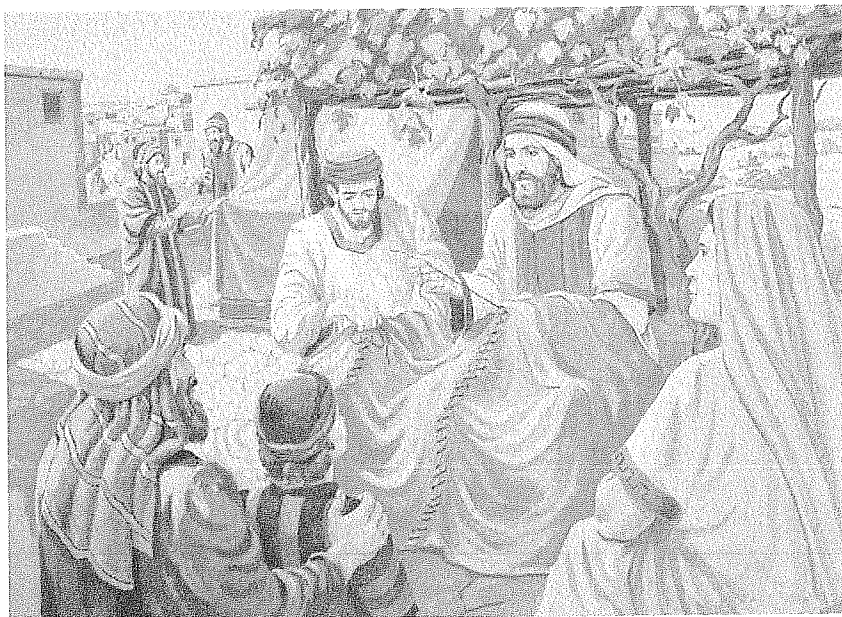


Tent Ministry in the WELS



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09 December 09

“The Apostle Paul did it.” Whenever the subject of tent ministry arises, a statement like that, or one similar to it, is usually the starting point for the discussion. The biblical reference for this starting point comes from Acts 18:1-4. Luke writes, “After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla...Paul went to see them because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.” If we kept on reading after these verses, we know that Paul’s primary purpose for being in Corinth was not to make tents with his two new friends. He was in Corinth to do ministry. And yet, while doing ministry in Corinth, Paul also made tents.

It is from Paul’s experience in Corinth¹ that the idea for a type of ministry which involves secular employment originates. The term commonly applied to this type of ministry is “tent ministry.” It is a term that has often been used to describe certain ministries in the WELS. It is also a term that can have various definitions and understandings. Therefore, as we begin our examination of “Tent ministry in the WELS,” we will do so by first looking at:

The General Understanding of Tent ministry in the WELS²

A WELS missionary once remarked, “What we do, we would gladly do for free.”³ His comment was made in reference to the fact that the “ministry isn’t a career that we chose because of the earthly rewards it promised us.”⁴ The privilege of sharing the gospel is a joy in and of itself. But later on in his paper, that WELS’ missionary added a second part to his original remark. He added, “What we do, we would gladly do for free. It’s just that this isn’t possible in view of our own and our families’ needs.”⁵

This missionary’s words are important to keep in mind as we seek to grasp the WELS’ understanding of tent ministry. In order to do this, we need to grasp the WELS’ need⁶ for tent ministry. Tent ministry, as it is seen by most in the WELS, is a “type of ministry to be

¹ We might also include his experience in Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:34-35) and Thessalonica (cf. II Thess. 3:8b-13).

² By “general understanding” I’m referring to the common characterization that people in the WELS have in mind when they speak of tent-ministry. This characterization is based on my interviewees’ answer to the question, “In your own words, what is tent-ministry?”

³ Cherney, Kenneth. *God’s Money in God’s Mission: Financial Support and the Minister of the Gospel*, (<http://www.wlsessays.net/files/CherneyMoney.pdf>), p.3.

⁴ Cherney, p. 2. Interestingly enough, Cherney points out in this paper that “many great rabbis engaged in what we would call “tent-ministries.” Hillel was a woodcutter. Shammai was a carpenter (others: a mason) Rambam and Rambam were both physicians. In time, the rabbinate became a fulltime profession; but the attitude persisted that to study and teach the Torah is its own reward” (p. 3). As an editorial aside, perhaps a student of these rabbis also wrote a “church history paper” on tent-ministry – “Tent-Ministry in the Rabbinate?”

⁵ Cherney, p.3.

⁶ It should be pointed out that there is never a “need” for part-time ministry. Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful” (Matt 9:37). Or as Prof. John Brug states, “*Part-time ministry* does not meet the need. I know of no place in the world that has need for a part-time preaching of the gospel. In every place there are more than enough straying, unchurched, and unbelievers to more than consume the time of a fulltime pastor.”

-*Doctrinal Brief: Part-Time Pastors*, (<http://www.wlsessays.net/files/BrugParttime.pdf>), p. 2.

employed when it is necessary and not as a standard practice.”⁷ So what are the needs or necessary times when tent ministry would be employed in the WELS?

The answer to that question is almost always financial. The synod understands that the minister of the gospel has needs and that “those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”⁸ But what about the times when there are insufficient funds to underwrite full-time calls and when there are plenty of capable men standing idle in the marketplace?

This dilemma of insufficient funds, coupled with an abundance of workers and the ever-abundant mission field, demanded a solution. Tent ministry was one possible solution. The idea was that partial financial support for ministry could be provided by the called worker himself. Thus, in addition to carrying out his ministry, the called worker would find secular employment to supplement the income he received from his church. These two sources of income were to provide sufficient financial support for the called worker to carry out his ministry. In general, this is how most in the WELS have understood tent ministry and how most tent ministries have been set up.

Of course, a key component to that understanding is that tent ministry was and is never meant to be a permanent solution. When a tent ministry is arranged, “there is a genuine hope that within a relatively short space of time, the pastor will be able to devote himself full-time to the ministry of the Word.”⁹ As one seminary professor wisely reminds us, “Scripture makes it very clear that the ordinary, God-ordained arrangement is that the called preachers of the gospel should devote themselves fully to the preaching of the gospel and they should receive their financial support from the recipients of their ministry.”¹⁰

Perhaps, it is with those thoughts in mind, that some in the WELS prefer using a term other than “tent ministry” to describe this form of temporary, self-supported ministry. This is due to the “baggage” that can be associated with such a term. For example, sometimes the statement is made, “The Apostle Paul did tent ministry.” The statement is then followed up by, “So we can do it (perhaps even, we *should* do it), too!” But a careful look at Paul’s “tent ministry” reveals a situation different from the typical WELS situation. Paul chose to serve in Corinth for nothing. While he could have rightly demanded financial support from the Corinthian congregation, “he would have hindered the cause of the Gospel (I Corinthians 9:12). Corinth at the time was overrun with itinerant teachers-for-profit. Had Paul conducted business the same way that they did, he would have fueled a popular misunderstanding that his message, ultimately, was no different from theirs. Nothing was worth that risk.”¹¹

⁷ Wendland, Paul. Interview via electronic questionnaire.

⁸ I Cor 9:14. (This and all other scripture quotations are from the NIV).

⁹ Wendland, interview via electronic questionnaire.

¹⁰ Brug, John. *Doctrinal Brief: Part-Time Pastors*, (<http://www.wlssays.net/files/BrugParttime.pdf>), p. 1. Furthermore, in the next few paragraphs, he cites I Cor 9:4-6, 9-14, Gal 6:6, and I Ti 5:17-18 as passages that support this.

¹¹ Cherney, p. 5. Cherney goes on to address Paul’s other “tent-ministry situations” in Ephesus and

One reservation, then, about using the term tent ministry comes from seeing Paul's situation as an example to follow. From this, "the appeal to do tent ministry can quickly become something we see as a standard way of putting men into the gospel ministry."¹² Another reservation is that "it can be a temptation for congregations not to address their offerings if they can get one of those cheap pastors."¹³ Based on these reservations, some have preferred using the terms "alternate placement,"¹⁴ "self-funded ministry,"¹⁵ or "partially self-funded ministry"¹⁶ in place of tent ministry.¹⁷ Perhaps, such terms remove the appeal to make this type of ministry a standard and are much clearer in portraying this ministry for what it is.

Having looked at the general understanding of tent ministry in the WELS, we now shift our attention to:

The Arrangement of Tent ministry

This is where the wrestling begins because there are so many questions to answer. How should a tent ministry be set-up? How much time should be devoted to ministry and to secular work? What is the best way to transition a called worker from tent ministry to full-time ministry? Who should serve in a tent ministry? What are the benefits and/or downfalls of tent ministry for: the called worker, his family, the congregation he serves, and the people with whom he works? Along with these questions, there are all the questions that go along with having a secular job. What kind of jobs would be appropriate? How many hours a week should the called-worker work? How important is flexibility of schedule?

The aforementioned questions are ones to which Scripture does not give explicit answers. But they are questions that need answers as tent ministries are arranged. Past

Thessalonica. Regarding the situation at Ephesus, Cherney writes, "Paul may well have been motivated by a desire to set himself apart from the other "spiritual" practitioners (editorial note: the spiritual practitioners would be those involved in the worship of Artemis or in the thriving magic, sorcery, and witchcraft that was common in Ephesus) in town."(p.5). Regarding the situation in Thessalonica, he writes, "The case *here* is slightly different. Here, too, Paul earned his living with his own hands-but he did so in order to set an example for congregation members to follow in their day to day lives" (p.5).

¹² Wendland, interview via electronic questionnaire.

¹³ Seifert, John. E-mail message to author.

¹⁴ Wendland, interview via electronic questionnaire.

¹⁵ Seifert, email message to author.

¹⁶ Ibid, e-mail message to author.

¹⁷ I should also point out that some have used the term "shared-time ministry" instead of the "options" mentioned above. Later in this paper, I will include examples of "shared-time ministries" (the term used by some that I interviewed, not my own) among examples of tent-ministry. I suppose that one could argue that shared-time ministry is different than tent-ministry. What the differences exactly are, I am not sure. (Perhaps, the difference lies in that in a shared-time situation there isn't always a plan in place to transition to fulltime ministry???) However, because both shared-time ministry and tent-ministry involve a pastor splitting his time between gospel ministry and secular employment, I have included them under the umbrella of tent-ministry. I will, however, note with a footnote when those I interviewed referred to their ministry as shared-time ministry instead of tent-ministry.

experiences will probably provide the best answers to those questions. Thus, we will cover the majority of those questions as we examine some specific examples of tent ministry situations later in this paper. For now, two questions deserve some consideration. The two questions are: 1) what is the best way to transition a called worker from tent ministry to full-time ministry and 2) what are the benefits and/or downfalls of tent ministry for: the called worker, his family, the congregation he serves, and the people with whom he works?

The first question deserves brief consideration not so much because the WELS has the "ideal answer" to that question (if such an answer were to exist), but because it is important to remember that the majority¹⁸ of WELS tent ministries are established with an "end goal" or "transitional plan to full-time ministry" in place. The WELS is careful in how it arranges its tent ministries, lest this temporary ministry become permanent. Or as Prof. Brug explains more adequately, "Our conference of presidents has been reluctant to grant calls for tent ministers, in cases in which there is no commitment and plan for working to bring full-time gospel ministry to the area in question...we may have to live with emergency measures for a time, but we should never accept them as the norm."¹⁹ Thus, as we look at examples of tent ministry, one way for the WELS to evaluate a tent ministry would be to ask if this transition is happening.

The second question deserves consideration because it gives us some things to pay attention to before looking at specific examples of tent ministry. In interviewing some of those involved in the planning and placement of men into tent ministry situations, I asked a few questions²⁰ which were aimed at capturing what they saw as the benefits and downfalls of tent ministry.²¹ As the benefits of tent ministry, here were some of the responses:

- Guys get to serve in the ministry who might otherwise be idle in the marketplace.
- Outreach opportunities that would otherwise be left alone are seized.
- It gives help to congregations that could not afford a second pastor.
- The man assigned to a tent ministry could be involved with raw mission work and, with God's blessing, work himself out of a job (his secular job, that is) as little by little he gather a flock around the Word.
- A man's secular employment could help him in making contacts with people as well as help him understand the people and community in which he was working.

As for the downfalls of tent ministry, here were some of the responses:

- Congregations might see this as a good way to get ministry done "on the cheap."
Some may want this to become a new norm and want the situation to be permanent.

¹⁸ I say "majority" here, because there are exceptions. I will note one later in this paper.

¹⁹ Brug, p. 3.

²⁰ The questions were: 1) (Before the tent-ministries) what reservations, if any, did you have about tent-ministry? 2) (Again, before the tent-ministries), what excited you the most about tent-ministry? 3) (Looking back on tent-ministry situations) what do you see as the benefits and downfalls of tent-ministry?

²¹ I will not cite individual responses, but will share a collective list. I'm doing this because many of the responses were quite similar. Thus, the list is more of a summary or paraphrase of those answers.

- It may be difficult to find appropriate jobs for candidates. Plus, if a man feels stuck in a job or situation that isn't suitable for him, he might not be able to carry out even a part-time ministry.
- It's a lot of pressure for a new graduate. You have the dual responsibilities of faithfulness to your call and satisfying an employer. On top of that, there are time and energy factors. Will you have enough time and energy for both?
- The press of two jobs could lead to cutting corners and developing bad habits for one's ministry.

Again, pay attention to these answers and see if the benefits and downfalls they listed match up the benefits and downfalls listed by those who served in tent ministries. It is now that we will turn our focus to:

Specific Examples of Tent ministry²²

Before examining the various examples of tent ministry in the WELS, two preliminary items regarding presentation of the information are worth mentioning. First, the following examples are shared in the chronological order in which they took place, starting with the oldest and moving towards the most recent. Secondly, each of the following examples will be presented in the manner as follows:

- Brief biographical information on the tent minister
- Description of ministry of the congregation in which the tent minister served
- Description of the tent minister's secular job with all its "facets"
- Reason for the cessation of the tent ministry (where applicable)
- The benefits and downfalls learned from the tent ministry
- A concluding statement on what they would see as the ideal tent ministry situation²³

²² To the best of my knowledge, this paper is the first attempt to compile a "storehouse" of information on tent-ministries in the WELS. In my zeal to compile this information, I had hoped to get my hands on every tent-ministry the WELS has ever had. While I was able to compile a list of ten names/situations (solely by word-of-mouth-referral), I was unable to track down every single person who has served in a tent-ministry. Because that was true, the specific examples listed in this section are by no means comprehensive. But, I do believe that they are adequately representative of tent-ministry in the WELS. I should also mention that in some cases, I was given a name but was unable to follow-up with information (due to a failure in communication mostly on my part). In such cases, I will list the names of other tent ministers (those whose names I know) in a footnote at the end of this section on specific examples.

²³ One question I asked of those whom I contacted was, "Complete the statement, if I could set up the ideal tent-ministry situation, it would be..." I wanted to share their thoughts because I believe that they capture well some of the lessons they learned from their own tent-ministry which could be applied to future tent-ministries.

Richard Russow, Christ our Savior (Angleton, TX), tent minister from 8/87-6/89

Richard Russow is a 1987 graduate from the seminary. He is currently in his third year of service at Salem in Wausau, WI. In addition to his tent ministry in Texas and his current place of service, he has served congregations in Sturgeon Bay, WI, Henry and Grover, SD, Waunakee, WI, and as a missionary in Albania.

Russow was assigned²⁴ to his tent ministry²⁵ at Christ our Savior in 1987. He described the congregation as one that “had lost its operating subsidy more than ten years previously. It had a building and a parsonage and a CEF loan. It had been served as preaching station and for ten years, which led to a loss in active membership. Officially, it was under the DMB, but it was receiving bare maintenance ministry.”²⁶ His call was to serve full-time as the congregation’s only pastor and he received a compensation of: housing with utilities, health insurance and pension, and \$350 salary per month.²⁷

To supplement his income, Russow had two secular jobs. He substitute taught at Brazoswood and Brazoport High Schools on an “on-call” basis, which he described as “hit or miss,” and he was an assistant manager at Burger King on a full-time basis. This full-time employment along with a full-time ministry made for a busy week. Russow explained that a “typical week” often looked like this:

Sunday: 2-3 AM write sermon/bulletin, 9:30 AM service, Burger King from 4PM-midnight

Monday: Sermon prep/office work AM; Burger King from 4PM-midnight

Tuesday: Off at Burger King; sermon/office/visitations

Wednesday: Church work AM, Confirmation from 2-3:30PM; Burger King 4PM-midnight

Thursday: Church work AM, Burger King from 4PM-midnight

Friday: Church work AM, Burger King from 7PM-5AM

Saturday: Burger King from 11AM to 7PM

When asked about the flexibility of his employment, Russow commented that his employer was flexible “but only to the extent that I was not scheduled to work Sunday mornings.”

After a year of serving in this capacity, a decision had to be made as to whether or not to renew the call for a second year, as the original call was a one-year call with an option to renew. If the call would have been renewed after the second year, the assignment would have become permanent. Christ our Savior and Russow renewed the call for the second year, but he requested and received a call following the second year which ended his time as a tent minister.

²⁴ Although he recalls being given three hours to decline the assignment, he, of course, did not.

²⁵ However, Russow did point out to me that his situation was called “shared-time ministry,” not tent-ministry.

²⁶ This and all other quotations in this section come from my interview with Russow (via an online questionnaire). This will also be true for subsequent tent ministers. I will only cite references where I am not quoting information from the interview (via questionnaire) that I had with them.

²⁷ He also added about his monthly salary, “The Self-employment Tax on the provided house effectively cut the salary in half.”

In looking back on his time as a tent minister, Russow viewed as a benefit of his tent ministry, the fact that his secular job provided much needed income. But in his case, the downfalls seemed to outweigh the benefit(s). About the downfalls, he noted that his hours of employment "did not afford much more than maintenance ministry" and that "the gospel ministry and the secular job did not compliment each other or aid in gospel outreach." These downfalls seem to surface again when he writes about his take on the ideal tent ministry, "It would be one in which the employment was provided by a member of the congregation which would allow more flexibility, especially to allow participation in circuit and district meetings and conferences, because that fellowship is needed. In addition, the secular employment would, in some way, be compatible with the ministerial needs of the congregation, i.e. making contacts for outreach."

David Rosenbaum, Peace (New York, NY), tent minister from 9/87-1/93

David Rosenbaum is a 1987 graduate from the seminary. He is currently in his thirteenth year of service at Redeemer in Merritt Island, Florida. In addition to his tent ministry in New York and his current place of service, he served a congregation in Boulder, CO.

The way that Rosenbaum got involved with tent ministry in New York is quite unique. As he explained, "I was waiting during the summer when Glen Thompson, then serving at Peace, NYC, gave me a call (telephone, not divine). He asked whether I was interested in helping in Manhattan while I awaited an assignment. I flew out for a one-week look and decided to do it. After just a couple months, I knew I wanted to stay. The North Atlantic District Mission Board then issued me a call with the understanding that it would not involve any support from then, and that Peace, Manhattan would provide a small stipend."

When asked to describe the congregation he served, Rosenbaum stated, "You might say that there is huge outreach potential in New York City. We served a nucleus of WELS members who lived in and around New York, including the remnants of a congregation in Ramsey, New Jersey that had closed. Glen Thompson's initial thought was to have another man on staff (unpaid) to explore various outreach opportunities, including small groups meeting in the various boroughs of the city. It gradually evolved and came to street witnessing, tract distribution, taking sandwiches and blankets to the homeless on Friday nights and ministering to the AIDS population."

As mentioned earlier, Rosenbaum was to receive a small stipend from the congregation. However, he chose to decline the stipend by his own choice. "I took pleasure in preaching the gospel free of charge," he commented. Thus, Rosenbaum was entirely responsible for providing all of his support, including housing, from outside employment. Off hand, he could not recall how the insurance was handled. He went on to explain that for his secular job, he

started by doing research as an intern for an economist at Chase Manhattan Bank. "After that ended, I worked through temporary agencies, being assigned to a variety of big banks for mostly clerical positions, such as data entry. Another stint was at Tiffany's. Several times I ended up at the New York Stock Exchange...a proofreading course led to several positions in that field, with the longest being at JPMorgan Investment Management, proofreading a variety of documents and proposals."

For Rosenbaum, there really wasn't a "typical" week as a "tent minister." It depended on what job he was working at the time. When he was working a secular job, he did ministry on nights and weekends. But he noted that "it was also common to have stretches of weeks or months without work, and then I would spend full time on ministry."

After almost five and half years of tent ministry in New York, Rosenbaum accepted a call to Boulder, CO. Many factors led to Rosenbaum accepting the call. He listed as a few of these factors, "Glen Thompson accepted a call to teach at MLS in the summer of 1992. Some key members used that as their excuse to join an ELCA congregation. Other members were drifting away. Temporary jobs had become increasingly difficult to find. The "glamour" of being a tent minister was wearing off. A request to make my position full-time with salary and benefits was approved by the District Mission Board but rejected by the synod Board for Home Missions." Shortly after accepting his call, the congregation in New York held its final service in January of 1993.

In looking back on his tent ministry, Rosenbaum didn't have many downfalls to list. He just simply noted, "Time has to be used more carefully, but as a single guy who didn't mind staying in the office late at night, that wasn't much of an issue." On the benefits, he enjoyed being in a workplace, knowing what his members went through on a daily basis, and getting to reach people he would never have reached otherwise. To this he added, "While there were witness opportunities, none of my work contacts ever attended a worship service." And as for his take on the ideal tent-ministry, "For me, as a bachelor graduate, the ideal situation was New York. I loved my time there. For other single graduates with a taste for adventure, a big city or foreign field might be ideal."

Mark Wenzel, Our Savior (Phillips, WI) tent minister from 96-00; Zion (Mercer, WI) tent minister from 03-07

Mark Wenzel is 1988 graduate from the seminary. He is currently in his second year of service as an institutional chaplain for Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries (WLIM) in the Milwaukee area. In addition to his tent ministries²⁸ in Wisconsin and his current place of service, Wenzel served a congregation in Beckley, WV.

With Wenzel's tent ministries, perhaps it would be appropriate to mention right from

²⁸ Like Russow, Wenzel also referred to his ministries as "shared-time."

the start one of the benefits that he saw in his tent ministry. He commented, "For me personally, it was what I needed to get back into the ministry. I spent six years out of the ministry. During that time I did what was needed to provide for my family. While working one or two jobs, I also did some ministry, filling in at churches that had needs. Getting back into the ministry was probably easier because it was a shared-time call."²⁹

The congregation that Wenzel served as he got back into the ministry was Our Savior in Phillips, WI. Our Savior was congregation of twenty-nine souls which was "started ten years earlier by two charter members as a sort of daughter congregation." When Our Savior called Wenzel, they were calling for a part-time pastor. As a part-time pastor, he "was to hold worship services, Bible study on Sunday, take care of confirmation class, do evangelism, visit members and do it in twenty hours. They asked me to keep track of my hours so that I wasn't doing too much." The congregation initially compensated him with \$8000 a year, without housing or health insurance. Wenzel noted that each year they were able to raise the compensation, adding things such as mileage, health insurance, and a pension, but they were never able to reach full-time levels.

Four years into his tent ministry at Our Savior, Wenzel was able to transition into full-time ministry when Zion of Mercer, WI joined with Our Savior to form a dual parish. To give some background on the situation, Wenzel commented, "Zion had been a dual parish for most of its existence. When their pastor left, they decided to go on their own with a retired pastor who moved into the area. Ten years later they moved into a dual parish role with Our Savior." This arrangement lasted for three years. Then, as Wenzel explained, "Our Savior wanted to get rid of the pastor (me) and Zion kept me on in a shared-time role."

The ministry arrangements with Zion were much like they were when Wenzel was serving only Our Savior. He held worship services and bi-weekly Bible studies, taught confirmation classes, visited members, and coordinated evangelism efforts. The compensation was similar as well with Wenzel receiving a part-time salary, health insurance, pension, and mileage. He remarked, "They were very generous with what they had." The only real difference between his tent ministry at Zion versus his tent ministry at Our Savior was that he lived 55 miles from the church.

As for his jobs during both "stints" of tent ministry, for awhile Wenzel worked construction for a member and then later at a factory. The factory job provided consistent

²⁹ Perhaps, this is an idea to explore in the future when considering whom to call for tent-ministries. Might tent-ministry be a good way to get men back into the ministry? Donn Dobberstein raised a similar point in a personal e-mail to me, but from the "opposite angle." In a context where he was talking about how he is hesitant to think that tent-ministries should be reserved only for Sem graduates, he wrote, "I could see tent ministry being used by our Lord to help "rehab" perhaps a pastor burned out in the ministry. Instead of losing him via resignation, give him the opportunity to "step away for a moment." Some pastors learn over the course of years that they have additional skills they like to use on the side – woodworking, building, computers, etc. Would such a man embrace the possibility that would allow him to use and enjoy his abilities in a part-time position while still serving the Lord?"

hours (Monday through Friday, 7AM to 3PM) and adequate flexibility. About this Wenzel said, "The employer was fully aware of my situation. It was the type of job where I could work extra hours when I knew that I need to be off. As part of my regular schedule, I came in an hour early one day so I could leave early to get to a Bible study. I was able to take off for pastors' conferences, etc. within reason. Some was vacation time, some was unpaid."

Of three tent ministries we have looked at thus far, Wenzel is the first one to be married (and also with a family of three children) while doing a tent ministry. Even though his mornings were devoted to his secular job and some afternoons and evenings were devoted to his ministry, he did not feel that having a family made things any tougher. "I was still able to make time to go to my kids' games and school events," he stated.

In the end, Wenzel's time as a tent minister ended when he took the call in which he is currently serving. While we have already noted one of the benefits that Wenzel saw in his time as a tent minister, he also listed the benefit of the congregation having a pastor "when they might not have been able to have one otherwise" and the benefit of having a regular life outside of the church in which he "was able to talk with people at school events and community events on a couple different levels." As for a downside, he mentioned personal study. "The luxury of doing a text study from the original language did not exist for me. My practice was to check out the text early in the week and write the sermon on Saturday." And as for his take on the ideal tent ministry, he said that it would have to be one where you have "a congregation that fully understands the situation and loves their pastor (whomever it is)," and one in which the congregation is "fully on board with the concept."

Rick Scheibe, Trinity (Wayland, MI), tent minister from 02-present

Rick Scheibe is a 1983 graduate from the seminary. He is currently in his tenth year of service (seven of which were served as a tent minister) at Trinity in Wayland, MI. Prior to serving at Trinity, he served congregations in Neenah and Brillion, WI, Remus, MI, Baltimore, MD, and Roanoke, VA.

Perhaps, the best way to understand Scheibe's tent ministry is to understand the situation of his congregation. Trinity is a congregation a 100-plus members. In the words of their pastor, it is an "aging congregation" but one that is "working to attract younger families." Scheibe also described the congregation as one "just like a lot of congregations throughout the synod: financially challenged, wanting to grow, wanting to reach out, but people are busy here like elsewhere."

In speaking about his congregation, Scheibe spoke very openly and honestly about the impact that the slumping economy has had on this congregation. "In the pre-9-11 days, life was high on the hog. But I have taken four pay cuts in the time I've been here. These days the congregation pays me a salary when they can. They're a year behind, but the fridge and

freezer is always full (just received beef three weeks ago from a member and his wife which should last us a year)...they take good care of me. In fact, I usually have so much that I have the ability to give to poor members in need. At my twenty-fifth anniversary dinner, one of the members remarked, "Pastor, I hope you know that we love you."

But something needed to be done to address the financial difficulties that the church was facing. This is where Scheibe asked for his congregation's permission and came up with a plan. He was already a member of the Wayland Fire-Rescue Department.³⁰ So, "the next logical step was EMS...the idea being that this is a way to supplement my income and give the congregation a break." After taking some EMS courses, Scheibe began full-time work for the Plainwell area EMS.³¹

His full-time work had immediate impact on the congregation's finances. Perhaps, the biggest immediate impact was seen in money saved from not having to pay monthly WELS VEBA insurance premiums. As a full-time employee of the Plainwell area EMS, Scheibe was eligible for and switched over to the health insurance that was offered him. By switching to this coverage, the congregation was able to save an extra \$850/month that usually went to VEBA premiums.

Now, even though Scheibe's shift to tent ministry had positive financial impact on his congregation, what kind of impact did it have on the work of his ministry? Scheibe joked that the saying that EMS stands for "Earn Money Sleeping" should actually be called "Earn Money Studying" in his case. He said that in his situation he really has it pretty good. "At Plainwell Area EMS, we have our own bedrooms for the 12-hour shift. I asked permission to move a computer desk in and that request was granted. Most of the "office" work is done there. I carry at least two book bags in with me every shift, everything else is on Libronix. I also have my own supply of paper, office tools in my locker, my printer." He went on to comment that technology plays a huge role in making his situation work. He is able to do plenty of corresponding with his cell phone, which "is how people reach me," or through e-mail. All of these things have played a role in helping things to go well in Scheibe's tent ministry. Because things seem to be going well, he commented that there are "no plans on the radar for it to end in the near future."

So, for being in an arrangement that has lasted over seven years, what does Scheibe see as the benefits of tent ministry? Including the financial impact that tent ministry has had on his congregation (which frees money up to be used elsewhere), he listed the following the things as benefits: people in the pews know you're in the world, just like they are; some

³⁰ When he arrived at Trinity, the congregation asked him to join the fire department as the previous pastor had done. He said that this involves two nights a month for training and one weekend out every five for weekend duty (18:00 hours Friday to 18:00 hours Sunday). He went on to explain that the fire department realizes that "if the tones go off for a fire call during a worship service or Sunday School/Adult Bible study, they are not to wait for me to get on that truck."

³¹ To be considered fulltime for the Plainwell area EMS, one has to work 36 hours a week, or three, 12-hr shifts. But Scheibe did say, "It's nice if I can do a 24-hour shift and knock out a good chunk of time all at once."

people with whom my first contact was made through EMS or hospital ER have come to Trinity for worship, some have become members, most have not;³² it keeps me fresh with ideas and sermon illustrations from real people; and, it provides opportunities for witnessing...on my EMS windbreaker, the embroidery reads: Preacher-Specialist. Patients on my ambulance will ask, "What's a preacher-specialist?"

And as for the downfalls of tent ministry from his experience, Scheibe noted, "There's not being able at the drop of a hat to get to members who call in an emergency (but truth be told, most "emergencies" can wait after people calm down and think, and besides, if it's a true emergency doctors don't want us around unless our people are dying on the spot). He also mentioned that time constraints hurt and that his current boss is "inflexible, doesn't understand the word compromise, and doesn't like to be told when I cannot work because of my church schedule."

In the end, Scheibe had this closing remark to share on tent ministry, "This is not for every congregation and it's not for every pastor/candidate. Both (the congregation and pastor, that is) have to be willing to take the worst it allows and in thanksgiving receive the best of both worlds."

Aaron Boehm and Mark Jacobson, Redeemer (Tucson, AZ), tent ministers from 7/04-10/05³³

Aaron Boehm and Mark Jacobson are both 2004 graduates from the seminary. Boehm is currently serving at Shepherd of the Hills in La Mesa, CA, and has been there for two years. Mark Jacobson is in now his fifth year of service at Redeemer.

The situation that brought these men to Redeemer was one of mission expansion. As Jacobson commented, "Redeemer, which started in 1944, moved to a new location in 1998 when that area was booming with new homes and no new churches. The growth in that area and in the church exceeded expectations and the congregation, bubbling with excitement, was hoping to continue that success in another part of the city. Phil Koelpin, one of the pastors at Redeemer prior to the tent ministry, also spoke of that growth, but then pointed out why tent ministers were needed by saying, "We were growing by leaps and bounds and had other areas of opportunity in which to reach out, but we did not have the financial wherewithal to call additional pastors."³⁴

This is where Boehm's and Jacobson's tent ministry calls come into play. Their calls were part-time calls focused primarily on doing outreach and evangelism at Redeemer's existing campus in Tucson and at the second campus in Dove Mountain. This involved

³² The statement concludes, "But all of them were surprised to find that Lutherans are normal just like they are."

³³ While both Boehm and Jacobson had different tent-ministry experiences, I am going to treat them both together because they both served at the same congregation.

³⁴ Koelpin, Phil. E-mail message to author.

putting together outreach plans, finding permanent and temporary locations for the second campus, organizing outreach activities, following-up on visitors, teaching BIC courses, and preaching about once every other month. The compensation that both men receive as part of their call was \$13,000 annual salary plus insurance. The rest of their incomes were to be supplemented by their secular job.

When both men arrived, their secular jobs were already arranged and in place. Both would be working full-time, but in very different fields. Boehm's employment was with OPW Engineering working as a land surveyor. He worked forty hours a week from Monday through Friday. His schedule seemed to work well and he noted that "as a member of the congregation, my boss understood there would need to be flexibility and was very accommodating."

Jacobson's employment was at Tee Time Printed Apparel, packaging and occasionally delivering screen-printed shirts and mugs. Originally, he worked Monday through Thursday from 7:30 AM to 6:00 PM. But this schedule proved to be difficult to maintain "because it basically took all Monday through Thursday evenings away to do ministry." He went on to clarify, "I would drive home which took a half hour, jump in the shower – that took about two minutes, and make my way to church or homes exhausted only to get to bed and start the new day again." In time, his hours were changed to Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM.

Like Boehm, Jacobson appreciated the flexibility that his boss, also a member, afforded him. He did note, however, that one issue came up because of the relationship he shared with his boss. The issue was one of favoritism. As he explained, "To keep me at the level of pay for a first-year pastor, my employer did start me at a level of pay that was higher than all the other workers. When that word got out, as you can imagine, it did not sit well with the other employees no matter how much my member-employer stressed how this money given to me...was considered by him as a gift to God and to his church. I just tried to work hard and not make a big deal of it, but I could understand why they would be upset. I would have rather been paid what I should have been paid for my secular work and the gift money to God run through the church instead."

Now, after Boehm and Jacobson had served for a year in these capacities, the congregation continued to grow and both men were able to curtail ten hours of secular employment. Boehm explained that this was part of the congregation's plan. "The congregation decided it would try to roll us into full-time ministry on a quarterly basis. For example, we would cut back ten hours to a thirty-hour work week and evaluate how that worked for three months. If the congregation was managing to gradually take on the additional salary, then the plan was to cut back ten more hours to a twenty-hour week, and so on." However, plans changed entirely when an anonymous donation to the congregation allowed both tent ministers to be rolled into full-time ministry while they were at the

“thirty-hours of secular work a week stage.”

Before moving on to the benefits and downfalls of their experience, a key question worth considering is, “Would Redeemer’s roll-back plan have worked in transitioning its two tent ministers into full-time gospel ministry?” While we can’t answer that question because things didn’t happen that way, we can take note of the fact that Redeemer’s accepting of that donation in the middle of their “roll-back plan” did have an effect on the outcome of the situation. As Pastor Phil Koelpin answered in response to a question about what led to the cessation of tent ministry at his church, he responded, “We received a generous donation of money that allowed both “tent ministers” to come on board with a full salary after about 18 months. Unfortunately, we accepted that money and took the two men off of “tent ministry” status prematurely. One result was that one of two tent ministers here received and accepted a call.”³⁵

So what were the benefits and downfalls of tent ministry from Boehm and Jacobson’s experience? We’ll take each man’s responses individually. For the benefits, Boehm listed, “1) Having a secular job and relating to the average layperson’s situation...2) Most pastors don’t have the luxury of spending much time out of the office working on people skills/bridge-building/evangelism. A secular job allowed for that. 3) Most pastors deal primarily with Christians on a regular basis as they shepherd God’s flock. The secular job meant dealing primarily with non-Christians.” And for his downfalls, Boehm listed, “The burden of a secular job has the potential to suck the joy out of ministry...2) a secular job dictates the ministry schedule...3) a secular job can at times add more stress to an already stressful position as pastor.”

For his benefits, Jacobson commented, “Having a secular job shows members that clergy are not too big for their britches that they can’t go work like many others work. Functioning as a minister of the gospel is more about the way we live our lives than it is about performing the normal duties of the pastoral office. We are not in the ministry to earn a living but to make a difference in the lives of people and we do that by making contacts with people and proclaiming the Word of God to them.” Finally, for his downfalls, Jacobson observed, “You are not able to do all the things that you desire to do when you have hours settled to secular employment. You can be tempted to look at those with full-time calls and wonder why they aren’t doing more, when discouragements come you can wonder whether the ministry plan will be successful and that coincides with wondering if you will be able to get out of secular employment.”

Finally, we conclude our look at the tent ministries of Boehm and Jacobson by getting their take on the ideal tent ministry. Boehm said that the ideal situation would be one that, “involved employment from someone within the congregation, is done with a tent ministry partner... (because) having someone to relate to and to share the burdens/frustrations and

³⁵ Koelpin, e-mail message to the author.

the joys made a huge difference, and has a concrete plan in place (i.e. you'll be doing this for this long; here's exactly what's expected of you, etc.)." Jacobson's ideal situation seems to echo and expand on that last point. He saw the ideal situation as one "where I felt I could get out of tent ministry. I would want to be in a congregation and area that was already growing. A tent minister needs hope. He needs to feel that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. A tent minister benefits from congregation members who work hard to meet the goals it hopes to achieve. A tent minister also benefits when he or she receives encouragement from God's Word and God's people."

Our Savior's (Port Orange, FL), tent ministry from Summer/06 - Winter/07

Though Our Savior's tent ministry does not chronologically appear as the next one on the list, it would only be fitting to include it after Redeemer's tent ministries. In January of 2005, the members of Our Savior's viewed a segment of the *WELS Connection* which featured Redeemer's tent ministries. Seeing what was being done at Redeemer, the members of Our Savior's were inspired to pursue a tent ministry of their own.³⁶

A number of factors had brought them to this point, for our purposes, we will consider two of these factors. One factor was the growth of the mission field in which they served. "In the 1970's, Port Orange was a sleepy seaside village of 3700 about 6 miles south of Daytona Beach...today (i.e. late winter/early spring of 2004), Port Orange has grown to 50,000 and projects an additional 10,000 every five years indefinitely for the future...On average, 75-85 new homeowners move into the area every month. Meanwhile, Port Orange statistics reveal that over 60% of residents do not claim a church home."³⁷

A second factor that led Our Savior's to seek a tent minister was the growth of the church itself. At this point in time, Our Savior's was in its twentieth year of existence. For the first fifteen years, "it thrived as a cozy little group of seventy-five souls... a mission mindset began to take over, however."³⁸ This mission mindset led the congregation to expand its ministry with new programs and the addition of a preschool. It also led them to begin plans for expanding their facilities through a building project. And finally, it led to an expanded membership. At the time of the proposal in 2004, the congregation had grown from "just

³⁶ Dobberstein, Donn. (e-mail message to author). This example of tent-ministry will be slightly different than the ones preceding and following it. I hope to present this example from the vantage point of the one who was heavily involved in setting up this tent ministry, namely Donn Dobberstein. (A secondary reason is that I was unable to interview the tent minister who served with him, Timothy Wagner....again to due to communication pitfall on my end). Therefore, subsequent quotations will be from Dobberstein, unless otherwise noted.

³⁷ This quotation comes from Our Savior's tent ministry proposal entitled, "Going for his Glory," p. 4. The name of the proposal was based on their mission statement, "Our Savior's exists to grow in God's Word and to go with God's Word." The proposal was shared with me in a personal e-mail from Donn Dobberstein. From this point forward, all references to the "Going for his Glory" proposal will be cited as "G4G," followed by a page number.

³⁸ G4G, p. 4.

under 100 souls at the beginning of 2000 to its present total of 234 souls.”³⁹

With the kernel for tent ministry in place, the congregation underwent a period of rigorous planning in which it gathered and received information and spoke with various district and synodical boards. During this time they also produced a meticulous proposal which outlined their specific plans for the tent ministry, as well as their plans for “rolling” the tent minister in full-time ministry within three years.⁴⁰ From the get-go, they also made it their goal to have “a majority of the tent minister’s work be on-site at Our Savior’s.” Thus, in addition to arranging twenty hours of work at UPS,⁴¹ they planned to have the tent minister work as the administrator for their preschool, Small Steps. Finally, after doing all of this, Our Savior’s came forward with a request to call a tent minister from the 2005 graduating class of the seminary.

The candidate assigned to the tent ministry at Our Savior’s was Tim Wagner. He served for eighteen months before accepting a call to Elgin, IL. When Wagner took his call, Our Savior’s did not continue with their tent ministry. When Pastor Dobberstein was asked what led to the cessation of the tent ministry at his church, one of the big reasons upon which he commented was, “**The overwhelming verbal support for tent ministry in both congregation approval and initial financial support did not sustain** (emphasis his). There was clear communication up front what tent ministry would cost...however, our eyes were bigger than our stomach. There are few congregations that can expand FACILITY and STAFFING at the same time (again, emphasis his). We truly thought we not only could, but *needed to* for the sake of future ministry. Hindsight proved that our congregation had only the ability to focus on one followed by the other...the financial hardship came to head fourteen months into the tent ministry. The council leaders were divided about what to do. It created a situation where Tim Wagner and I recommended to the council that the two pastor ministry be downsized to one and that both our names be placed for call lists and let the results be left to the Holy Spirit for the benefit of God’s Kingdom. Tim received a call in November, 2006. I received a call January, 2007. Tim accepted his call. I declined my call.”⁴²

³⁹ G4G, p. 4.

⁴⁰ The plan for “rolling” the tent ministry into full-time ministry within three years involved supplementing the tent minister with \$5000 and mileage for the half-year of 2005; \$10,000, mileage, and conference expenses for 2006; \$20,000, mileage, and conference expenses for 2007; and then provide full compensation in 2008. (G4G, p. 7). I suppose that here would be a good place to note that they did also provide housing.

⁴¹ The schedule was a Monday through Friday schedule from 4:30-8:30AM.

⁴² I include this footnote for those who may be pondering whether or not tent ministry is for them. A second reason that Dobberstein saw for the cessation of tent ministry at Our Savior’s was, “We asked for a graduate to be assigned. Our district president and seminary president supported the call and I believe gave it a high priority because of the incredible blessings we were experiencing. But in 2005, the initial wave of tent ministry calls were no different than any other call assignment (ergo: **you could not decline a tent minister call**). Was there a perceived fear at that time among candidates of “not getting a call”? One wonders the influence it had upon some candidates to sign up as being receptive to tent ministry without thinking through skill sets, the need for a wife to be 100% on board with it, as well as the mentality that wholeheartedly EMBRACES the opportunity to be a tent minister rather than views it as a “sacrifice” I must bear for my Lord.”

Finally, as we wrap up our look at Our Savior's tent ministry, I asked Pastor Dobberstein to comment from his experience on how well tent ministry in the WELS has worked. He noted, "One could look at us and declare, "It failed." That would be a mistake. With the right man in place, I would absolutely try tent ministry again. I believe it allows a new segment of WELS churches the opportunity to expand ministry via staffing without having to pony up front the buko-bucks needed to support a full-time called worker package. Yet, tent ministry provides what so many WELS churches desperately need: an extra set of hands in ripe mission fields...to lose or dismiss tent ministry now would truly be lamentable. I believe the better years for tent ministry lie ahead of us. Our tent ministry cannot be viewed as a failure, but simply that we fell forward. We learned from the experiences and are better for them. I would love the opportunity to do tent ministry again. Are you interested?!"

John Stelljes, King of Kings (Maitland, FL), tent ministry from Summer/06-Summer/08

As was the case in the previous example, John Stelljes' tent ministry at King of Kings does not chronologically appear as the next one on the list, but it would only be fitting to insert his tent ministry here. In essence, there was almost a "domino effect" of tent ministries in the WELS for a couple years, at least in Florida. Our Savior's, Port Orange heard about what was being done at Redeemer, Tucson and it inspired them to give tent ministry a try. In a similar way, King of Kings, Maitland heard about what Our Savior's was doing and it inspired them to give tent ministry a try too.

The tent minister assigned to King of Kings was John Stelljes. He was a 2006 graduate of the seminary. He is currently serving Light of Life, an exploratory mission, in Greenwood, IN. He has been serving there for five months.

When King of Kings decided to pursue tent ministry, they were in a situation where they saw potential for outreach in the area, but they could not fund a second pastor full-time. As the congregation's tent ministry proposal stated, "Our average Sunday attendance is around 169. However, it is not unusual for us to be in the 180s during the school year. We are at the awkward size. We know we need more staffing, but the question is, "Can we afford it?"⁴³ So the congregation moved forward with its tent ministry plans, seeing it as an "incremental way to grow into a second full-time pastor."⁴⁴

The plans were detailed and specific. The congregation's tent ministry proposal laid out their plans in these words, "Each year, the ministry of our tent minister would change, one year building on the next. The expectation is that, in the first year, our tent minister would serve at least 25 hours per week as an associate pastor and approximately 30 hours per

⁴³ *Tent Ministry proposal for King of Kings Lutheran Church and School 2006*, p. 3. This document was shared with me by Pastor Ben Goblisch in a personal e-mail. From this point forward, all references to this proposal will be cited as "Maitland Proposal," followed by a page number.

⁴⁴ Goblisch, Ben. E-mail message to author.

week in his secular employment. In year two, pastoral ministry responsibilities would increase to about 40 hours per week and his secular responsibilities would drop to only 20 hours per week. By the third year, he would be a full-time Associate Pastor.”⁴⁵ Following these words, there was a section which listed the ministry expectations that the congregation had for its tent minister. To share just the section summaries for each of the three years, “In general, the primary focus of year 1 is **Evangelism** (learning, establishing, planning, and equipping, all with regards to evangelism. This takes precedence over everything else....In general, the primary focus of year 2 is **Transition** (working himself into full-time ministry, expanding and promoting congregational ministry)...In general, the primary focus of year 3 is **Assimilation** (becoming the full-time pastor necessary to carry out our congregational ministry).”⁴⁶

So what did things look like when Stelljes arrived in the summer of 2006? For the first year, he worked a secular job in shipping and receiving at a warehouse for Miller Bearings, a bearings distributor. His hours were Monday through Friday from 11:00AM to 5PM. Working at Miller Bearings had two major benefits. One was that he was that the president of the company was a member of King of Kings, thus Stelljes was able to “flex” his schedule when necessary. The second benefit was that Miller Bearings provided his health insurance.

Now, during Stelljes’ second year of tent ministry, his situation was quite different. His wife worked and this allowed him to spend more time doing ministry. As for the third year, it too was different from both the second and the first. It was during this year that Stelljes transitioned to full-time ministry.

So what caused the tent ministry to end? Really, this could be answered in two ways. For one, Stelljes accepted a call to the exploratory mission in which he is currently serving and thus his time at King of Kings ended. But the second way you could answer this question is by pointing out that the tent ministry ended when Stelljes was transitioned into full-time ministry. Stelljes’ associate, Pastor Ben Goblisch, also commented on the latter when asked to answer how well tent ministry has worked. “Tent ministry did what it was supposed to do. It gave us as a congregation the chance to get our financial feet under us as we moved to two pastors.” He then added, “Under normal economic and ministry situations, it would have worked long term.”⁴⁷

Now five months removed from his tent ministry, I asked Stelljes to comment on some of the benefits and downfalls that he saw. He noted that “a benefit was that I taught a Bible

⁴⁵ Maitland Proposal, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp 6-7.

⁴⁷ Goblisch, e-mail message to author. Also, on this point of the situation working long-term “under normal economic and ministry situation,” Goblisch had explained earlier that the “Central Florida economy had been hit very hard. The subprime mortgage was HUGE here...Unemployment is an unheard of 12% for this area. (Three years ago in this area it was at 1.5%).” He noted that these effects were certainly felt in the congregation and among its members as well. Such effects led the congregation to wrestle with some tough questions, such as whether or not they could simultaneously support two pastors and a school.

study in my workplace. The downfalls were that my heart was wanting to serve my congregation (in both outreach and nurture), but I wasn't able to. I barely knew who people were in the congregation, since I only saw them on Sunday mornings."

And finally, when asked what situation he would set up for the ideal tent ministry, Stelljes replied, "I wouldn't. I've told the seminary and the COP that it's not something that should be given to a sem graduate. If tent ministers are to be called, then a pastor needs to deliberate the particular situation. Being assigned to tent ministry is not healthy for a graduate. He needs time to learn what it means to be a pastor."⁴⁸

Tom Benzing, St. Stephen (Fallbrook, CA) tent minister from 04-07; Christ the Vine (Temecula, CA) tent minister from 07-08; & Good Shepherd (Midland, TX) tent minister 09-present⁴⁹

Tom Benzing graduated from Martin Luther College in 2004 with his Staff Minister Certification. For the first two congregations that he served, and like many other tent ministry situations, he noted that the churches had outreach potential, but could not afford a second called worker. He added, "There is only so much work to be done and it is difficult for one pastor to serve all of the needs."

At St. Stephen his call was to be the family minister. For Benzing this meant dealing mostly with Bible study, Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, youth programs, and also serving as liturgist at worship. At Christ the Vine, his call was to be the staff minister. Usually this involved serving as liturgist, leading men's Bible study, and "switching off with pastor on Sunday morning Bible study as various lessons changed." He would occasionally work with the youth as well.

Benzing didn't mention receiving any compensation from Christ the Vine, but St. Stephen compensated him by paying a small salary for one year and then by paying the tuition for his son to attend the LES. He went on to comment, "But for the rest of my time in California my only income was from my secular job."

During his time at both churches, Benzing worked his secular job at a printing company. In general, he would work between forty to fifty hours per week. With his job, he spoke of it as being flexible, but found difficulty in "serving two masters. No matter how helpful an employer may be, they still have expectations of a full-time employee. Many times employers expect you to drop everything for the company. Quite often I was unwilling

⁴⁸ Editorial aside: Perhaps, it is from comments like Stelljes' that future tent ministries are now treated "on par" with world mission calls. Dobberstein made a point that he liked the fact that this (i.e. a tent ministry call being on par with a world mission call) would be the case. "The calling is truly unique, with circumstances and the necessity of the candidate's family being on board," he commented.

⁴⁹ Benzing's and Dave Stuhrt's (the next and final situation we will look at in this paper) situations are examples of tent ministries that are being served by someone other a pastor. I was gracious for those who put me in touch with them because the title of this paper is "Tent Ministry in the WELS." I hope that their situations may provide a glimpse of a non-pastoral tent ministry.

because of my call and desire to serve in the congregations as much as possible.”

Benzing’s ministry in California ended when he was laid off from his job. He then explained how he got to where he is now serving in Texas by saying, “We decided to leave California in our job search, which meant leaving a congregation of wonderful Christians, but they couldn’t support us, so they sent us on our way with many prayers. We prayed a lot and the Lord led us to West Texas. I wasn’t planning on serving as a called worker again, but God had other plans.”

Those plans involved serving a tent ministry at Good Shepherd. On this situation, Benzing commented, “I am the only called worker for a “preaching station.” I lead worship when I’m off on Sundays and we are making plans for outreach and growth.” When he mentions being “off” on Sundays, that’s because his job for the city of Odessa (in Public Safety Communications) requires him to work a four days on, four days off schedule. Such a schedule means that he sometimes has to work on Sundays.

So, for a called worker now on his third “stint” of tent ministry, what does Benzing see as the benefits and downfalls of tent ministry? He mentioned in reference to the effect it has on his family, “There is only so much time. Our families deserve more of it than our work. So when you are trying to work full-time and have a great desire to spend a lot of time in service to a congregation, conflicts add up.” In addition to this, he again mentioned the difficulty of serving two masters. “Jesus said that we will hate the one and love the other and that is a temptation. This type of ministry requires a lot of faith that the Lord will use you to further the Kingdom in a useful way when the majority of your time is taken up earning a living for you and your family. This isn’t easy. It’s a real struggle.” He concluded by saying, “We are blessed here and are again serving in a congregation that loves their Savior and is willing to deal with a part-time called worker so that we can try to grow. Serving in this type of ministry is a great privilege. You just need to know that you can only do so much, and the Lord blesses those efforts.”

Dave Stuht, St. Peter (St. Albert, Alberta, Canada), tent ministry from Summer/06-present

Dave Stuht graduated from Martin Luther College in 2006 with his Staff Minister Certification. His current call is the first and only one he has had since his graduation.

The situation that led to Stuht’s call to St. Peter is a neat one. It involves a bit of background information. In 2005 with a larger class awaiting calls from the seminary, former MLC tutor, Mike Vogel, declined an assignment from the seminary,⁵⁰ choosing instead to volunteer his time for one year by helping with the ministry at St. Peter.⁵¹ The pastor at that

⁵⁰ Naumann, Peter. E-mail message to author.

⁵¹ Naumann commented that Vogel had spent his vicar year at one of the Calgary churches. Thus, he was familiar with the area and with Canadian ministry.

time, Daniel Habben, explained that the congregation was able to offer him free room and board which allowed him to “make it” on the smaller salary the church offered.⁵² The experience proved to be very positive. The congregation saw the value of extra manpower and the blessings of expanded ministry. Habben noted, “They wanted to sustain that after Mike left.”⁵³

This is where Dave Stuht entered the picture. As the district president recalled, “Contact was made with Prof. Larry Olson at MLC and arrangements were made for staff ministry candidate, Dave Stuht, to serve in a tent ministry.”⁵⁴ Though the congregation could not take on another called worker full-time, they had hoped in time that they could.⁵⁵ As it turned out, that time came right away.

The plan for Stuht’s secular employment was to have him work at a local hospital in radiology, his former career of fourteen years. Stuht commented on what actually happened, “Unfortunately, Canadian Immigration didn’t see it that way. Because of licensing and registrations I could not practice in Canada. As I was planning to move to Canada I was told many times that, it would be very difficult to move to Canada to work in radiology.” From this Stuht went on to comment on the congregation’s response to this obvious set-back by saying, “The congregation very graciously moved me full-time until my status in Canada would change and I would be able to work at any employment in Canada... just recently, I became a resident of Canada and acquired my part-time job.”⁵⁶

As for Stuht’s ministry, he does a variety of work ranging from outreach to youth ministry. Habben spoke of the positive impact that Stuht has had on the congregation. “It has been a blessing to have another called worker on staff. Numerically, it hasn't brought in any new members because we have a staff minister. We have made more contacts with people, however. And our coordination of outreach events is better. Dave Stuht is also gifted with the youth and he has made an impact there.”⁵⁷

And so, with all that has gone on with Stuht’s tent-ministry, what does he see as the benefits and downfalls of tent ministry? One benefit that he saw was being able to “expose”

⁵² Habben, Daniel. E-mail message to author.

⁵³ Ibid, e-mail message to author.

⁵⁴ Naumann, e-mail message to author.

⁵⁵ Habben commented about the situation that led to the tent ministry, “I shared with the congregation how the longer I was in their midst, the more I was doing in outreach ...so I said if we were serious about doing outreach, then we needed a dedicated member to coordinate our outreach events, and if such a person wasn't available, then why not call someone. I mean really, what was keeping us from doing it? I think a lot of congregations would have been quick to say, "But we're too small!" St. Peter's only has a communicant membership of 62 and they are not "rich" people. Having said that, they're North Americans! We are rich. With good stewardship I was confident that we could eventually support two full-time called workers. As it turns out, that's what happened.”

⁵⁶ The part-time job to which Stuht referred is at a sign company working three days a week for twenty-four to thirty hours. But his associate commented, “Right now, Mr. Stuht has gone to part-time with us, but I suspect we'll have him back on full-time in six months to a year” (Habben).

⁵⁷ Habben, e-mail message to author.

people to the gospel, church life, etc. And as for the downfalls, he stated that working as sign salesman “takes me from the ministry I have been trained for” and that tent-ministry brings a unique set of challenges, especially in a foreign field. “I am not so sure a tent ministry is a good thing for a minister with wife and children and definitely not for a guy serving in a foreign country. Although I am a third/fourth career guy and feel that I have been prepared for all of the situations that might come around in this type of situation, I don’t think it was wise for a first call (bearing in mind all that happened, i.e. not being able to work in my previous career). Obviously these were unforeseen.” In the end, Stuht’s final take on his own tent ministry was, “I am blessed beyond imagination and am undeserving of all that our Lord provides for me. I am very thankful of the congregation he has asked me to serve.”

Having now looked at many specific examples of tent ministry,⁵⁸ this brings us to the last and final part:

The Future of Tent ministry

To be quite honest, I’m going to purposefully keep this section short.⁵⁹ In a utopian situation, this paper would be the first and last one ever to be written on “Tent Ministry in the WELS.” For that to be true, all tent ministries present and future would have to cease. And for that to happen, it would mean that our congregations and synod would be more than adequately supporting all of their workers as they faithfully share God’s Word, full-time, until the Day approaches. But, the church militant isn’t without its challenges. And with or without full-time support, the gospel needs to be spread. To that end, if there are tent ministries in the future, may God bless them so that they may only be temporary. And may he help us to take the wisdom we’ve gained from past experiences and apply them to ones we might face in the future.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ I mentioned in footnote 22 that I would follow-up with names of people whom I know have served or do serve in tent ministries, but whom I was unable to contact. Those men are (followed by the location of their tent ministry): Glen Thompson (New York, New York), Pao Moua (Anchorage, Alaska), and Noah Bater (Salt Lake City, Utah).

⁵⁹ I suppose one could argue, “Purposefully short? Joel, you just want to be done with this paper.” While that statement does have some merit, I kept it short because our synod’s future (as well as our own future) lies in the hands of the one who has “plans to prosper us...and to give us hope,” (Jer 29:1). Any speculation that I have or “wisdom” that I could share, pales in comparison to the definite plans of our God.

⁶⁰ I know that all the reference books would not suggest including a reference for this, but, I would like to thank my beloved wife for keeping me well-supplied with a variety of foods and caffeinated beverages as I “slaved” over this paper. I’m not sure that this paper would have gotten done without her!

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