

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT
DISTRICT CONVENTION, MANITOWOC
AUG. 5-8, 1968--Pastor Marvin A. Radtke

(That you might know the direction of this paper I will append the sub-title: Specialized Ministries.)

When we speak of mission work, we are speaking of a very complicated procedure. We are speaking of a field of labor; we are speaking of the District Mission Board, the General Board for Home Missions (GBHM), the Priority Committee of the GBHM, the Board of Trustees, the Fiscal office, the Coordinating Council. Yet, for all the complicated machinery which we have wrapped around mission work, the work itself is just as simple and uncomplicated as in the days of the apostles.

The Book of Acts relates to us the simple, yet the effective manner in which the apostles and the early Church did the work which the Lord commanded. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 souls were added to the Church. Later we read: "And The Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great number of priests were obedient to the faith." We marvel at the growth of the number of believers. We perhaps in view of this ask: Were the apostles more qualified to do this work than we are, or even can be, today? The apostles answer us very tersely as to what it was that qualified them to preach the Gospel and to carry out the Lord's command. They declared: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." The things which they had seen and heard had so impressed them, had granted them such rich blessings, that they found themselves constrained to speak to others and to tell them what it was that they had seen and heard, and to do so even in the face of persecution. Because they had seen and heard, they were able to tell others of Christ and His saving Gospel. Because they had seen and heard, they had opportunity to do mission work.

We, the members of the Northern Wisconsin District, have the Word and sacraments in great abundance. We have them in their fullness. We have had them for a long time. And there is nothing that prevents us from expending ourselves in seeing and hearing.

This is the beginning of mission work-- our own personal seeing and hearing-- our own hearts becoming filled with faith, not just with a head knowledge but a heart that accepts and responds to the Word of our Savior, a faith that is constrained to speak even in the face of adversity.

In view of this we should be able to say that all the members of our Northern Wisconsin District ought to be well qualified to speak even as the apostles. Our District is well dotted with old, well-established congregations, congregations in which the Gospel has been proclaimed in its truth and purity for a full century. We have more Christian Day Schools than any other district, save one. We have three Lutheran High Schools within our District boundaries and Synodical schools close at hand. We have a superb opportunity "to see and hear" from childhood on.

Therefore we must say: We are well qualified to do the work of the Christian, to be witnesses unto our Lord and Savior, to speak to others concerning the things which we have seen and heard.

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We are qualified. Yet we cannot all go into other fields or distant lands and labor. This does not mean that our qualifications are for naught. We can send others. Paul's word to the Romans is at once recalled: "How shall they preach except they be sent?" We in the past, because of growth, and organization which is a necessary part of growth, have repeatedly emphasized: SEND. Sending is important. Without the sending our mission work, as we know it today, would end. There is something else that ought to be emphasized besides the sending. Again we can turn to the Book of Acts. In the eighth chapter we read: "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles . . . As for Saul he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them . . . Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John."

The blind unbelief and hot tempers which demanded the death of Christ were not satisfied with the crucifixion of Christ. The Gospel was still being preached, and every time that Gospel of Christ was preached their own consciences were pricked. Indeed, sorely pricked. When the High Priest, the Sadducees, and members of the Sanhedrin tried to shut the mouths of the apostles and other believers, when they tried desperately with imprisonment and threats to silence the Gospel, Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him both God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him. And when they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them."

Gamaliel, however, quickly counselled: "Refrain from these men and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God. And to him they agreed." They agreed to do nothing. Yet, even in that moment they had the apostles beaten before they were released. The whiplash of their own conscience caused them quickly to ignore the counsel to which they had agreed and soon they were again attempting to silence the Gospel by stoning such as Stephen and imprisoning the apostles and other believers. So we read that Saul made havoc in the Church. He readily gained letters from the High Priest to persecute the believers in Damascus, men and women, and bring them bound to Jerusalem. The result of this intense persecution was that the believers fled from Jerusalem and wherever else they were persecuted, to new areas. The believers were scattered abroad even as seed that is scattered in the field. And they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word. They CARRIED the Word with them and wherever they went, they preached that Word, each in his own way.

It was not very long before the Church in Jerusalem heard of the Gospel being preached and accepted, here, there, and the next place. Thus the Church at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to investigate the report that the Gospel was being preached and received in Samaria.

In this history we can see the importance of not only our sending, but also our carrying of the Gospel wherever we go. Each individual is a witness to Christ, a witness to the things that he has seen and heard; a witness to the fact that God raised up Jesus and exalted him with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

This history of the early Church took place some 1950 years ago. However, this history of the early Church is not ancient history. It is just as modern as today. Today the believer is not faced with the kind of persecution which denies him his citizenship or which drives him out of his home and country. Yet believers today do find themselves scattered abroad. In our day business is expanding as perhaps never before. Large concerns are expanding by building additional plants in areas which only a few years ago were unknown for industrial activity. Many of our people therefore suddenly find themselves transferred to different parts of the country. Many of our young people graduating from college find job opportunities in far away states. Even as the early believers found themselves scattered abroad, so we find the believers today also scattered abroad, throughout our country.

We, in this day, have tremendous opportunities to extend the Lord's Church. We have opportunities to carry the Gospel where it is not as yet found in its truth and purity.

In this respect we of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have extraordinary opportunities for mission work. Our District, with over 52,000 communicants, is second in communicant numbers only to the Southeastern Wisconsin District. It is therefore a correct conclusion that our District has more of her youth, more of her skilled laborers moving to other parts of the country than almost any other District. We indeed have a marvelous opportunity to bring the Gospel of Christ to areas where that Gospel is not found or is not found in its truth and purity. And with opportunity there is responsibility. Having the opportunity we also now have the responsibility to carry the Gospel wherever we go and to be witnesses to Christ, our Savior, and to extend His Church. When we speak of extending the Lord's Church I believe we must constantly express the fact that we are not only, or not primarily, concerned about the visible church, that we are able to point to a new mission, or that we are able to add a few more digits to our communicant numbers, or that we have so many more pockets with which to share our Synodical budget. We are concerned about each individual soul. This is to extend the Lord's Church, soul by soul, to tell one soul: "Christ has redeemed you, Christ has fought the battle for you, Christ has gained the victory for you. Christ offers you the free gift of His grace, forgiveness, life and salvation."

The angels in heaven rejoice over every sinner that repents and so we also rejoice over every sinner that is brought out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of eternal life. If we can look upon the individual's need, if we can see his need for Christ, his need for salvation, his need to be pulled from the depths of hell to the heavenly mansions prepared for him by Christ, then we will find ourselves ready, willing, yea, zealous to carry the Gospel with us wherever we go and to preach it to all who will listen.

However, when a young man or woman, when our own son or daughter leaves home in the pursuit of his occupation, it will accomplish little at that time to admonish them:

Take the Gospel with you; preach it to others; gather a group of Christians about you; begin a mission. They will be too timid. They will be too shy. They won't know how to go about mission work and to begin a mission. They will not be qualified to carry the Gospel to others. Again, we can ask: What was it that qualified the apostles to bring the Gospel to others? "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Their seeing and their hearing is what made them qualified to do the work of a disciple. And so also our young people can only be qualified for this work, if they too have seen and heard.

When we therefore speak of mission opportunities available to our Northern Wisconsin District, we must look upon the great numbers of our youth. Each and every one of them is a potential missionary. Each and every one of them can be a carrier of the Gospel. Each and everyone of them can bring life to a lost soul. Therefore we must show and teach our youth. We must teach them the Gospel in fullest measure possible. We must bring it to them in all its truth. We must show them what the Gospel has done for us. We must show them, we must let them see that peace which we enjoy in Christ. We must let them see the comfort of God's Word as we stand at the grave of a beloved fellow Christian. We must let them see the strength which the Lord affords us. We must let them see how through Christ and His Gospel the fear of death is vanquished in our hearts and can be in theirs. We must show them the blessings of the Lord in their own lives. They must be trained so that one day they will find themselves moved into action because, even as the apostles, they have seen and heard. If they can truly see and hear the marvelous good news of the Gospel, then they, too, even in the face of persecution, opposition, or ridicule will be witnesses to the things which they have seen and heard. They will be zealous carriers of the Gospel.

This work requires zeal. It requires love, love for the Savior and love for the lost souls of men. This work requires a measure of zeal and love which cannot come through a simple admonition. This is love and zeal which can only be born out of personal experience.

Are we as a District qualified to carry on this work? We ought to be more than qualified. The congregations making up our District are perhaps the oldest in Synod. Surely we have had ample time to imbibe a full measure of the Gospel. We have over 40 Christian Day Schools and the opportunity to bring the Gospel to over 5200 children every day of the school year. We have three area high schools with a total enrollment of 892 students. Again we have further opportunity to bring the Gospel of our Lord to our youth in fullest measure. Our Northern Wisconsin District is a district the Lord has peculiarly blessed with opportunities for mission work and for extending the Lord's kingdom. We have, and should have to an ever greater degree and number, souls that are filled with zeal and love for the Savior, neither too shy nor too timid, to take the Gospel and preach it to others wherever they may go. This is the beginning of all mission work: The training, particularly of our youth at home, at church, and at school, that by the grace of God they can be carriers of the Gospel to the eternal salvation of many souls.

What about other mission opportunities within the boundaries of our District? If we will look back, we may be able to better understand the mission opportunities presenting themselves to us today.

During the years 1860 - 1870	33	congregations were organized
1870 - 1880	20	" " "
1880 - 1890	14	" " "
1890 - 1900	9	" " "
1900 - 1910	14	" " "
1910 - 1920	5	" " "
1920 - 1930	12	" " "
1930 - 1940	4	" " "
1940 - 1950	10	" " "
1950 - 1960	7	" " "
1960 - 1968	6	- Inc. Beechwood Tomahawk

When our state was first being settled, mission activity went on at a feverish pace. The number of missions, generally speaking, thereafter declined in numbers to our present day. Does this mean that we have become less mission-minded than our forefathers? Not at all. A given area can be well cared for by a specific number of congregations. After that, additional congregations, or mission opportunities are the outgrowth of areas expanding, or a shift in population. It is this situation in which we find ourselves today. Our forefathers did their work well.

This does not mean that there are no mission opportunities today in our District. At our District Pastoral Conference last fall your District Mission Board presented a panel discussion in which we spoke of areas which we believe will afford us opportunities for mission work. Rather than to repeat the details of that discussion, permit me to very briefly summarize. In looking at the population trends, industrial expansion, and industries long-range planning, we view the various areas of the Fox River Valley as areas of greatest mission potential. Our District Mission Board hopes to meet with the pastors of the various areas and together with them to study these potential opportunities. We have met with the pastors of the Appleton Area and as a result an area will be canvassed during the week of August 12. We await the report of the canvass to determine whether or not further work will be done in the area. We will be meeting with the pastors of the other areas shortly.

I think it is important that congregations keep a careful tabulation of where their members are moving within the city. I believe it is important not only for individual congregations to do so, but that neighboring congregations compare notes. Often a trend can be noted and an area marked early enough for the Mission Board to begin its planning.

And, gentlemen, long-range planning is going to be of far greater importance than it has been in the past. Our Synod, particularly since 1960, has grown greatly. The opportunities which the Lord has laid before us and is still bringing to us have, and are, growing by leaps and bounds. Whereas in 1960 requests for opening new fields were almost entirely restricted to the confines of the defined District lines, we today have requests from coast to coast, from Hawaii to Alaska and Canada. The result is that our General Board for Home Missions is faced with the fact that to be good stewards over the gifts the Lord has granted us, we must do planning for more than one year or even one biennium. From now on each District mission board and each mission congregation must do long-range planning. We are being asked to plan ahead for six

years. Naturally, none of us can read the future, yet we must anticipate the needs of our missions and the opportunities which lie before us to a greater extent than in the past, so that we might better know where we are going and how we are going to get there.

As a District we must therefore today mark areas which have promise of future fields. This will require a more direct line of communication and cooperative work and planning between the District Mission Board and the individual and collective congregations of the District.

I believe that when we speak of mission opportunities in our Northern Wisconsin District we must also turn our attention to areas which before have been somewhat neglected, particularly in our reporting.

Our District is an old established district with over 52,000 communicants. This fact ought to make us cognizant of mission opportunities of a special nature. As a matter of fact we now speak of specialized ministries in our GBHM.

At the head of specialized ministries stands a ministry that is not really glamorous as far as mission work is concerned. Yet, it is a precious ministry. It is the ministry of the institutional missionary. Since we have a large number of communicants within our District, and a large concentration of these communicants within certain areas, it stands to reason that we also have a large number of aged, sick, mentally ill, convalescent, and even imprisoned. Wherever we find a concentration of these Wisconsin Synod members confined to institutions, we try to serve them through part-time or full-time institutional missionaries. In our district we have two full-time institutional missionaries, Pastor Immanuel Boettcher and Pastor Louis Winter.

Such a full-time ministry makes sense. Instead of five, ten, or 15 pastors making a few calls at a particular institution, one man makes all the calls. And being a full-time institutional missionary, he is able to serve the individual more frequently, not only with private comfort and devotions but also with a public worship service designed to meet the needs of the individuals being served. Also by constantly working with the institutionalized the missionary has a ready grasp of the particular problems faced by one who is aged, mentally ill, or who is a convalescent. There is in fact a specialized ministry.

I think we ought to recognize also the precious mission work accomplished by this ministry. Many who have fallen from the faith, who have grown weak in faith, or who have never truly known their Lord and Savior, in hearing our missionaries serving one of our people, call upon them to also serve them. The number of confirmations may be very small but the number of souls that are preserved in faith, the number of souls that are restored to faith, the number of souls that are brought to faith in Christ their Savior will only be known in the kingdom of glory. All of our private and public institutions must also be looked upon as opportunities for mission work.

It might be added that institutional mission work is a very expensive work. This is not because the institutional missionaries are so expensive-- they are no more expensive than any other missionary. However, the institutional missionary does not

have a congregation which more and more shoulders its own financial responsibility until one day it is able to become self-supporting. In the case of the institutional missionary, the full expense of that ministry must be borne by Synodical mission funds.

As the number of institutional missionaries increases, both in our District and in other districts, I believe the question will be raised: Should the expense of institutional missionaries be wholly taken from the Synodical mission fund?

Our institutional missionaries are almost entirely serving people from our own District. They are truly "District" missionaries. They, in effect, are serving our own congregations, since the institutionalized are still members of our congregations and therefore our responsibility. In view of this, I believe that the question could be raised: Should the District bear that expense? We perhaps can give the question a little forethought. (I might just add the note that the two institutional missionaries of the Milwaukee area are supported by the Milwaukee congregations without support from the Synod.)

Another area of mission opportunity lies also in the field of the specialized ministries. Statistics show us that over 50% of the population today is under 25 years of age. Industry bears this in mind. This is the age group to which they attune their products. Politicians, as we are seeing in this election year, are not overlooking this age group. They have turned to the college student perhaps more than ever before. This is an important segment of population in our country. The Church also cannot ignore these young people. These young men and women are the future of the Church; from their ranks will come the future leaders of the Church. Through our Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission we try to keep in touch with our college students by means of the printed Word. However, the Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission is the first to state that much more should be done. Many of the colleges in our country are now being served by one of our neighboring pastors. Where we find a substantial number of students from our Synod, we have established campus houses or student centers. Where there is a concentration of our students we have also established a full-time campus ministry. Opportunities for such a specialized ministry also present themselves in our District.

The mere reference to college students almost leaves a sour taste in our mouth. We think of the riots, the sit-ins, the protests, and the hippies. We think of the "wild" ideas and theories some would promote. But, gentlemen, let us not sell OUR youth short. The training our youth received at home, at church, and in our Christian day schools and high schools has not been in vain. One of the most impressive meetings in which I have ever sat was held a few months ago when our District Board met with a group of our students from the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. The details of this meeting will be reported in our District Mission Board Report. But let me repeat here what I stated in the Bulletin Inserts which you received through the mail: These young people convinced us beyond any doubt that they were seeking a place of refuge, a place of spiritual refuge as they daily plod through a hostile desert which regularly seeks to destroy their faith and confession.

Out of this meeting grew a new awareness of the opportunities the Lord affords us through a campus ministry, opportunities to preserve and conserve faith that is

under violent attack, opportunities to do mission work in a field that presents us with new souls every year. Added to this is the genuine concern of these young people, not only for the kingdom of God in their own midst, but for the kingdom of God at large. Many of these students are willing to be bold witnesses of Christ both on and off the campus. Consider the work of the Lutheran Collegians and the number of their members who were willing to sacrifice good summer wages that they might conduct a vacation Bible school (V. B. S.) in Chicago, in an area where the name of our Savior is only known as a form of swearing. Consider their willingness to expand their activities in conducting another V. B. S. in the Madison area and also in sending a couple into Peru to do mission work in that country in a field under the supervision of our sister Synod.

Work among our college students we dare not regard only as a work of conservation, but through them we also find new and wonderful opportunities for mission work, both on and off the campus.

We can rightfully be proud of our young men and women. How thankful we ought to be that the Lord has blessed our labors in their childhood. Their actions, their zeal ought to spur us on to provide the spiritual counsel and help they now seek. With the mission zeal they already display I can see them in a few years bringing this same zeal into our congregations as members of our congregations.

Our Northern Wisconsin District is an old established District. Yet, there are many mission opportunities open to us in our expanding cities and in the fields of specialized ministries. We do not have vast frontiers in which to work like other districts in the east, the south, the south-west and the far west. We do, however, have pioneering problems. What our District is facing today, being an old and a well-established district, others will face in the years to come.

May our District lead the way. May we face our problems with forethought and meet them with zeal. May we always stand ready to serve wherever and in whatever manner the Lord gives us opportunity.