

WELS Kingdom Workers

Are They Meeting Their Original Goals?

by

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The purpose of this paper is not to give a historical account of the Kingdom Workers. They are a relatively new organization and a history of their formation would be rather short and, I feared, dull. Instead of simply regurgitating facts from the minutes of early meetings and from interviews, I wanted to explore the purpose and goals of the Kingdom Workers. My curiosity was fueled by two things. First as one of the men asked to work for Northside Lutheran Ministries in the inner-city of Milwaukee I am paid by the Kingdom Workers. A second and more compelling reason was that as a future pastor I wanted to know what this group called the Kingdom Workers did and how they might be able to help me in my future years of service.

The title and aim of this paper is "Are the Kingdom Workers meeting their original goals?" After interviewing a number of people, I found that an abridged version of this paper would read, "Yes!" When I began I hoped to encourage the leadership of the Kingdom Workers to consider whether or not they are staying focused and working toward the stated goals of the Kingdom Workers. This seemed like an interesting topic and because the Kingdom Workers are so young, it seemed possible that some goals were not yet reached. Also sometimes a young organization can lose focus as they try to incorporate and begin functioning. Ultimately, I hoped to find how the Kingdom Workers were helping our synod spread the gospel and particularly, how they could help me in my future ministry.

In order to see if the Kingdom Workers are meeting their original goals I will use the following outline:

- I. How did the Kingdom Workers get started?
- II. What were the original goals?
- III. How did the Kingdom Workers plan to accomplish their goals?
- IV. Are these goals being met now?
- V. How do the Kingdom Workers function as a part of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod?

As I explore these areas I want the reader to see that the Kingdom Workers are indeed meeting their original goals as well as formulating new goals that fit into the broad goals originally set for the Kingdom Workers.

I. How did the Kingdom Workers get started?

In order to look at the Kingdom Workers' goals we must look briefly at their history. I will not even attempt to give a complete history but will give the reader enough background to see how the goals were formed and how they planned to achieve these goals.

Basically, the Kingdom Workers is the child of two laymen, Bob Grebe and Jim Haag. These two men served for a number of years together on the Board for World Missions. Bob served on the executive committee for Latin America and Jim was on the committee for South East Asia. At a world mission conference focusing on the seminaries in the mission fields held in Puerto Rico Bob and Jim

were the only two laymen and were able to spend some time talking to each other.

Jim said that he thoroughly enjoyed his time on the Board for World Missions. He appreciated that he was able to get involved with mission work and says that he grew spiritually from the experience on the board. Both Bob and Jim wanted other lay people in the Wisconsin Synod to be able to get involved as they were. They felt that there were very few opportunities for the lay people to help. At this point, Jim says the Kingdom Workers was born.

The initial idea saw Kingdom Workers as a way for lay people to show their faith. They hoped the Kingdom Workers could get monetary support as well as lay involvement. They hoped that monetary support would lead people to think about becoming personally involved.

Another reason that the Kingdom Workers was started was to help disseminate information. Jim said a number of times that he thought that the average WELS member knew very little about our mission efforts. Sure, they know that we have men in a number of countries throughout the world, but they do not know specifics about the spread of the gospel. Jim believes that if people only knew about the great things that God is doing through our mission efforts, they would be overjoyed to support the work. For this reason Jim feels that a major way the Kingdom Workers can support the synod's work is simply to inform the average WELS member of what is happening in the mission fields.

These two reasons (encourage involvement and spread information) led Bob and Jim to work at forming Ideas. Immediately after they returned from the conference in Puerto Rico Bob began sending Ideas to Jim. Jim said that basically Bob was the idea-man and Jim was the sifter. Bob is more of a dreamer than Jim so from what I gathered, they made a great team in forming the Kingdom Workers.

They held an initial meeting at St. Paul's in Muskego and got a small group together. Gerald Davis was a key player in these early years. He helped the Kingdom Workers incorporate as a tax-exempt organization. The first office was at Jordan in West Allis. They were staffed by volunteers. Eventually they felt they should hire a full-time National Director. Mark Krueger was the first man hired and Dave Timm presently is serving in this position.

There are many other people who deserve credit for the founding of this organization. Jim Haag said that Bob Grebe deserves most of the credit though. Bob did much of the work to start the group as served as its leader during the early years. He remains active now as he serves with his wife as a lay volunteer in Novosibirsk, Russia. For the purpose of this paper I will not get any more details as to the people, setbacks and progress in the formation of the Kingdom Workers.

II. What are the specific goals of the Kingdom Workers?

In order to see if the Kingdom Workers are fulfilling their goals, it will be necessary to look at the specific goals that the Kingdom Workers have. This can be done easily because they print their goals in their informational brochure.

There we read:

Statement of Purpose

WELS Kingdom Workers exist for the purpose of assisting the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod mission divisions in their task of making disciples according to the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Go and make disciples of all nations. Matt 28:19

To accomplish this purpose WELS Kingdom Workers will endeavor, under God

to inform WELS members of the needs and opportunities that exist in the home and world mission fields;

to encourage WELS members to become personally involved in mission work;

to facilitate and coordinate volunteer efforts in mission fields;

To provide financial support for authorized, but yet unfunded, mission programs.

These are the goals as stated in the Kingdom Workers materials.

When I asked the men who worked for the Kingdom Workers what they perceived as the goals for the Kingdom Workers they said these goals. They all seemed to understand very clearly what the mission of the Kingdom Workers is. The leaders

of the organization did not seem to be confused or wondering what they were trying to accomplish. They each clearly stated a mission for the Kingdom Workers.

III. How did they plan to accomplish their goals?

Even after the Kingdom Workers were organized, the goals would not be easy to accomplish. The first major obstacle was the number of people involved was very minimal. (This continues as a major challenge for the Kingdom Workers now and will probably continue for a long time.)

The basic problem was determining how to recruit and organize new members. At first the idea was to mirror the organization of the synod and form districts that coincided with the districts of the synod. The problem with this plan was that most of the people who were originally involved lived in the Milwaukee area and the only district that was then operating was the Southeast Wisconsin district. They soon recognized that there were still too few people involved and by organizing into basically one district, these few people were too spread out.

The next idea was to form chapters. By doing this, local congregations or groups of congregations in one area would be able to work together as one chapter. Presently there are nine active chapters and three or four chapters in the early planning stages. Dave Timm, the National Director, said that when they were organizing a chapter there was usually a good deal of support for the idea

of the Kingdom Workers even before the future members knew much about what the Kingdom Workers did. Then once the group was informed about the goals and activities of the Kingdom Workers the chapter came together fairly quickly. From my research into the Kingdom Workers, I would guess this statement is very accurate. I think one of the major challenges facing the Kingdom Workers is letting people know what they do. As ^I_A learned more about what they do to help spread the Word, I was very excited about what they did and prayed that God would bless their efforts.

By forming chapters the Kingdom Workers have had success in fulfilling their goals. Each chapter sponsors a specific project. (For example, the Milwaukee chapter sponsors the Mission to the Economically Deprived in Inner-city Milwaukee.) These chapters then help support the work in their project, although chapters are not limited to helping only one project. By forming chapters the Kingdom Workers have smaller groups than with districts which makes it easier to spread information.

I can only speculate, but I feel that as more people learn of the Kingdom Workers, the organization will have no trouble recruiting new members. I found nothing even close to objectionable about what they were doing. Therefore, as WELS Christians learn about the goals of the Kingdom Workers, they will see that they are simply trying to help our synod spread the gospel of Jesus. As pastors

learn about and promote this organization, the Kingdom Workers should experience growth.

IV. Are the goals being accomplished?

Again, I would have to answer that question with a resounding "Yes!" Particularly in the area of spreading information. They are working on videos for each of our synod's mission fields. These could be used as part of a presentation about that area. They have a newsletter that keeps members up to date on the project that the Kingdom Workers support. These help to keep people informed. As Jim said, most people do not know what the synod is doing and are asked to blindly give money to support projects. When people are informed, they are much more willing to get involved.

The financial support seems to be there. There are now fifteen projects funded by the Kingdom Workers. For the year of 1994 the funds that are to be spent on Kingdom Worker projects totals \$260,920. It should be noted that the Kingdom Workers does not in any way attempt to steal money that would be given to the synod. They whole-heartedly support the mission offerings given to the synod. They operate on a budget that is funded by money given above and beyond what people would give to the synod,

The opportunities for personal involvement are also there. They have volunteers working in Zambia and Russia. But to involve even more people, the Kingdom Workers have started the Christians Volunteer Corps.

The Christian Volunteer Corps is an attempt to match the skills of WELS members throughout the synod with the needs of individual congregations. The example Dale Mueller, the head of the Christian Volunteer Corp, used is an architect could give advice to a congregation that was planning to build. This program is still relatively new so it is not working as planned yet. The Kingdom Workers have a form that they ask people to fill out on which they can list "skills and talents that you would be willing to share with others in service to the Lord." The information from these forms is then put onto a computer database program. At present there are one hundred fifteen people entered on the computer.

Dale Mueller and Dave Timm both see this new program as a real asset to the Kingdom Workers. Jim Haag also echoed their thoughts and said he felt that the Christian Volunteer Corps was a great new idea for the Kingdom Workers. They all wanted to give people the opportunity to be directly involved with mission work. As Dale said, "You don't have to sign a check to be involved in mission work."

Another new responsibility that the Kingdom Workers have assumed is overseeing the Builders for Christ. This organization was under the Board for Home Missions, but was handed over to the Kingdom Workers on January 1, 1994

because it was too big of a project for the Board for Home Missions to properly administer. This group also falls under the direction of Dale Mueller, who serves as the Director for the Christian Volunteer Corps.

The Builders for Christ have a roster of ninety one people. These people volunteer their time to help mission congregations build a worship facility. Their efforts save congregations thousands of dollars in labor cost. Most of the volunteers are retired persons. Not all of them work on each project and those who do work do not all work during the same time. They spend a week or two at the sight and thenⁿ go home, but are usually replaced by someone who was able to come at that time. The Builders for Christ give Christians an excellent opportunity to get directly involved with mission work.

It is my opinion that the Kingdom Workers are doing a fantastic job of meeting their goals. They are working to share information about the mission field and with the creation of the Christian Volunteer Corps, they give every WELS Christian an opportunity to get involved in some way.

When I asked the men involved with Kingdom Workers to tell me how they could do a better job of meeting their goals they all had one response in common--more opportunities for volunteer involvement in the work in our synod. This seems to be their main thrust right now.

Another common thought was that the members of the synod could be better informed as to what Kingdom Workers does. They felt that this would boost membership and get more people involved in the work of our synod.

Dave Timm said that the future of the Kingdom Workers may involve some "risk taking" for the synod. By this he meant that Kingdom Workers would fund pilot programs. Often synod board^s are rightfully concerned about trying untested ideas. Dave thought that the Kingdom Workers may be able to help test new ideas.

Again and again, I heard these men say that they wanted the Kingdom Workers to help get WELS members excited about and involved in mission work. Their love for the Savior was very easy to see. They wanted people to have the opportunity to put their faith into action.

V. How do the Kingdom Workers operate as a part of the WELS?

A concern that one might have about a group such as the Kingdom Workers is that they would operate outside the frame-work of our synod's mission efforts. This would be in poor order and would probably create friction that would hinder the spread of the gospel. Do the Kingdom Workers look for independent projects and try to beat the synod to mission fields?

The answer of course is no. The Kingdom Workers were created to assist the mission divisions of our synod. No one involved sees the Kingdom Workers

as an organization in competition with the WELS. All of the projects come from requests made by the Boards for either Home or World Missions. They do not independently explore mission fields or take projects that have not been approved by one of the synod mission boards. None of these men see the Kingdom Workers taking any projects that come from outside the synod structure.

As I read through the minutes of past meetings of the Board of Directors I found an example of a request that came directly from a congregation. This request seemed like a good idea, but was rejected on the grounds that the congregation had not gone through the proper channel to bring the request to the Kingdom Workers. They told the congregation to take the request to the Board for Home Missions first.

Dave Timm said that even when it came to picking the volunteers for service, the responsibility was in the hands of the Synod board. He described the Kingdom Workers as the broker that finds talents and funds for projects that the synod would like to do and turns those people and funds over to the synod. He said that they never insisted on a volunteer for a certain field. They may suggest an idea to a missionary, but ultimately the mission field had to request the volunteer.

Jim said he felt the Kingdom Workers filled a void in the synod because the boards are reluctant to fund lay peoples' work. Instead they focus on the called workers and the actual spread of the gospel. The Kingdom Workers are able to

help the spread of the gospel by providing extra money and volunteers who can help the missionaries in the field. For example, a "Quiet Project" presently being examined by the Kingdom Workers is to get business men into Laos. Presently the government does not allow missionaries into the country, but the thought is that the business men could establish contacts in the country that missionaries could use. It would also be a way of showing the government that we have no intentions of starting a revolution. This would put us in the good graces of the government and give future missionaries a place to begin when the country allowed them to enter. This project is not publicized because they do not want the Laotian government to somehow get wind of this and get the impression that we are attempting to undermine their authority.

This type of service will be a great benefit to the work of our Synod. The Kingdom Workers can provide wonderful opportunities for people to be involved with mission work. But in doing this, they do not intend to rival the synod for projects. I thought that it was fitting that the office for the Kingdom Workers is about a mile down the road from the WELS main office--while separate they strive to work together.

Conclusion

After interviewing some of the key men in the Kingdom Workers past and present I came away with the feeling that I had talked to a number of Christian men who were eager to serve their Lord. All of the office personal gave me this impression also. This were not people trying to buck the system and do mission work their own way. They were Christians interested in finding ways to assist the WELS in spreading the gospel. They all had a clear understanding of the goals of the Kingdom Workers and were attempting to fulfill this goals in any way possible.

One of the selfish reasons I had for choosing this topic was to see how this organization could help me in my future years in the ministry. There are numerous ways to answer that. I think that every pastor in our synod would be wise to become familiar with the Kingdom Workers and inform his members about this group. They are able to offer assistance to pastors and congregations in many ways.

Do the Kingdom Workers meet their goals? Will they be able to offer help in my future ministry? YES!! Pray that God will continue to allow this organization to assist our synod in spreading the message of the Savior.

RESOURCES

I interviewed the following people:

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| Jim Haag | He was a founder of the Kingdom Workers and now serves as the vice-president of the National board of Directors. |
| Dave Timm | He is presently serving as the National Director, a full-time position. |
| Dale Mueller | He serves as the Director of the Christian Volunteer Corps |
| Pauline Jaeger | She serves as the bookkeeper and began serving as a volunteer in the office in February 1989, very early in the history of the Kingdom Workers. |