

CHURCH ATTENDANCE--IS IT ONLY A STATISTIC?

Church History
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Church Attendance--Only A Statistic?

Introduction

This topic was prompted by the startling discovery I made when I was vicaring in South St. Paul, Minnesota. I grew up in a small country congregation with notions that all ^{of} the members attended church services regularly.

My naivete grew as I entered the Synodical High School in Saginaw, Michigan. I attended the church services of a large congregation. I was overwhelmed by the hundreds of people that almost filled the church. I thought the same all through my college days at Northwestern in Watertown, Wisconsin.

During my first two years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, I was fortunate to be organist at a church on the southside of Milwaukee. It was there that I learned that big churches don't mean 100% attendance by members.

But it really hit me when I started vicaring. There were many persons who were members, yet hadn't been inside the church building for who knows how long.

Just how many were attending and how many weren't? That was easy enough to find out. I found out that there were about 1500 souls at the congregation where I was vicaring. The average weekly attendance was 450-500. That added up to a 39%

700
1500
39%

attendance rate. The conclusion was that more than half the members did not go to church regularly.

Even if one would take into account illness, weather, and out-of-town trips, there still would remain a large number of persons just not coming to church. Of those who did come to church regularly, very few knew the overwhelming percentage of delinquent members.

When I returned to the Seminary for my Senior year, I took a look at the Wisconsin Synod Statistical Report to see about how many members there were in Synod that attended church services regularly and how many didn't.

Other questions also ran through my mind: What are influences that affect church attendance? Why do delinquents find it easy to be delinquent? What can the pastor and active members do to encourage better church attendance?

These are some of the questions which I will address in this paper. I won't be able to answer them all completely. But this will give some insights into a problem that plagues every congregation in WELS.

I. History of the Statistics

The Statistical Report has a history in itself. The column that contains the percentage of members who attend Sunday services regularly was begun in 1974, nine years ago. That percentage is contained in the overall summary of Synod. For individual congregations, the figure given is the average number

of persons attending the church services. Percentages were figured on this number divided by the average between the number of communicant members and the number of souls as a total.

Before 1974, there was no record kept of these percentages. Even in 1974, there was a question of whether it should be included. In the June 16, 1974 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, Thomas Franzmann wrote an article dealing with statistics. The question was raised whether or not statistics were being overemphasized.

The arguments against statistics included: waste of Synod money on manpower, waste of supplies for printing and waste of space for storage. Another impression made against statistics (and this is probably the biggest argument) is that they allow for individual churches to "keep tabs" on other churches. This would lead to Pharisaism and possible downgrading of smaller congregations.

As I see it, these arguments are not as convincing as the arguments stated for the use of statistics. The first reason given for statistics was that statistics would help churches to see where they were at one point of time, what ground had been covered, and what still had to be accomplished.

The second reason given was that statistics are used in the Bible as in the case of the Feeding of the Five Thousand with 12 baskets of food left over. In Old Testament times, on different occasions the men of Israel were counted. When Paul was traveling to Rome on the ship which was wrecked, there were 276 other persons on board.

The third (and most important) reason is that statistics can be used for encouragement or warning. They can be used to encourage when an increase in any category is observed. They can be used to warn when complacency sets in.

This last point is the one that this paper will focus in on. Dealing with church attendance, the rise in percentage is a real encouragement. The more members that attend regularly, the more that are being fed a steady diet of God's Word.

There will be a natural concern when there is a decrease in church attendance. But this concern can come about only when the decrease is known. This is where the statistic concerning average Sunday service attendance comes in.

The Statistical Report in 1974 indicated that the overall average in our Synod for Sunday service attendance was 45.4%. It is no wonder that this statistic was not a welcomed sight to the Statistical Report. It definitely was not an encouragement to see that less than half of the total members of the Synod worshipped regularly.

In a report of a two-year study of 5,000 Lutherans done in 1971, it was found that 56% of Lutherans attended church regularly.¹ Three years later, WELS church attendance was only 45.4%. Not encouraging at all.

But encouragement came the following year. In 1975, there was an increase from 45.4 to 46.1%. And again there was an increase in 1976 up to 46.6%. Between 1976 and 1979, the percentages dropped. In 1980 and 1981, the percentage rose to its highest point. That was 47%. The 1982 percentage dropped

down to 46.3%. Over a nine year period, the average Sunday service church attendance rose a mere .9%. Encouraging, yet discouraging. Still less than half of the members of the WELS were not attending regularly.

Obviously, statistics cannot reflect the actual number of members who attend regularly. Illness, weather conditions and out-of-town trips can play a part in deciding statistics.

According to a survey done on our Synod, lay persons reported a 66% average Sunday attendance. The survey reported:

Wisconsin Synod baptized members are regular church goers as two out of three attend regular congregational services four or more times a month.²

There is quite a discrepancy between that figure and the 46.3% in the Statistical Report.

I have a theory that takes care of the 19% variance. I will use a nice round figure of 1000 members in a church. The average Sunday attendance is 470. 660 members say they attend regularly. On any given Sunday therefore, 190 persons may be missing. If each of the 660 missed the same number of Sunday services in a given year, that number would be 3 Sundays. For a member to miss 3 Sundays in a year due to illness, weather, or out-of-town trips is 95% attendance per year per member who attends regularly.

That takes care of the variance in average church attendance. But there is still the matter of the other 34% who don't attend regularly or even semi-regularly.

Even though statistics, when used incorrectly, can become a hindrance to preaching the Word of God, I would like to present

available statistics on church attendance as a positive factor to the preaching ministry.

II. A Survey

I conducted a survey of twenty-two congregations. Appendix C contains the congregations to whom I sent the questionnaires. It was not random, but rather a selective survey. I wrote to pastors with whom I've had an acquaintance. I felt that it did give a fair evaluation of church attendance and influences affecting it. I tried to get a range of different localities.

The States involved are:

Illinois- 1 Congregation
 Michigan- 6 Congregations
 Minnesota- 7 Congregations
 Wisconsin- 8 Congregations

The four types of localities (with percentage of average attendance at each church) are:

Country (rural)- (4) 53%, 60%, 60%, 65%
 Small town- (8) 36%, 40%, 47%, 50%, 55%, 58%,
 70%, 75%
 Suburbs- (4) 39%, 46%, 55%, 60%
 Big city- (6) 42%, 45%, 45%, 53%, 60%, 62%

By dividing the congregations into these four localities, four different types of lifestyles are represented.

Sending out a questionnaire such as this leads to subjectivism. I realize that, but still I wanted the opinions of a number of pastors on this subject.

Naturally, topping the list for any type of despising of God's Word is sin. I am taking for granted that sin is the foundation of delinquent church attendance. But to stop there is like saying that sin leads to hell and then not preaching that there is a way out of going to hell. The challenge is before us to try our best to lead delinquent members back to their loving Savior. To do so, we need to find out what keeps them away. *The Evangelism Life Line* sums up my point:

Scripture emphasizes the importance of the problem. It reveals to us the joy in heaven over each and every sinner who repents. It is clear that it is the responsibility of pastors and congregations to know when even one of the members are straying and to search for that one.⁴

Let us now look at the Questionnaire and its results. A copy of the Questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Question one is a general question. I imagine pastors have heard many different reasons or excuses from members as to why they don't attend church services.

The greatest response was recreation, and especially sporting activities. This ranged from children in school sports to adults in softball leagues or on bowling teams. This was the biggest outside influence. It was a very negative influence voiced by all the pastors. This is not to say that sports are wrong, but that it is an excuse for not attending church

regularly.

Another detrimental influence that received much attention was the lack of parental leadership. It seemed that in the cases where parents were indifferent to church, their children also grew up being indifferent and non-active. It has been said often enough that children learn from their parents. This applies to all facets of life including the spiritual.

These are negative influences. I will discuss the positive influences affecting church attendance later.

Questions two and three were generally answered the same among those questioned. Five years ago, the influences weren't quite as strong, but were there. Ten years ago, people made more of an attempt to avoid activities that would interfere with church services. The trend is that outside influences will continue acting in a negative way. One pastor commented, "As God warned--times continue to get worse. 'The love of many is waxing cold'--many are no longer concerned with hearing God's Word."³

Thoughts of oneself have crept in on Christians and humanism has taken over a majority of the population. People are more wrapped up in themselves than ever before.

Question four indicated that the locality of the church did not affect greatly. It was pretty well agreed on that bad weather affected attendance no matter where the church was located.

Questions five and six were not pertinent to the paper. They probably should have been left out. Most of the pastors

read the question differently than I had intended. So nothing conclusive was advanced in these two questions.

Question seven was a big question with the answers and excuses that I had expected. For teenagers, the excuses were: spiritual carelessness, peer pressure, and the feeling of no pressing need to go to church. Peer pressure was felt mainly in the big city. The one excuse that rated highly in small towns and rural areas was "sleeping in." The reminder here is that the lack of parental leadership may have much to do with these so-called "lifestyles."

The biggest excuse for Middle Age members was "too busy." Closely connected with this excuse were the following: only day off, sleep, and work around the house. There were no significant differences among the localities. They were pretty much the same excuses.

The overwhelming excuse among Golden Agers was weather. Bad weather home-bounded the frail bodies of the older folk. This was the excuse I expected. Bad weather can definitely hinder old people from getting anywhere. This excuse was used mainly by those living in the big city and suburbs. This would seem to indicate that country folks are more hardy and are more inclined to fight bad weather to get to church.

Ranking second among Golden Agers was the excuse of "illness." That comes with old age. Many end up in convalescent homes.

The excuses given by delinquent members are far too common. They are easy excuses to give. There are also counter arguments

to these excuses. Appendix B is an article I obtained last year. It lists about twenty-two excuses people use for not coming to church. After each excuse is a counter-argument showing how the excuse does not stand up as far as the Christian is concerned.

Immanuel Frey gives insight into the problem of nonattendance in his article, "Is Church-going Optional?":

(Church members) will usually become quite defensive and apologetic when confronted by their pastor about their nonattendance (for example, "I didn't get to church," rather than "I didn't go to church," thus implying lamely that in spite of heroic efforts on their part their good intentions were frustrated through no fault of their own).⁵

Question eight had interesting findings. Most pastors indicated that children attended regularly with their parents. One big city church indicated that usually only one parent brought the children. One small town church also indicated this.

Two congregations indicated that children attended up to their confirmation, then they would come irregularly or not at all. I feel that this also happens in other congregations, but the percentages would vary greatly.

Question nine was to feel out pastors as to when the greatest number of members did attend.

The season that was top vote-getter was Lent and Easter. I would surmise that the Word of God that is planted in the souls of delinquent members pricks their consciences enough to cause them to come to church once a

year to hear of what their Savior has done for them. The idea of "giving up something for Lent" leads them to "graciously" give up their free time to come to church.

The Christmas season was another favorite time for rise in church attendance. But even this time of the Church Year didn't rate as well as Easter. One pastor commented that even Easter doesn't have an impact on members as it used to.

Seventeen of the pastors had Easter as the most attended service and ten of those included Christmas as the second highest. The other five had "Spring/Fall", indicating the beginning of school and the confirmation season, times when a slight emphasis could be placed on school attendance by the church attendance of the parents. As small as it may seem, there is evidence of parental leadership here.

Four of these five had parochial schools and the fifth was a small town congregation. This would indicate the fact that the church that has a school gives cause for a minute attendance increase at the stated times above.

Question ten is one question that I thought would have a significant bearing on church attendance. But it wasn't as much as I thought. These are the figures. The percentage is the average Sunday attendance of each of the congregations surveyed.

Very much: 40%, 45%, 45%, 47%, 62%, 75%

Indifferent: 36%, 46%, 53%, 53%, 55%, 58%, 60%, 60%, 60%

Very little: 39%, 50%, 55%, 60%, 65%, 70%

Don't know: 42%

As shown by the above figures, congregations who are very much concerned about delinquency don't necessarily have higher church attendance. Comments on this questions included:

"They are concerned but it is hard for them to show it in a positive way."

"They want something done, but don't want to help do it."

"Most feel that it is the pastor's job."

"Some are greatly concerned, but most not."

"They are concerned, but aren't quite ready or sure what to do."

This would seem to indicate that some teaching of the members needs to be done. I think an excellent tool for this is *Regaining the Straying* in conjunction with *Talk about the Savior*, both published by the Commission on Evangelism. *Regaining the Straying* talks about proper Scriptural motivation, God-pleasing solutions, spiritual responsibilities of the Elders, purifying and strengthening the congregation, fostering unity and cooperation, and the

exercising of loving discipline. This would perhaps raise more concern among active members in the church.

Question eleven could have been phrased differently, like: "What is the percentage of members who view the function of the church as..." The WELS survey indicated 96% of the lay persons agreed on worship as the main function of the church. The reasons for attending church is what I did ask and the pastors answered fairly well.

Six of the pastors did not give responses because they felt that they would be judging the hearts of the people. I realize that attitudes and beliefs are sensitive issues. We can't see in the heart, but still, there are outward responses that can cause one to draw conclusions.

One pastor said it was a combination of all three answers. I would have to agree with him on this. Indeed, a Christian can be motivated by a number of influences to attend church.

Two pastors added a fourth category. It is one I should have placed on the questionnaire myself. That is "obligatory." There are many members who feel obligated to attend church. The WELS Survey placed 8% in this category.

There were five pastors who gave 100% credit to worship. Six others provided 70% or better in the worship category. This certainly coincides with the findings of the WELS Survey which indicated 70% of the lay people felt the need to hear God's Word and to worship him.⁶

This also coincides with the survey of Lutherans in

general:

Asked to name the most important purpose of a congregation, Lutherans resoundingly answer "Sunday morning worship." Some 70 percent name worship as of first importance; another 20 percent place worship in a position of second or third importance.⁷

It is a positive note to know that of those who do attend church services regularly, the majority do attend for the "right" reasons.

III. General Comments

Question twelve is a question by itself. A few pastors contributed to this portion and the rest did not wish to comment.

One pastor of a small town congregation made this observation:

Small towns seem to promote a family type feeling that sometimes carries over into congregational life and positively influences church attendance.

This is the impression that I have always held. In the congregations that I have been involved with, this is true, not only of small towns, but also country congregations. Taking the median percentages of the four localities, it sums up like this:

Country (4)- 60%

Small town (8)- 50%

Suburbs (4)- 46%

Big city (6)- 45%

Even with the family-like influence, there is still room for positive growth on the country and small town levels.

Another observation that I have made is that church attendance patterns are set during Sunday School, Confirmation, and Day School years. This can have a positive influence on children who will in future years become the adult members of the congregation.

For this to happen, pastors and teachers need to work closely with the parents. In the article, "Why Johnny Doesn't Go To Church," Rev. Mark Jeske states:

Work with parents. Admonish them, as St. Paul admonished the Ephesians, to bring their children up in training and instruction of the Lord. Help them see, as did Moses for the Israelites, that the main religious instruction for children is to come from the parents.⁶

Combine parental leadership with spiritual directives in Confirmation classes and school classes, and children will be well-trained in the practice of worshipping God in church with fellow believers. As can be attested by many a pastor, this theory is not 100% foolproof. But it is what our Christian duty dictates. We give the young people the positive influence and the Holy Spirit uses that influence to direct the ways of God's people.

One comment that was referred to earlier in this paper was: "Most feel that it is the pastor's job." I, also, have heard this comment, or members have implied it on a number of occasions. "The pastor is getting payed to bring in the

strays." This disturbs me that more people don't want to get involved in saving souls. It is the old nature in us that leads us to think first and foremost of ourselves.

Thomas Franzmann wrote a series of four articles in the *Northwestern Lutheran* entitled, "Why Are They Turning Away From the Church?" In these articles, Pastor Franzmann brought out the idea that people have lost sight of what the church is doing. One reason given was that people have invested very little of themselves in church. They have no interest because they are not motivated to become involved.

Another reason given was that members lose sight of the chief function of the church. With this reason I tend to differ because of 96% lay persons who agreed that Sunday worship is the major function of the church. But there are enough delinquents in our congregations who feel that social and recreational activities rate high on their priorities for the church. And when their expectations are not met, they drop out of church altogether.

IV. Conclusions

As I previously stated, not all the questions concerning low church attendance can be answered. Some may say that in our mission zeal, we have forgotten about those already in the flock, but now straying. *The Evangelism Life Line* gave figures in 1978 concerning the loss of members from the Synod. 8,763 communicants left our Synod. That number did not include those who died. Through evangelism efforts of the same year, 7,360 communicants were gained. There was a loss of total membership of about 1,000 members, not including the deceased.¹⁰

I am not saying that evangelism and mission work is not to be top priority in the congregation. It indeed is. But to forget about 34% of the members within the congregation surely isn't what God expects of us.

So we must use whatever means we have to lead the delinquents back to church, which, consequently, will raise the church attendance figures.

One numerical item that I have seen often in many church bulletins is the total attendance for the previous Sunday. It gives a sense of accomplishment whenever the total is larger than the total of the Sunday before that. But what people tend to not see is the number of absentees, those delinquent members. I often wonder why the bulletins don't include a percentage of total members who attend each Sunday. It would give the person in the pew more to think about.

In this way, congregational awareness could be heightened in the area of church attendance. More concern could be generated if there would be a good program carried out not only by the pastor, but also by the active members of the congregation.

The point that was brought up earlier concerning parental leadership is also vital. Teaching children the importance of worshipping God with fellow believers is to be high on our lists of priorities. Rev. Mark Jeske writes:

Is poor church attendance something worth getting riled up over? Yes, sir. No-shows hurt their Savior, who is cheated out of the worship He deserves from His adopted brothers and sisters. No-shows hurt their fellow members, who need each other, old and young, just as a body needs all of its members to function effectively. Worst of all, no-shows hurt themselves. People who are careless churchgoers stunt their spiritual growth, and prolonged neglect of the Word of Life will cause spiritual death.¹¹

Low church attendance is a valid concern. It always will be. As long as there is sin in the world and as long as there are congregations preaching against that sin, there will be inactive or delinquent members in those congregations. Rather than treating less than satisfactory church attendance as a statistic, we need to look at the concrete facts and make an effort to change those facts.

Appendix A

Dear Pastor

I am doing a Church History paper on Church attendance and influences affecting it. I would appreciate if you would answer the following questions briefly.

1. From your point of view as a pastor, what outside influences (if any) in the community affect church attendance?

2. How have outside influences changed compared to five years ago (1978) in your community?

Ten years ago (1973)?

3. What is your locality? (check one)

- a) Country (rural) _____
- b) Small Town _____
- c) Suburbs _____
- d) Big city _____

4. Does locality affect attendance?

5. How many Sunday services do you have?

Mid-week services?

6. Does your service time change during the summer months?

If so, does it help attendance?

7. What is the most often used excuse for not coming to church (given by delinquent members)?

- a) Teenagers (under 20) _____
- b) Middle age (20 to 60) _____
- c) Golden Agers (60 and up) _____

8. Do the children attend church services regularly with their parents?

9. Which season(s) of the church year has the greatest attendance?

10. How much are the members who attend regularly concerned about delinquent members?

- a) Very much _____
- b) Indifferent (mediocre) _____
- c) Very little _____
- d) Don't know _____


11. What is the percentage of members who view church attendance as:

- a) Social? _____
- b) Recreational? _____
- c) Worship? _____

12. Comments:

Yours in Christ,

WHY GO TO CHURCH



**Unite
Our
Hearts**

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

-Matthew 7:7,8

I ACCEPT THE BIBLE, BUT I DO NOT GO TO CHURCH

Are you a Christian? "Certainly," you say, "I am not a heathen or a Mohammedan." Do you go to Church? "No, but I believe in God." So does the devil. So does every person whose reasoning powers are unaffected. The voice of nature alone should convince you of the existence of God. Mere belief in the existence of a supreme being, however, is not the faith that saves.

"But," you argue, "I am good. I do nothing very wrong. I am honest. I try to do my duty. I am as good as many church members. Furthermore, I believe the Bible." We are glad to hear that! For if you are ready to take the statements of the Bible as authoritative, we believe that we can show you that you ought to go to church.

Do you really accept the Bible? How, then, can you be so proud of your personal goodness and worthiness; and because of this goodness so sure of being accepted by God? How about these statements of your Bible: "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not." "We are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags," and "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all." From such passages you must clearly see that God demands nothing less than perfect obedience, and not a single one of us is perfect. The Bible brands even our personal worthiness as worthless.



You are willing to admit that? But still you cannot see why you should go to church? The Bible plainly shows that God wants you, yes, commands you to go to church. Here are a few of its statements: "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." You simply cannot stay away from church without transgressing the will of God.

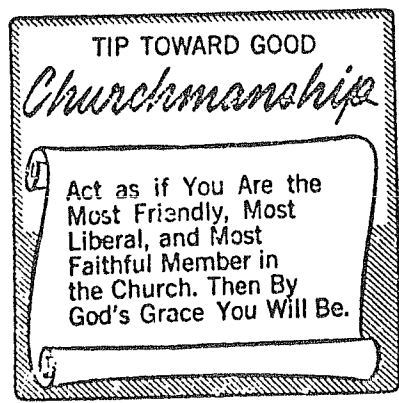
I HAVE NO TIME

What? No time to attend to your greatest need, no time to look out for your eternal welfare? Then find time! It must be done. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." First things first! "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

I CAN BE A CHRISTIAN WITHOUT GOING TO CHURCH

Unless you are physically disabled, you cannot. In the first place how can you as a Christian, persistently disobey God's command and despise His Word? But there is another reason.

According to the Bible, we are justified before God by faith. What is faith? It is not a mere lip profession but a persuasion of the heart that God alone can accomplish. And this faith God works only through His Word by the Holy Spirit. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." God works faith through no other means than His Word and Sacrament. And only one who has faith is a Christian.



Your mere saying so does not make you a Christian. Your living an outwardly moral life does not make you a Christian. You cannot be a Christian unless you are under the influence of the Word. The very fact that you have no inclination to go into the house of God is a sad commentary on your spiritual condition. Christ says: "He that is of God heareth God's Word: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

Now draw your own conclusions. If it is faith that saves, the person who neglects the means through which God works faith, the Word, is cutting himself off from salvation, for the Word of God says, "He that believeth not shall be damned." There is nothing ambiguous about that statement.

I DO NOT LIKE THE CONDUCT OF SOME CHURCH MEMBERS

Neither do we. But remember that the church is composed of sinners, subject to all the frailties to which man is heir. Even the most sincere Christians are never perfect. "But," you say, "some church members are hypocrites." We grant that. The Savior told us to expect that. There was a traitor even in the little circle of Christ's twelve disciples. Why should you be surprised to find some in the larger circles of Christian congregations? Does that fact excuse you from attending to your soul's needs? God will judge you personally without reference to your neighbor's spiritual status.

CHURCH MEMBERS ARE NOT SOCIABLE ENOUGH

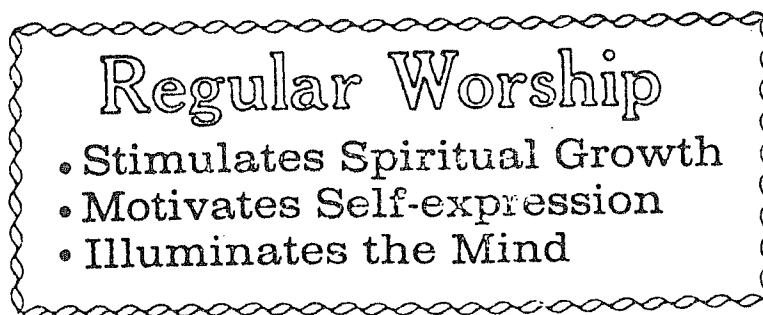
Did Christ institute the church for entertainment? The church is no social club. It was founded for the proclamation of the gospel message for soul-sick sinners. It is to edify, uplift, console through the Word of Him who redeemed us.

The church which is serious about the Father's business will always treat and consider its social life as a side-issue. Church members in some instances could be a little more sociable, but are you going to sacrifice your soul because of their weakness in this regard?



HOW OFTEN SHOULD I GO TO CHURCH?

As often as the Word is preached. You take food for your body regularly, why neglect sustaining your soul? If you use the Word of God irregularly, your spiritual life will not thrive. Every time you neglect the services of the Lord, you are despising your Savior. Christ says to His disciples: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me."



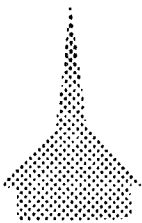
I HAVE TOO MUCH WORK

If you have so much work that you cannot attend church on Sundays, then you have more work that God wants you to have. God gives you 168 hours each week. Out of that number you certainly can spare ONE hour for public worship - and that for your own good.

SUNDAY IS THE ONLY DAY ON WHICH I CAN DO ODD JOBS AROUND THE HOUSE

It is fine that you are interested in keeping things up around the house and yard. But the most important thing in life is the care for your souls. You must

have time for God and for His Word. Try God's prescription in the future (Matt. 6:33) "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Seek His kingdom first; and all these things (earthly benefits) will be added unto you. After you have done your duty toward God, He will double bless your spare time.



*Where The
Action Is*

I LISTEN TO CHURCH SERVICES BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO

We are glad to hear that you listen to church services broadcast over the radio. It shows that you are interested in religion and in the needs of your soul. However, Heb. 10:25 says: "We should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together." Christ also says that Christians are to partake of the sacrament of the altar frequently. You cannot obey those two commands of Jesus by listening only to church services broadcast over the radio.

I'LL GO TO CHURCH WHEN I AM OLDER

Friend, do not take the chance. You may not have the chance.

I LIKE TO SLEEP ON SUNDAY MORNING

I can appreciate that your work is strenuous, and I cannot blame you for your desire to catch up on sleep on Sunday morning. But the last service doesn't begin until 10:45. So you need not get up too early on Sunday morning. Then, too, you can take a long nap on Sunday afternoon. But an hour spent in God's house is restful for both body and soul.

I SEND THE CHILDREN

You do well in sending the children. As a parent you have the obligation of having your children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You should arrange to have them hear the Word of God. However, do you realize that by your negative attitude you are undoing what the church is attempting to work in them? The mere fact that you send your children to church proves that you recognize the necessity of religion for THEM. By what reason do you make YOURSELF an exception to that rule?



THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH ARE TOO UNFRIENDLY

I can well understand that you expect the people to be friendly when you come to church, and I'm sorry to hear that you think the members of our congregation are too unfriendly. Since all members belong to God's family, they ought to love one another and be friendly. There are, however, defects in all congregations, for we are all sinners. God expects His children to correct these defects. But bear in mind that the friendliness or the lack of friendliness of a church membership has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of your own soul.

MY WIFE AND I ARE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS, AND TO KEEP THE PEACE, WE ATTEND NO CHURCH.

I am sorry to hear that you do not have spiritual unity in your home. But if you are convinced that your church teaches the truth of the Bible, there is no better way of gaining your husband (wife) for the truth than diligent attendance at the services in God's house. By your neglect of the church you are helping neither yourself nor your spouse. Come to church, read the Bible together and pray to God that He will lead your spouse to see the truth.

THE CHILD IS TOO SMALL TO BRING TO CHURCH or THE LITTLE CHILDREN ARE TOO RESTLESS TO BRING THEM TO CHURCH

Jesus told His disciples (Mark 10:14) "Permit the little children to come to me and do not keep them away." The earlier children are trained in regular church attendance the better. We dare not neglect to obey the command of God when He says: "train up a child in the way he should go." This training must begin when the child is young and must continue regularly. Neither should parents neglect their own spiritual life or give their children a poor example to follow in this area.

To aid parents with small, restless children our church provides a babysitting service for children between the ages of 6 months and three years every Sunday through the year during the late service. Use it, if necessary.



I CANNOT CONTRIBUTE

Just come to church and share its wonderful blessings. It offers to poor sinners in the name of Jesus, the only Savior, forgiveness of sins, comfort in affliction, peace of soul, reconciliation with God, power for good living, and hope in the hour of death. As you begin to share in these blessings, you will also gladly share in the Church's support. God's concern is in proportionate giving, in giving according to the blessings received.

THE PASTOR IS CONSTANTLY ASKING FOR MONEY

If a Man's faith does not affect his pocketbook then his faith is phony.

The church saves souls; it comforts the troubled and distressed; it offers God's strength for holy living; it inspires the dying with the hope of heaven through Christ, the Savior. So why object when the pastor encourages the members to support the church with their money? The greater your love for Christ, the more generous will be your financial support of the church. There is no better investment of your earthly means than the program of the Church of Jesus Christ.

One-third of all the recorded parables of Christ deal with the right use of material possessions. About one-twenty fifth of the pastor's sermons deal primarily with the use of material possessions. Therefore, if one only hears the pastor speaking about money it is a very sad commentary on his church attendance.

I HAVE NO DECENT CLOTHES

I am sorry to hear that you are in such poor circumstances. God has promised that if you take care of your soul first and foremost, He will also see to it that your bodily needs are provided for. And God will not look at your clothes. He looks at your heart. Just come in the best clothes you have, and you will be more than welcome to the members of the church, and, above all, you will be welcome to the Lord.

I DON'T HAVE TO GO TO CHURCH. I READ MY BIBLE AT HOME.

That is fine. All Christians should read the Bible but that is not enough. God tells us to READ His Word, but He also commands that we assemble ourselves together to HEAR It. Surely, if you wish to comply with His will, you will do the one and not leave the other undone. Then, too, how can you obey His command to receive the Lord's Supper?

OTHER CHURCHES ARE JUST AS GOOD.

If you are sick, you do not take any medicine, you take the medicine which the doctor prescribed. Your soul is sick. Not any medicine will save it, but the medicine prescribed by Christ. The Lutheran Church teaches men "all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

OUR CHURCH IS TOO NARROW.

You are right. Our church is "narrow". Christ was "narrow". He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." (John 14:6). Christ did not teach that there are many ways to heaven. He taught that there is but one way, namely, faith in Him and His saving Passion. Loyalty to Christ and His truth compels the Church to teach all things taught by Christ in the Bible and to reject those things which are contrary to His teachings. Be assured, you will find the saving truth in our church.



I WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH A GOD WHO PERMITS DREADFUL CALAMITIES TO VISIT MEN.

God is not the cause of sorrows, wars and calamities. But He does permit them to happen, in order to call men to repentance. The real cause of all trouble in the world is sin. Greed, envy, jealousy, lust for power, cause disunity, hatred, strife, war, and bloodshed in the world. Sin has turned this world into a vale of tears.

THREE GOOD REASONS FOR GOING TO CHURCH

I. GOD'S BLESSING

(One of the most important reasons for attending a Church Service is to hear the Word of God. The Bible promises great and sure blessings to hearers of the Word! The Hearing of the Word will do something for you life--)

GOD'S WORD WILL --

...Accomplish God's Purpose for You

"As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall My Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isaiah 55:10.

...Set You On A Rock of Certainty

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them; I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. Matthew 7:24.

...Make You Christ's Disciple

"Then said Jesus: 'If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed.'" John 8:31.

...Give you Faith for the Future

"So then Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Rom. 10:17

...Bring Forth the Fruit of Righteousness

"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty." Matthew 13:23.

...Grant You Happiness In Hearing

"But Jesus said: 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.'" Luke 11:28

...Give you Everlasting Life

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life. John 5:24.

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6:63.

2. GOD'S COMMAND

1. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Matthew 11:15.
2. "Be ye not stiffnecked, but yield yourselves unto the Lord and enter into His sanctuary; and serve the Lord, your God." 11 Chronicles 30:8.
3. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear. Eccl. 5:1.
4. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Hebrews 10:25.

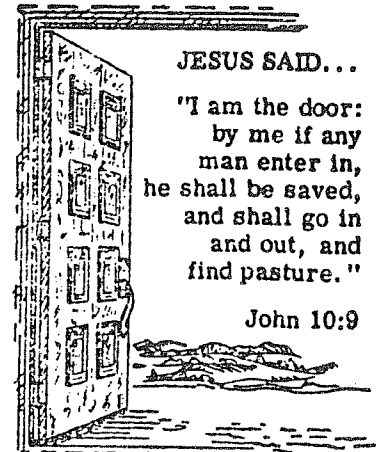
3. EXAMPLES FROM GOD'S WORD

CHRIST

1. "I sat daily with you teaching in the temple." Matthew 26:55
2. "As His custom was, Jesus went into the synagogue on the sabbath day." John 4:16.

DAVID

1. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple" Psalm 27:4.
2. "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!"
"My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."
"Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house."
"For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."
Psalm 84:1, 2, 4, 10



SUMMARY

A Sunday well spent
Brings a week of content
And strength for the toils of the morrow
But a Sunday profaned
Whatever be gained
Is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

"HE THAT IS OF GOD HEARETH GOD'S WORD"

Appendix C

Congregations Surveyed and Representatives

Bethlehem, Oshkosh, Wi. (R. Sloan, Vicar)
 Bloomington, Bloomington, Mn. (C. Huebner, Vicar)
 First, Racine, Wis. (R. Pope)
 Good Shepherd, Burton, Mi. (H. Birner)
 Grace, Alma, Mi. (G. Stawicki)
 Grace, So. St. Paul, Mn. (D. Strong, Vicar)
 Lord And Savior, Crystal Lake, Il. (R. Mueller)
 Martin Luther, Forest Lake, Mn. (J. Lindloff)
 Mt. Zion, Kenosha, Wi. (F. Schulz)
 North Trinity, Milwaukee, Wi. (T. Fischer)
 St. John, Glencoe, Mn. (M. Guthmiller)
 St. John, Goodhue, Mn. (T. Kuske)
 St. John, Mischicot, Wi. (M. Hoppe)
 St. John, Red Wing, Mn. (P. Schleis, Vicar)
 St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wi. (M. Jeske)
 St. Paul, Remus, Mi. (E. Schmelzer)
 St. Peter, Elmwood, Wi. (J. Adomeit)
 St. Peter, Goodhue, Mn. (T. Kuske)
 Salem, Milwaukee, Wi. (W. Nommensen)
 Zion, Broomfield twp., Mi. (E. Schmelzer)
 Zion, Chesaning, Mi. (D. Schwartz)
 Zion, St. Louis, Mi. (R. deRuiter)

End Notes:

1. A Study of Generations, p. 176f.
2. A Profile of WELS Lutherans, p. 114.
3. Questionnaire
4. *The Evangelism Life Line*, Winter, 1980, p. 2.
5. *NWL*, Vol. 63, June 13, 1968.
6. A Profile of WELS Lutherans, p. 108-109.
7. Profiles of Lutherans in the U.S.A., p. 45
8. *The Lutheran Educator*, p. 13.
9. *NWL*, Vol. 67, p. 397-398.
10. *The Evangelism Life Line*, Winter, 1980, p. 2.
11. *The Lutheran Educator*, p. 12.

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- Barnes, Isch, A Profile of WELS Lutherans, 1981.
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- Regaining The Straying*, Publ. by WELS Commission on Evangelism, 1981.
- Reuss, Profiles of Lutherans in the U.S.A., Augsburg Publ. House, 1982.
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- Stromm et al. A Study of Generations, Augsburg Publ. House, 1972.
- The Lutheran Educator*, Vol. 23, Oct. 1982, "Why Johnny Doesn't Go To Church" by Mark Jeske, p. 12-15.