle that we have come to take for granted and with which we have come to feel quite comfortable? Someone has well said that many of our personal financial problems today are not so much the high cost of living as they are the cost of high living.

We need to remind ourselves that when the sacred record says: “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28), He is including the economy and everything else that He permits to come into the life of a child of God. For when our dollars no longer reach to maintain the lifestyle to which we’ve become accustomed, then we have no choice but to reexamine our priorities. Then we have to ask: “What are the things that have eternal worth?” And which fall into the category of things “where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal” (Matthew 6:19)? And when we do that the kingdom will not be shortchanged. For it’s no secret that during the severe depression of the 30’s people on the average gave a larger percentage (not dollars, obviously) of their income for the Lord’s work than they do today.

So even though the Lord is letting us experience just enough problems so that we do not forget where our strength lies, He is also giving and will continue to give us more than enough blessings to keep us from becoming discouraged. WELS—1980 is not deprived of the blessing of God to one of the tribes in ancient Israel, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deuteronomy 33:25b). So as we face the 80’s we have a lot going for us. We have, above all, a gracious God Who once thought enough of us to send His own Son into the world to redeem us. He has given us a large corps of dedicated pastors and teachers who accept the Bible as God’s inerrant Word, errorless and incapable of error in all of its parts. He has given us a vast army of dedicated lay men and women who love their Lord and are eager to serve Him. Through that loyalty to the Word—and we’d better not forget that this is a pure gift of grace—God has blessed us with a unanimity of purpose and action and a clearer understanding of our mission—His mission—than is the case in so many church bodies today. For that reason I’m happy and excited about serving the Lord in WELS—1980. I count it as a gift of His amazing grace “that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). I know you do too. Because our motivation for the task is of the highest order, “The love of Christ constraineth us” (II Corinthians 5:14a).