

The History of the WELS' Commission on Evangelism's School of Outreach

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In January 2000, a small mission congregation from Englewood, Florida, sent a team that consisted of four lay people and one vicar to a seminar called the "School of Outreach." It was an event that the South Atlantic District of the WELS was hosting in Beverly Hills, Florida, that particular occasion and the little mission congregation from Englewood had been signed up by their pastor, LeRoy Martin, to go and participate. They went and they participated. What the Holy Spirit would accomplish in the hearts and lives of these participants through the empowering gospel that they heard that weekend reminds this author just how true the words spoken through Isaiah are.

*As the rain and snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that
it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it.
—Isaiah 55:10, 11*

It would be difficult at this point in time to point to any tangible results in the form of hard statistical data that would verify the following statement. However, with that being said, the author of this paper (who was the vicar mentioned above that attended) and the members of Trinity from Englewood, Florida, were deeply impacted by the whole weekend. The desire to take the saving gospel to the people of Englewood, Florida was nurtured. The plan to do the same was drawn up. And perhaps most importantly, the activity to carry out that plan under God's grace was translated into activity back in the Englewood community by called workers and lay members alike. The School of Outreach had been and continues to be a blessing to the Trinity congregation in Englewood, Florida.

It was because of this experience that the author became interested in chronicling the history of this seminar that had come to be known as "The School of Outreach." As I began researching this topic, I found that little was available in traditional records of the church's history as kept by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This led me to make interviews of those who were involved throughout the School of Outreach's history. These interviews are the primary means to tell the story of God's blessing to our church body through the School of Outreach. As a result, the major part of this paper will be quotes gleaned from personal interviews that I conducted with the major participants in the School of Outreach. These men whom I interviewed

are the experts on this subject because they were there making this history as God gave them strength. Additional information has been gleaned from Commission on Evangelism committee meetings, but they can only tell a small part of the story. What follows now is the history of one of the blessings that the Lord of the Church has given to the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod through the blessed fellowship it practices and enjoys on a synodical, district, and congregational level.

What is the School of Outreach?

Whenever a congregation becomes interested in the School of Outreach, they are mailed an application form. This form contains a brief, but sufficiently comprehensive overview of what exactly the School of Outreach is. The form reads as follows:

The School of Outreach is an evangelism "immersion" experience designed to provide an "A to Z" exposure to congregational outreach, with the intention that strategic planning for specific congregations will result. Presentations, resources, discussion and workshop provide participants with the tools and insights for such strategic planning. Staff consulting and interaction among participants facilitate the planning. Small group "Huddles" initiate the planning process. Devotions and fellowship provide a rich spiritual atmosphere.¹

As the description makes clear, the School of Outreach was created with a very well defined purpose. The goal is not to convince people that doing evangelism is a task worthy of the church. In a sense, the School of Outreach assumes that point. Rather than convincing people to become witnesses, the School of Outreach exists to help congregations and individuals witness to the fullest of their abilities. As the description from the letter states, this is an "immersion experience" into what could be called the "how-to" of congregational evangelism and outreach.

As biblical Lutherans, we are committed to sharing the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Our Synod will wholeheartedly stand behind the command of Jesus who told his disciples to "Go and preach the good news to all creation." But perhaps the distinctive characteristic of confessional Lutherans in the religious scene of today is that we do evangelism not simply because Christ commanded it, but because as Paul writes in Second Corinthians 5, "we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."

¹ From my personal file. This letter is mailed out by the Commission on Evangelism to interested congregations.

We do evangelism because we are convinced that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” This is the biblical doctrine of objective, universal justification that has become a uniquely Lutheran doctrine in today’s religious scene. It is because of this doctrine that Lutherans, more than anyone, understand the implication of Paul’s exhortation, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

“Christ’s love compels us.” That love compelled a group of men within the Wisconsin Synod to develop and carry out what has come to be known as “the School of Outreach.” Here is the history of that program created and carried out because they were, and still are, convinced that one died for all and therefore all died. And because he lives, “you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Co 15:58). Here is the history of that labor in the Lord.

Why a school of outreach?

A logical place to start is to ask the question why the School of Outreach ever came into being. What led the Commission on Evangelism to see the need for and address the need with something like a School of Outreach? Paul Kelm, administrator of the Commission on Evangelism from its inception in 1985 until 1989, is credited with coming up with the idea of School of Outreach. In an interview conducted with him in April 2001 he shared his thoughts:

When the evangelism office was created, work had already been done by Reuel Schulz and Ron Roth. We, in the Evangelism office, were involved in developing a sense of evangelism synodically. The initial desire was to create resources. And so the first step was to create an evangelism handbook. As we were doing this, we realized that the resources were fine for those who already had a mission sense. What we realized was that there was a need to create a desire for outreach. This is when we came up with the “Five Year Plan.”² The first was, “Gearing Up for Evangelism.” But even as we were doing these, we realized that it was too easy to just go and then go home and not get anything going. So then the School of Outreach concept came.³

But for Pastor Kelm, he began to see that this was only one part of what needed addressing in the life of the congregation.

² The “Five Year Plan” was a plan to do one evangelism workshop a year in each of the 12 districts. Pastor Kelm mentions the first one, “Gearing Up for Evangelism,” in his comments. More on this will follow in the sections where Pastor Hartman and Pastor Huebner comment on “Why a School of Outreach?”

³ From notes taken during a personal interview with Paul Kelm on April 12, 2001.

School of Outreach became part of a series of thoughts to help congregations initialize evangelism. We realized how systemic congregational life is. We saw what seemed to be a need for more evangelism by lay people. Things were not like they were a generation ago when lay people were trained and ready to go with things like the "Talk About the Savior" program. There was a great need for all our people to share law and gospel.

The gap between church culture and world culture is growing. Our members don't relate as well to the unchurched. School of Outreach was designed to help with that. It's not getting any easier, but it's getting clearer what the line is between Christians and the world.⁴

These were Paul Kelm's words on the subject. He is credited with conceiving the idea and making it a reality. His successor as administrator of the Commission on Evangelism was Pastor Robert Hartman. Pastor Hartman has been running the School of Outreach since Pastor Kelm left his position to take another call. In an interview conducted with Pastor Hartman he gives the reasons why the School of Outreach came into existence in the WELS.

The answer is: to give it [i.e., evangelism] the priority it ought to get in a congregation. Because unless you prioritize evangelism it just doesn't happen. Jim Radloff always talks about how the congregation must have a balance between nurture and outreach. And in order for there to be a balance between nurture and outreach you have to prioritize outreach. Nurture always happens. Outreach you have to prioritize and give emphasis to. And that becomes the basis for a School of Outreach.

You see the nurture that needs to be done day by day and week by week in a congregation. But you don't always see the outreach that needs to be done because the unchurched aren't calling begging for your assistance or for your attention.

Another reason for a School of Outreach is that congregations can feed off of one another. In other words, if they are only working by themselves they can sometimes become narrow in how they look at things because they only see their own circumstances. But by working together with other congregations in a group as you do in a School of Outreach, they feed off of one another. They hear and see what the others are doing. They see the enthusiasm from others. And that becomes beneficial for them too.

We have a report session at the end of the School of Outreach in which they share their plans and that becomes feedback and opportunity for networking.⁵

⁴ From my interview with Kelm.

⁵ From my transcript of a taped interview with Pastor Robert Hartman on April 17, 2001.

At this point in the interview I asked Pastor Hartman a question whether they were seeking to address a problem and be reactive, or if they were being proactive in setting up the School of Outreach. He responded that the School of Outreach was started, "to give priority to outreach in the church."⁶ In a sense then, it was a proactive impetus.

The third major participant that I interviewed to learn about the history of the School of Outreach was Pastor James Huebner, pastor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee. Pastor Huebner has served on both district and synodical evangelism boards and committees since the mid-1980s. He has been a part, in lesser and greater roles, of the School of Outreach since the beginning. Here are his comments on why the Commission on Evangelism decided to do the School of Outreach.

When Paul [Kelm] took over as administrator for outreach, he had two major goals. One was to create events where people, pastors, and churches, could come and learn about outreach and evangelism and whatever else you want to call it—[learn] about doing it. And the second goal he had was somehow to get into churches, to help them on site.

The first goal Paul Kelm accomplished in two ways. One was an annual series of five workshops that our committee on evangelism sponsored, did, and produced on sight at the Synod Administration Building with the district coordinators as the audience. Then we asked each of those district coordinators to run out to their 12 districts and repeat those in a regional setting. ...The first one we did would have been in the summer of 1987. Another great event that Paul came up with to bring people in was School of Outreach.... My recollection is that he was one of the shakers and movers to create this idea. He would probably credit home missions with being part of this. It was kind of a cool idea.⁷

The Development Leading Up to the First School of Outreach

As they were preparing for the first School of Outreach, I wanted to know how they decided which topics they were going to address. Pastor Hartman explained:

⁶ From my interview with Hartman.

It was an awareness that everything rises and falls on leadership. Leadership is critical in the church. If you don't have strong pastor leadership and you don't have strong lay leadership, the congregation will often just flounder. It's got to have leadership. And so it's important that people understand biblical leadership with its two facets—that you take initiative but you do it in selfless love and service. This way they don't understand leadership just from a secular point of view, which is top-down, but they see it from the scriptural point of view, which is bottom-up. So leadership is absolutely critical to, in a sense, almost everything we do in the church.

Then dealing with change is just an adjunct to that, if you want to use the term, because we have to realize that change is constant. The gospel is all about change. The Word of God is all about change. Yet we tend to avoid change in the church. Well, change is critical in terms of understanding it. Change always occurs, but now how do you manage it? How do you use it wisely?

And organization also flows out of that. If you're going to have leadership, you have to have the organization for your leadership.

And then out of that comes planning. Planning is critical. If people don't know how to plan, then leadership will fail too.

The other piece, the sizes of churches, we have always recognized that churches are different from one another. In the church, in the Synod, we have probably given a greater emphasis to the larger church. We produce the programs for the larger church with the Lutheran elementary school. We have to recognize that half, two-thirds, of our churches are small to medium. Actually more than two-thirds are small to medium if you're going to use that term. Half of them are small.

So all of those pieces as you looked at them, with what the synod's make-up is today, became issues that you had to talk about. And the "7 Pieces of the Evangelism Pie" are just, if you want to call it such, a logical progression. You have to motivate the congregation. You have to know your community. You have to find prospects. You have to nurture prospects. You have to witness, that's evangelism. You have to welcome people and you have to assimilate them. So it's just kind of a logical progression. Here are the practical steps of the process, or the pieces of the pie.⁸

I asked Pastor Hartman to explain to me how they put the School of Outreach together. These are his comments.

Paul Kelm formatted it the way we did it at the Seminary. And the point was that there we had one pastor and one laymen from each congregation—a team of two. So now by doing it in the districts on the weekend you can have a larger group—you can have four, six, eight, ten, twelve people or more. Typically a

⁷ From my transcript of a taped interview with Pastor James Huebner on April 18, 2001.

⁸ From my interview with Hartman.

congregation will have four, six, or eight people there. That becomes helpful. That becomes a difference in the thrust.⁹

From Pastor Hartman's comments it becomes clear that from the very beginning the desire was there to get the laity involved in all phases—from planning to implementing—evangelism in the congregations. Unfortunately, the format for the first six Schools of Outreach only allowed for only one lay member to participate in the planning stages—because of the limitations imposed by holding it at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary over the course of a whole week's time. Pastor Kelm noted an addition weakness to this. When you have only one person present, you run the risk that they may not be the right lay person to take the idea back to the congregation and get others onboard and involved. He commented, "One of the initial failures was if you don't have the right people present, it won't get back to the whole congregation. Can the people who are present reach the whole congregation, get the whole congregation, and get them on the same page?"¹⁰

Progression Over School's Of Outreach II-VI – The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Years

During the years 1987—1992, the School of Outreach was held annually during the summer at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. This was a one week seminar that brought together one pastor and one lay leader from each participating congregation along with a number of presenters. Pastor James Huebner shared his recollection of the events of those years with me during our interview. Here is what he said.

Another great event that Paul came up with to bring people in was School of Outreach.... My recollection is he was one of the shakers and movers to create this idea. He would probably credit home missions with being part of this. It was kind of a cool idea. There we had one pastor and one lay leader from each church who wanted to commit for a week. 1987 was the first one.... Starting in the fall of 1986 we had a [district] coordinators meeting with the Synod's Commission on Evangelism that Paul [Kelm] was the administrator of. All the district coordinators, and I was one of them, came in. That's when I started learning because Paul Kelm was interested in teaching us what we were supposed to do. Some of these guys had been doing stuff like that for years,

⁹ From my interview with Hartman.

¹⁰ From my interview with Kelm.

but Paul was coordinating it all now. One of the big things he said was, 'Come to School of Outreach. It's a new thing we're going to try in the summer of 1987.' So that would have been a year after I had been elected [as district coordinator]. So this is my big learning experience. The 12 district coordinators were invited to come and audit. So we spent a week at the Seminary with these other pastor and lay represented churches. They did them in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992. 1992 was poorly attended. Well, not poorly, it was smaller. You run out of gas. Only so many churches can have a lay person clear out a whole week [of their schedule] and spend it at the Seminary. So into the fall of 1992. By then, Hartman was already the administrator. Back in 1987 Paul Kelm was the administrator for evangelism. By 1989 the Synod had called him into Spiritual Renewal—a separate office, temporary. That's when I got involved with Paul [Kelm] and Lawrence Olson in consulting. We spent a year and a half visiting 70 different churches. Then we put together a seminar called, RPM – Revitalizing Parish Ministry. We went to each district within six months; we were in all twelve districts. Paul [Kelm], Lawrence [Olson], and I shared what we learned in consulting. Then we recommended the Board for Parish Services make this full time. That's when Ron Heins started his call to Parish Assistance. That's how that got started. When Paul Kelm left the evangelism office in 1989, that's when Hartman was called. And Bob Hartman continued the School of Outreach at the Seminary using pretty much the same presenters. That continued on for a total of 6 times [1987-1992].¹¹

Resources

Over the course of the years from the initial concept to the end of the “Seminary Years” of the School of Outreach, a number of resources were developed to aid congregations in their preparation for the planning that was to take place at the School of Outreach. These resources are still being used today to help congregations take an objective look at themselves and to help the consultants recommend strategies to them. Here is how those resources came into being. The following is a transcription of part of the interview I did with Pastor Robert Hartman.¹²

Could you tell me a little more about the resources created to address these needs, like the congregational profile for example?

The congregational profile and the community profile were actually developed for the first of those five district workshops, “Gearing Up For Evangelism.” “Gearing Up For Evangelism” had the community profile, which I was responsible for putting together. That was my assignment. Lawrence Olson

¹¹ From my interview with Huebner.

¹² The portions in italics are questions I asked Pastor Hartman during the interview. Throughout the rest of the paper, any portions within a quotation that are in italics are the author's questions to the interviewee.

was responsible for putting together the congregational profile. He also developed the congregational survey. And that all came about the same time as the first School of Outreach.

You see, at the first School of Outreach there weren't even the tools for several things. They did not have the tools we have. The tools actually came with the first district workshop. That's all about the same time as the first School of Outreach [1987]. And I don't think these tools were developed until the fall of 1987 or maybe 1988. There were the three basic tools [i.e., the community profile, the congregational survey, and the congregational profile]. Then the fourth tool that we added was one that Jim Radloff put together, which was the Mission-Awareness-Preparedness Checklist. This he was using already with congregations—mission congregations—to help them determine, "Are you ready to do outreach?" So it became another useful tool that we added to it.

So those were developed separate from the School of Outreach, but were quickly incorporated into it?

Right. The tool by Radloff was developed as a need he saw to work with mission congregations. The other three tools were actually developed for those five-year district evangelism workshops that we held from the late 1980s till the early 1990s. They were:

- Gearing Up For Evangelism,
- Getting Everyone Involved,
- Prospect Witness and Nurture,
- Locating the Lost, and,
- Assimilation and Retention.

If you put those five together, you have a whole plan for support of doing outreach. The whole emphasis is outreach. But those original tools that were a part of "Gearing Up For Evangelism" were developed almost with the first School of Outreach or right after it. So then they were incorporated.

But they weren't developed specifically for the first School of Outreach?

It may have been that they were being developed for that, but the School of Outreach kind of happened and then those five district workshops were also happening.

So those resources were developed to go along with the district workshops which the synod evangelism committee was doing in each of the districts already at that point in time?

Right. See, that was developed already back when Paul [Kelm] came. One big project was to develop that five-year series of workshops. Another big project was the School of Outreach. Another big project, and it took a little bit longer, because he had to sell Northwestern [College] on it, was the summer evangelism experience where we did training of students. Then the other thing that was going on with Paul in the office was the development of resources.¹³

Taking the School of Outreach on the Road

¹³ From my interview with Hartman.

One could argue that the single most significant change that the School of Outreach has gone through in its history was the decision to take the School of Outreach out to the congregations instead of having the congregations come to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. It became obvious that taking the School of Outreach on the road would have major benefits, not the least of which was a broader participation by congregations of the Synod—especially in the outlying districts of the Synod. But with significant change also comes the large task of creating something that will still fulfill its original goals in a very changed environment. Questions such as, “How do you cover the material to make this beneficial in less than half the time?” and, “Can we do what we do well at the seminary just as well with a smaller staff on the road?” would have to be addressed.

What was the impetus to take it on the road?

It was the request to do it. The big question for us was logistics. When we did it at the Seminary, remember that we had a staff of eight or nine people that did it there, different people like Jim Huebner, Jim Aderman—there’s a whole bunch of people that came in and did one piece, two pieces. David Valleskey came in and did a piece; Jim Tiefel came in and did a piece—everyone had a piece. And you could do that because people were right here. Now to take it on the road meant we had to have a small staff—and we decided on a staff of three. That was one of the difficult things. And then also to put together a program that a staff of three could do.

So when did you decide to take the School of Outreach on the road?

There were the repeated requests to take it to the districts. We kind of resisted that as long as we had 12 to 20 congregations that would come during the summer. But it became harder and harder for congregations. Well, maybe not so much harder. In one sense it is hard for a congregation, for one pastor and one layman to give up one week and come to the Seminary to spend a week doing that. That’s like someone going to summer school. It is a hard step for a congregation to be able to do. But the other thing in the first four, five, six years was that you had, if you want to call it that, the most highly motivated congregations that were willing to do that.

You were preaching to the choir.

Yes, preaching to the choir. Then if you started to go down to the second level you didn’t have that same high motivation.

So you kind of hit a saturation point of congregations that you could get to the Seminary. If you were going to move to the next circle out, you would need to go out to them?

Right. It just kind of became a progression. They asked us to do it and we resisted. But then we decided to videotape it. Pastor Jim Huebner, Pastor Jim Radloff, and I got together. It was either in the late fall of 1992 or early spring of

1993¹⁴ that we sat down and put the pieces together that we wanted to do on the road. And then we put it together in a schedule to see if we could do this—could we actually do what we did for a whole week and put it into a weekend. We recognized that in order to accomplish it—this [i.e., the current content of the Satellite School of Outreach] is what you would call the bare minimum that we needed to cover because we couldn't cut it back from there. For example, in the School of Outreach in Mequon, there we could talk about large church, small church, middle-size church. We could even break them up into smaller groups. I would sit with the large churches and talk about what it means to be a large church. Someone else could sit with the small churches and talk with them about what it means to be a small church. Well, you can't have three sessions like that in a weekend. So some things were combined.

But then we had also determined what are the things that we really had to do. We had to talk about keeping our outlines as brief as possible—just get to the nuts and bolts and the implications of that. And then we needed to make that always lead to the discussions that they were going to have in the huddle sessions. Give them something to think about that they can talk about. *Who was the "they" that you were talking about that was asking you to bring it out to the districts?*

Just different churches and different district coordinators. There were requests from the districts you might say, particularly from the outlying districts. Through the years we've had greater response from the outlying districts in terms of participation percentage-wise of congregations than we've had here from the five big Midwest districts. Number-wise probably about the same. That of course also depended upon the leadership within the district in terms of encouraging, preparing, and planning for a district-wide School of Outreach. For example, Pastor Chuck Westra has done an excellent job in the South Atlantic. Some of the district coordinators have done a better job than others, you might say, in motivating and encouraging and setting up a School of Outreach. *So they really are key point men?*

Oh yes, absolutely. The other issue for us became timing—when can you do it in a district. We discovered that, for example, here in Southeast Wisconsin, when we tried to do a couple here in the spring they kind of fell flat. Spring just was not a good time to do one in Southeast Wisconsin. We found that the fall was better, October or even into November was better. So we've had better success. So we've also discovered the pattern of when is a good time to hold one in a district. Besides that, we're also smart enough to do warm weather ones in winter and cold weather ones in spring and fall. The point is, we've discovered that certain times in certain districts work better than others. Take for example when we went to Alaska. We wanted to do it in late spring, even into early summer, but they said, 'No. You have to do it either before or after hunting and fishing season.' So we were not allowed in until after October 31st because that's the end of fishing and hunting season. So we went in the first weekend of November where we weren't too excited about going in the first

¹⁴ Pastor Huebner puts the specific meeting that Pastor Hartman had in mind on May 26, 1993. However, informal conversations had been going on well before this according to Pastor Huebner.

weekend of November. They already had two feet of snow on the ground and it snowed at least twice a day during the time that we were there. But it was pleasant; it was nice. We enjoyed it. ...

But when the district coordinators do a good job of motivating them to come together, we go.... And that again goes back to that concept of leadership when you have the district people saying, 'We want to hold one in this area.' And the thing that we have happening now is that congregations are attending for the second time, and in some cases, even a third time because there has been a new pastor or there has been turn over in the evangelism people in the congregation. Congregations have a turn over in their leadership where people move to another city or another state and they develop a new team. Then the new team wants to come and do another plan.

One good example I still remember is one congregation in Findlay, Ohio, where Jim Mattek was the pastor. They had come to the one we had done in Ann Arbor, MI. Then they came about four years later to the one we had down in Columbus. They had put together their plan in Ann Arbor for the things they wanted to do and they finished them. I mean they actually did everything they said they wanted to do. So they came back and put together another four or five year plan. They really became a neat advertisement, you might say, for the School of Outreach. They got up and explained, "We're here because we did everything we wanted to do when we came the last time. Now we're here to do another plan." So that has been a new wrinkle to the School of Outreach, congregations coming back for a second shot at it.

They're finding out that as far as the School of Outreach goes, they're never going to outlive its usefulness.

No [i.e., they won't grow out of the usefulness of the School of Outreach]. And again, the benefits of the School of Outreach are fully determined by the energy and the leadership of the congregation. If they just go home and put it on the shelf and don't continue to meet and to plan to and to implement, it's not going to happen either. They can come for the weekend and lay out a plan and get enthused and get excited, but if they don't go home and continue to meet and to plan to and to implement, it's not going to happen either. So the School of Outreach is no magic cure-all. It simply is a tool to get the congregation some tools and the impetus to go ahead and do something. Many congregations, if they didn't attend the School of Outreach, would just stay in a rut and not do anything. Or they just do one thing and it doesn't work.... Sometimes congregations hear about certain methods that the church has tried, like door-to-door knocking. Well, you can't do door-to-door knocking in New York City. And in some wealthier communities you can't do it either. You have to find different avenues.¹⁵

¹⁵ From my interview with Hartman.

Pastor Hartman remembers the logistics as being the major force that held them back from taking the School of Outreach on the road earlier than they did. Pastor James Huebner adds to that by pointing out that it was not merely the request from congregations and district coordinators that finally led the Commission on Evangelism to take the School of Outreach on the road, but also an internal desire within the commission to go out to the congregations in the districts. His comments follow.

Bob Hartman kind of recognized that we were running out of steam in getting people to take a whole week. Let me go backward in time, because this is my recollection. Here's what happened. Back in 1991, David Rutschow resigned from being the Evangelism committee chairman. The 1985 synodical restructuring created the Commission on Evangelism. In fact the Board for Parish Services was brand new in 1985, at least that's what I remember. That's when Kelm was called to be the administrator for evangelism. So he was in it for four years or so before he took the call to Spiritual Renewal. At any rate, I was already into this evangelism loop in 1986 when I got elected in the district. And then you meet with the synodical commission and you learn.

Then I got involved with Paul [Kelm] at Parish Assistance—we didn't call it that back then, just 'consulting'. That was 1989-1991. Now all through this, David Rutschow is the Synod's Commission on Evangelism chairman. Now it's legal in the Synod to have a Synod office and a district office. He was on the district presidium and he was Synod Commission on Evangelism chairman. But he felt the press of duties, because it became obvious that he was probably going to be the next district president. So he resigned from the synod Commission on Evangelism, and I was appointed as the chairman in 1991. So I'm not the district coordinator anymore. That's when I had just finished up working with Paul Kelm in Spiritual Renewal on a part-time thing.

Hartman is now the administrator for about two years. So we [Robert Hartman, synodical Commission on Evangelism administrator, and James Huebner, synodical Commission on Evangelism chairman] got together with our synodical commission. These are guys like Mike Hintz, Steve Degner, Dan Krueger—who's still on it—and Dave Witte, who just finished his 500th year on the commission and finally his term is up, and Carl Hochmuth. Those are the guys. We would sit, and I can still picture 1991—perhaps in the fall already. It was Mike Hintz who was the one who said, "You know, for all these past years," (now we're talking from 1987 up until 1991) "our theme has been, 'Let's get people to come in to us. Come to these evangelism events. Come to School of Outreach at the Seminary. Come, come, come.'" He said, "All the way along we've been trying to train people to go. Yes, you want people to come to churches, but you also have to get out there. Get out on the streets." So Mike Hintz was the one who said in our commission meeting, "We ought to develop some way in which we can go to churches more. Go out instead of having people come in. And that just sort of rang a bell in everybody's head and so we

just developed this as a theme in our synodical commission. We're all sitting there thinking, "This is a great thing. So how are we going to do this?" Well, that was kind of brainstorming, kicking around in 1991. So we're heading to that last School of Outreach and we're already beginning to talk about doing something different than having people coming in. We had them come in that one last time in 1992. That was the sixth School of Outreach at the Seminary.

(At this point I showed him the copy of the School of Outreach VII application form. This was to be held in summer 1993, but never occurred. Pastor Huebner continues.)

Here's what happened. This [School of Outreach VII application] is going to be sent out in 1992. So Bob Hartman is already getting these materials together. So we're probably talking late 1992. When that last School of Outreach at the Seminary happened in 1992 and we get into the fall of 1992, now again our commission is meeting. We're still talking about this Mike Hintz thing on what we can do better than have people come in. And we noticed that their registrations, even already in 1992, were down. We used to have 30 or 40 guys apply, but we could only take a certain number of congregations. You can only handle so many churches. So somewhere, starting already in 1991, leading into the spring of 1992 as we are heading into that last School of Outreach at the Seminary—I can see the calendar in my head—we are already developing that theme, 'Let's not just get people to come in to us. Let's go.' But that wasn't hatched completely yet, so by the time you get to the fall of 1992, we're already thinking about the next summer, School of Outreach VII at the Seminary in the summer of 1993. So we're already kind of thinking this is not going to work. We're going to do something different. By then our commission was talking about, 'Let's see if we can take this thing on the road.' That's when it started to get real serious.

So Bob Hartman and I had been talking about this informally. ...Prior to our [formal] meeting, Bob and I had already kind of sketched out the curriculum. He was really a leader here in saying, "From the original School of Outreach we did at the Seminary, we're going to take some of these initial presentations on 'The Mission of the Church,' 'The Philosophy of Ministry,' that Paul Kelm would do and videotape them." So we had done that already in 1992. We videotaped in 1992 thinking already that we're going to use these. So part of the thinking about going on the road had already been in our heads in that summer of 1992 when we had that last School of Outreach at the Seminary. Obviously, or we wouldn't have had them all taped. So we had those taped.

Then we sat down. I know I was in on the discussion, but I don't remember how it went. But we came up with a list of things that we really felt we needed to do if we were going to go on the road—and to conceive of how to do this. Like if you go out on the road, do you take a week, do you take three days, what do you do? I'm sure Bob [Hartman] had this all in his head and probably wrote it down somewhere—I'm sure he told you about this. I know I was somehow involved in this discussion, and he had a lot to do with planning what the curriculum would look like, what topics we would address. Obviously there would be some from the School of Outreach in the summer at the Seminary.

There would also be some that we would drop and just have people watch on video to prepare for their arrival. But obviously there were a few other things we wanted to add. So when we got the list in our heads—because I remember we had a list—it was on May 26, 1993 (I went back and looked it up my calendar) that Bob Hartman, Jim Radloff, and I met at the Synod Office to plan the School of Outreach on the road. We had called it the “Satellite School of Outreach,” because that was what it was going to be called at first. That was the date I had in my calendar for when we met. We met at the Synod Administration Building for an hour or two. Then we went to lunch at the Bavarian Wursthau up there on Hampton and 76th.

So the idea to go on the road had been cooking in 1992 enough, maybe already with some original 1991 thoughts, that we videotaped stuff in 1992 thinking that we may or may not be able to pull off the one in 1993 at the Seminary. And sure enough, as you swing through the rest of 1992 and head into the spring of 1993, we must have had enough. Now this is where it's fading in my memory, but Bob [Hartman] and I must have had enough conversations because we already had the curriculum pretty much in our heads of what we were going to talk about on the road. Almost all the subjects that we would have from the summer School of Outreach would be included, but we dropped a number of them and added a couple of new ones. And that's how we finalized this at that May 26, 1993 meeting.

Then the next trick is, where are you going to do these things. Bob [Hartman] was the shaker and mover there. He could tell you how he worked it out, but somehow we got Paul Mueller who was the pastor out in Modesto, California, to host it. And it was in September of 1993, I think it was the 12th to the 14th ¹⁶. It was a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We just wanted to try it out. This was like a pilot. This was like, 'Is this going to work?' So Bob [Hartman] always says we started the School of Outreach on the road in fall of 1993. But in reality, I say we didn't start it until January 1994. That's when we got serious and started doing them all the time. At any rate, it [the pilot] went over very well. We were surprised in fact. We were kind of shocked. What was beneficial about it, and there were several things, but the primary one was this theme that Mike Hintz had introduced back in 1991—that it was actually better to be with people, in a sense, on their site in their territory instead of having them fly into the Seminary. We're out there in California; we're going to work in their setting. The other thing we designed into the Satellite School of Outreach that was already there in the summer sessions, but to me became much more hands on, was the consulting.¹⁷

Blessed With Greater Lay Participation

As Paul Kelm had noted, one of the weaknesses of the original School of Outreach format as it was in “the Seminary Years” was that you only had one lay

¹⁶ The application form for the first Satellite School of Outreach confirms these dates. This form is in the author's personal files.

¹⁷ From my interview with Huebner.

member from each participating congregation present for the session. If this person was a capable leader in the congregation who could lead other people to work with him and the pastor in implementing the plan, it would work. However, if he was not able to do this, the plan that they worked so hard to draw up during the week at the Seminary would most likely never get off the ground.

When the School of Outreach went on the road, all that changed. Because the seminar had been cut down to a weekend, more people—including those who still have jobs—could attend. Because the seminar was sometimes much closer to their homes than Mequon, Wisconsin was, more people were able to make the journey. One obvious blessing was greater involvement by lay members of congregations in the planning stage. One result of greater participation is often a wider ownership of the plans adopted. And when a larger group has ownership, they usually are able to do something with it. May God grant that this has been the case in the majority of our congregations who have made plans to actively and aggressively take the saving gospel into their communities.

Pastor Jim Huebner's comments that follow highlight the value he sees in the ownership that is created by wider lay member participation.

We set our parameters and kind of made it a requirement that if congregations are going to come, they have to bring lay leaders—they can't just come with the pastor. We want a group. And we're also only going to be able to host maybe 9 churches because we're only going to have 3 presenters, and it's the consulting that became the big issue with the Satellite School of Outreach.

So if we're going to have a weekend, and I'm going to be there with Bob [Hartman] and Jim [Radloff] and we each handle three churches, that's about all we can handle. We prefer to. We found out after we did this a bunch of times that basically anybody can stand up there and give some information like a talking head. That's fine, but it was the consulting that was really starting to make it fun for us—something we really enjoyed.

And helping churches understand they don't have to do all the things in this notebook we're handing out or all the things we just said, but tailored to your setting in bite size pieces with a date and a time and somebody responsible.

My sense of them not being as productive at the Seminary was because you only have a pastor and a lay leader. But when you're at Satellite School of Outreach—when we took it on the road finally—now you've got pastor and probably three or four lay leaders. We've even had churches bring a group of 15-20 lay people. But now you don't just have pastor and lay leader at the Seminary blown away by this big, fat notebook and they come home and their brain is leaking information that they can't even digest it. Sure they did some

thinking and planning and the genius was the huddle, but the huddles work better when you have a group. But when you get a huddle of anywhere from four to six people with the pastor, then you can think, work, talk, and apply. Now they have ownership going back to the church, rather than just one guy with the pastor.¹⁸

Pastor Robert Hartman's comments follow on the particular blessing of wider participation that is now possible through taking the School of Outreach on the road.

Paul Kelm formatted it the way we did it at the Seminary. And the point was that there we had one pastor and one laymen from each congregation—a team of two. So now by doing it in the districts on the weekend you can have a larger group—you can have four, six, eight, ten, twelve people or more. Typically a congregation will have four, six, or eight people there. That becomes helpful. That becomes a difference in the thrust. *So this is an important change that you've seen in the thrust over the years from the start until now?*

Right.

You get more of the congregational leadership involved in it.

Yes, that is one reason why we set it up in the districts the way we did. We video taped it one of the last sessions we did at the Seminary so we could make available some of those video tapes as foundational pieces for the weekend so that we didn't have to repeat certain things. And then also we narrowed our focus. What came out of it is what we call the "5-5-7 Plan." It used to be called the "5-6-7 Plan" but we shortened the number of consultations. We took two of them that were shorter and put them together and made it a little bit longer.¹⁹

The "5-5-7 Plan"

What does a congregation learn about at the School of Outreach? At the School of Outreach, the materials have been grouped into what could be called the "5-5-7 Plan"—which consists of the five building blocks, five consultations ("huddles"), and seven pieces of the evangelism pie. Pastor Hartman's explanation of the materials follows.

We talk about the "5 Foundational Pieces" that every congregation needs to have in place in order to do outreach, which are:

- leadership,
- dealing with change,

¹⁸ From my interview with Huebner.

¹⁹ From my interview with Hartman.

- planning,
- organization, and,
- understanding your church size.

Those become the five foundational pieces for the School of Outreach.

What we call the “5-5,” the second “5,” are the huddle sessions—the consultations. In many respects this is probably the most critical part of the School of Outreach. This is where the small group from the church gets together to analyze their self-study. During that they go through the discussion questions we have in the back and sit with a consultant to analyze and then develop a plan for their own congregation for the outreach they want to do over the next one, two, three, four, five years.

Pastor Kelm mentioned that he saw the huddles as being the genius of the School of Outreach because it does force a congregation to do self-analysis.

And planning and brainstorming because that really is the key to the whole thing. Then also tying a consultant in with them who takes their self-study ahead of time and analyzes it and then helps to point things out to them from an objective perspective that they may not see from their own subjective perspective.

Plus the consultant has looked at numerous other congregations also.

Well, yes. You can bring ideas of other things that you have learned from others. That’s true, but the key is to help them in the objective way to see themselves and having analyzed them as to help them to understand what are the strengths that they need to build on and what are some of the weaknesses they need to correct.

And then finally, the “7” (of the “5-5-7 Plan”) are the seven pieces of the evangelism pie. And that really is Jim Huebner’s organizational planning if you want to call it that. He kind of put together those seven pieces. In other words, these are the seven components that make up an outreach program for a congregation. And you recognize what they are in a School of Outreach outline, so we don’t have to talk about them here, but they kind of give you the whole package for an outreach program.²⁰

And then we emphasize to the congregation that you’re not going to have all seven pieces up and running in the next one-month, six months, or even a year. They may have some up already and running. Then they may want to concentrate in the next year on one or two of the pieces and then one or two the following year or however they want to do it. But they have to look and see which of the pieces are up and running and which of the pieces need emphasis. And in many case the congregations actually go back and talk about some of the foundational things, what we talked about with those first five things—the building blocks. They see that they need to do something with organization and leadership and leadership training. And often congregations put a strong emphasis on member motivation for outreach, that that needs to be constant in the congregation. So that first piece of the pie becomes very critical, because if

²⁰ The “Seven Pieces of the Evangelism Pie” are Congregational Awareness and Commitment to Outreach, Community Identity, Prospect Development, Nurturing Prospects, Friendship Evangelism, Worship Welcome, and Prospect Assimilation.

the congregation isn't motivated and enthused to do outreach it just isn't going to happen. If all there is, is the pastor just doing it by himself, often he'll just get discouraged and nothing happens.²¹

School of Outreach – A Part of the Bigger Pie

The School of Outreach was the brainchild of Pastor Paul Kelm. As time went along, Pastor Kelm saw additional elements of congregational life that needed to be addressed—often that needed to be addressed before evangelism could be effectively addressed in a congregation. This insight led to other synodical efforts such as Spiritual Renewal and Parish Assistance. What follows are comments from my conversation with Pastor Hartman about the larger role that the School of Outreach has served in our Synod.

Maybe this ties in with the leadership part, as I was talking with Pastor Kelm the other day. He was mentioning how when he moved from the evangelism office of the Synod to the spiritual renewal project that they realized that this evangelism problem that they were hoping to address in congregations was more of a symptom. In other words, where their evangelism was a problem in the life of the congregation, there were other problems as well. I asked if he would agree that what they had found was that the seven pieces of the evangelism pie were really only one piece of an even larger pie that is congregational life. He agreed. Would you say that this is a fair assessment as well?

Yes. For example, in Parish Services for almost ten years now, eight years—whatever it has been—we have said that, 'Adult spiritual growth is job #1'. In other words, we have done a good job of teaching the children and doing confirmation instruction and instruction up through confirmation and in some cases, with the area Lutheran high schools, up through the teen years. But we have not been strong in adult education. And so you have to get adults back into the Word and keep them in the Word. So that becomes critical for doing evangelism. If you don't have adults in the Word, how are they going to reach out? They're not motivated; they're not strengthened. They don't feel ready or confident to reach out.

You're almost in a sense missing the nurture aspect. I remember Pastor Radloff describing it as very cyclical—the nurture/outreach cycle. Once you take one out, then if these people aren't motivated they aren't going to do the evangelism. They maybe don't have as many questions that they are looking to address that will drive them back into the Word either.

Right. Nurture leads to outreach and outreach leads to nurture. It is cyclical in that sense. And that is why Parish Assistance and School of Outreach go hand in hand—because many congregations that do attend a School of Outreach

²¹ From interview with Hartman.

also discover that what we really need is a little Parish Assistance project in our congregation, which is a three-year program in which they do the analysis, vision setting, and implementation.

So Parish Assistance came after School of Outreach?

Yes, Parish Assistance...actually, if you want to put it in its chronological order, School of Outreach came first. And then Spiritual Renewal came, which was really then what we would call part two of Parish Assistance. Part one is introduction, but part two is the analysis phase and Spiritual Renewal—what Paul Kelm did—was an analysis phase for congregations in which they went in and analyzed themselves and saw their circumstances and where they needed to work and to build. What was not built into Spiritual Renewal was the vision, planning, and implementation. Then came Parish Assistance, which then had all the steps. And so many congregations that do Parish Assistance come to School of Outreach because they need to strengthen evangelism. Many congregations that come to School of Outreach see the need for Parish Assistance and so one feeds off the other. We give them referrals and they, in a sense, give us referrals.

Would you say then that Parish Assistance then has been one of the other blessings that has really grown out of some of the awareness created by School of Outreach?

It's hard to say. Probably. In a sense it is the brainchild of Paul Kelm with Spiritual Renewal. And I don't know exactly, I was around here at that time. Spiritual Renewal started just before I came into the office. Paul Kelm was the first evangelism administrator and then started the Spiritual Renewal project about 1988. And then I came in 1989. So he already sensed that there was a bigger need in congregations. So in a sense Spiritual Renewal flowed out of the School of Outreach. And then you could say that Parish Assistance flowed out of Spiritual Renewal. So I wouldn't say that School of Outreach led to Parish Assistance, but one led to the second and the second led to the third.

There is a logical progression in what Paul Kelm saw. As he looked at the evangelism needs of the congregation, he realized that there is a bigger picture here. We need spiritual renewal here so let's help them do this. So Parish Assistance became the...

Well, it became the avenue for the congregation to put spiritual renewal into practice. And just as we touched on with the outreach and nurture being circular, Parish Assistance and School of Outreach are the same thing. Parish Assistance leads to evangelism or School of Outreach; School of Outreach can also then lead to Parish Assistance.²²

Additional People Brought In

When the School of Outreach was held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, presenters were plentiful and they were all made use of. Since Wisconsin Lutheran

²² From my interview with Hartman.

Seminary is in the heart of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, it was easy to bring in a number of different presenters rather easily because so many qualified people lived in the area. But with the transition to taking the School of Outreach on the road, came new challenges. Not only was the timeframe shortened from one week to one weekend, but the number of presenters was also cut—from over 10 to only three. Still, anytime a program takes off, it begins to need more help. The School of Outreach was no exception. As interest in the School of Outreach steadily grew, one challenge became having enough qualified presenters and consultants on hand to give the congregations quality guidance and consultation during the already short weekend. Pastor Hartman explained to me in our interview why additional people were brought in and who they were.

Were there any additional people that you brought in?

The ones that we brought in were the mission counselors. Jim Radloff was a part of the basic team. The other mission counselors became additional team members as we needed them. First of all, if we were in their district, they would come; they would help. They would always follow up with the mission congregations or another one or two congregations in that district. We've expanded the base team, which was Huebner, Hartman, and Radloff. The base team is now actually six people. We have John Huebner, Wayne Schulz, and now Chuck Westra. And any six of us are now interchangeable.

Does the number of people depend on the number of congregations involved?

Yes. What we have determined to do is that the maximum a fellow can do is three—ideally two. So if we have six congregations and three people, that makes a nice school. If we have eight congregations and four people, that makes a nice school. If we have nine congregations and three, that makes it a hectic weekend for the three of us.²³

Developments Over the “Road” Years of the School of Outreach

Since the beginning, evaluation and appropriate changes have been incorporated into the School of Outreach. Perhaps this flexibility and common sense approach has been one of the strengths that has allowed the School of Outreach to continue to be a valuable asset to the congregations of our Synod as they seek to carry out Christ's Great Commission in their own local spheres of ministry. Pastor James Huebner shared his recollection of some of the little changes that have occurred over the years.

²³ From my interview with Hartman.

Changes in the early years:

What we would do every year is that we would have evaluation. I wasn't always in on this; I would do some presenting. But there were shakers and movers.

Now Harry Hagedorn got dragged in there from Board for Home Missions. I think the Mission Boards were involved. But this was primarily evangelism, so guys like Kelm and Hartman and these guys are talking. Then they would add a section or drop a section. They would evaluate what was good. So there would be 'tweaking' but the basic core stuff is there.²⁴

Curriculum Changes—Changes to the "5-5-7 Plan"

In 1995 we made the second revision of the notebook. People had told us that they were not real clear as to what was going to happen there. So I wanted to explain to them up front (because I'm the first presenter doing the first devotion) what we're doing here—that it's a planning weekend, not coming to learn how to be a witness or something. And then also to give a roadmap on how this would sequence. See, the other thing was that people could never figure what subject flowed when and where. So we would talk about this when we would talk and feedback with one other. We always have our debriefing with each other at dinner on Sunday night [after the School of Outreach]. I had suggested to Bob [Hartman] that we go to five building blocks and seven pieces of the pie. That's pretty much what happened.

So the first rewrite of the notebook took place in 1995. It was five building blocks, five huddles, and seven pieces of the evangelism pie. We originally had 6 huddles, the "5-6-7 Plan," but we combined some things. There are 12 presentations and we [Hartman, Huebner, and Radloff] each have four. That was one rework of the material into that organization.

The next major rewrite of the notebook took place just a year ago. We had it done by April [2000]. We used it first at El Paso. We used to have in here about 180 pages; we have 150 total [now]. We really critically went over each other's presentation outlines and paired down the presentation material. We still talk the same amount of time with the same stories. We cleared out outdated and unnecessary appendices. We've all found that regardless of the presentation, the real fun has been learning and honing our consulting. It's one thing to be a consultant like in parish assistance and to go into a church and spend four days knowing that you're going to be coming back in six months. You're really developing a close tie with a church—one on one. But when you get a weekend, you don't have much time. Win their confidence; listen where they're at; analyze their data; and, then go at it. Help them get a handle on things in a short weekend. That's a fun challenge. That's really exciting I think and the three of us really enjoy it the most. So those are the material revisions.²⁵

²⁴ From my interview with Huebner.

²⁵ Ibid.

Unfortunately, some things are hard to change. One aspect that Pastor Hartman comments on is the “complaint” some participants have about the grueling pace of the weekend. Pastor Hartman’s observations on change in the School or Outreach over the years follows.

We do have each one do an evaluation and then we do go through and make changes. We have shortened some sections. We have extended the time for some of the huddles. We try to give as much huddle time as we possibly can. We’ve done those adjustments based on the feedback we get. The one feedback that we most commonly get is, ‘Can you do something about Saturday?’ and the answer we give is, ‘No we can’t.’ It’s just simply a long day.

Now what we have done are a couple of things. For example, at least once or maybe it was twice, we did a School of Outreach on Friday and Saturday. In fact we did one in Arkansas. We started at noon on Friday and finished up in the evening on Saturday because they wanted to get back to their churches. They did not want to stay over, so we actually ended it on Saturday. It worked out alright. It was kind of rushed.

Some people have also suggested, ‘Could you start it earlier?’ Well, depending on how far of a distance they have to drive because already some people are losing half of Friday and in some cases all of Friday. So we are also trying to base it on the work schedule of people also. So we try to incorporate it on a weekend when people who are working can be there and not lose too much time from work.²⁶

Earlier I included Pastor Huebner’s comments on the revisions made to the curriculum. I have included Pastor Hartman’s comments here because they are the continuation of the comments included previous to this paragraph. Here is Pastor Hartman on the curriculum changes.

The School of Outreach workbook has also been revised. I think we are on the third or the fourth revision.... We’re on three big editions you might say. We’ve redone all of the huddle sessions, the questions, and tried to get a little better progression and be a little more directive. Those are a couple of the things we have done. We’ve eliminated some of the appendices and tried to eliminate some duplication. Then we’ve tried to make sure that all the pieces fit in the right spot.²⁷

Personnel Changes—The Development of Additional Presenters and Presentation Teams

²⁶ From my interview with Hartman.

²⁷ Ibid.

Earlier it was noted that additional people were being brought in as circumstances called for such an action. But now, as we look to the future of the School of Outreach beyond the year 2001, additional questions need to be addressed. The Commission on Evangelism has already begun to address one large issue: who will do the presenting? Pastor Robert Hartman recently turned 65 years of age and is nearing retirement. Pastor James Radloff is only a few years younger than Pastor Hartman. The third team member, Pastor James Huebner, has decided that he also needs to cut back the number of School's of Outreach that he can do because of his growing congregation and the need for him to have more time for this local parish ministry. Pastor James Huebner shared his comments on the past personnel developments and the possible future developments for the School of Outreach.

The past:

As you can tell, this [the Satellite School of Outreach] picked up steam. Basically, all three of us—Bob, Jim, and I—were the ones who went to every single School of Outreach. We were the three presenters; we were it. But we recognized as we got into it farther—already this happened in 1996—that we would need some additional help when we got nine, ten, eleven churches. So we brought in the other mission counselors. [They were] Wayne Schulz, Gene Ahlswede, and John Huebner.

We went through all these years with those guys helping. Now the first time I said, 'I'm not going,' was in 1998 in the fall because my son was in football. It was his senior year and I wanted to see those games. They were very important to him and to me. So that was when we started to use the other mission counselors more instead of having them sitting in the back and just helping out with the consulting. Wayne Schulz has been the one who has helped out the most.²⁸

The future:

We had been thinking that by the year 2000, or maybe 2001, it would be our last year doing School of Outreach. Well, instead of winding down, it has been winding up. There are still churches that want to come, churches that want to come a second time. The word is mostly word of mouth. We haven't done a lot of promotion on this. We have relied on our district coordinators quite a bit to do the promotion and rally up the churches. And the word is getting out that this is still a fun thing to participate in; it's still worthwhile. We're very thankful for that.

So the synodical commission that I chair first of all asks Bob and me, 'How can you keep the schedule?' They're concerned about Bob burning out as administrator because he works like a crazy man. They're also concerned

²⁸ From my interview with Huebner.

because I have a parish that I have to serve. So I always had assured them that I have support, but I also realize it's very important to cut back.

So it's kind of a bittersweet thing because I love doing it. I love the consulting end of it. I like the crowds and people. You just get a lot of Christian fellowship. Who comes to School of Outreach but people who are keyed to do outreach? These are cool people; they're really fun. You don't have alligators and people who argue. They are a fun group who gets it. We have some pastors in the WELS who see themselves as not interested in outreach, or they might be scared of it, or they just might not want to it, or whatever. But who are the guys who come to the School of Outreach? It's the pastors who want to know—they're keyed to do it.

So now what to do [about Huebner cutting back the number of School's of Outreach he will do and Hartman nearing retirement]?

We've talked about different people we could see who have the gifts and skills, not just to stand up and present, but to also do the consulting. That's why Chuck Westra was asked to participate. He's a multi-talented young pastor whose skills and gifts we really appreciate. So he's basically beginning to take my place part-time.

We've been encouraged to develop another team of presenters. In essence, we have. Radloff, Hartman, and Huebner—that's the core. Then we have Schulz, John Huebner, and Chuck Westra. We have two teams ready to go. But what happens because of the way the schedule works, we haven't yet had two teams on the same weekend in two different districts in two different parts of the world—which we could be doing. But we haven't done that yet. We surely could as this goes on. It would be my suggestion that we finish developing this second team and even a third. Then we could start scheduling these concurrently in different parts of the nation. But that will happen after Bob is out of the office because he'll be retiring probably within a year. Then we'll be calling a new administrator. Then let the new guy figure out if he wants to do it that way.²⁹

A Wider Participation Throughout the Synod

The comments in the previous section by Pastor James Huebner describe what we might call an “enviable obstacle.” The very fact that the Commission on Evangelism has to deal with how to keep the School of Outreach going into the future is an indication that the Lord of the Church has blessed the efforts of the School of Outreach team. This blessing becomes more obvious when we consider the statistical data on how many congregations have participated throughout the years of the School of Outreach. The following table gives the data through the end of 2000 by district, with the synodical totals at the bottom.

²⁹ From my interview with Huebner.

District	School of Outreach Congregations/Total Number of Congregations in District
Arizona-California	53/104
Dakota/Montana	33/79
Michigan	56/150
Minnesota	32/162
Nebraska	32/90
North Atlantic	27/40
Northern Wisconsin	37/153
Pacific Northwest	24/47
South Atlantic	51/54
South Central	34/41
Southeastern Wisconsin	45/145
Western Wisconsin	38/174
World Mission Congregations	3
WELS TOTALS THROUGH 12/2000	488 congregations³⁰

Clearly the table demonstrates that the School of Outreach has had a far-reaching impact on the congregations of our Synod judging solely based on the widespread participation. Pastor Hartman shared the following comments.

In general you would say that participation has been wider. You're not just "preaching to the choir" anymore.

No. In fact, we're into what we call 'second level congregations.' I don't know if we're into any third level congregations. First level congregations are congregations that are up and running and always anxious to do something. They're always willing try something. Second level congregations are those who kind of sit back and want to see if this is really going to work or not. They're like the people from Missouri, 'Show Me.' They're not ready to jump in headfirst right away when something is suggested. They'll sit back. Many of those congregations have now participated. Then third level congregations are the ones you really have to tug along. And there have been maybe a few of those that have come. They would say, 'We don't need that. There's no benefit for us in that.'³¹

Certainly Pastor Hartman's lament is valid. It would be nice to see even more congregations participating. But we ought not to overlook the blessing either. Certainly

³⁰ Total counts all attending congregations, includes congregations that have repeated at the School of Outreach. I counted 430 as the total number of *different* congregations in the list Pastor Hartman supplied for me from his personal files. Total does not include world mission conferences because these were larger conferences for specific groups (i.e., one was held at Antigua for the Caribbean churches).

³¹ From my interview with Hartman.

the desire of congregations in the Wisconsin Synod to do evangelism is evidenced by their desire to learn. That desire led them to attend the School of Outreach.

The Value of the School of Outreach—Through the Eyes of Those Who Have Been There

Asking people to evaluate the value of something within the church often leaves them looking for the right words to say what they mean without saying something they do not mean. I was not looking for these men to make comments on what we might call “tangible” (i.e., measurable results or gains, such as increased memberships, adult confirmations, adult baptisms, Bible class participation, offerings, etc.). What I asked them to comment on was what they had seen the Lord to bless our fellowship through their labors.

The following is what Pastor Bob Hartman had to say:

We fully expected that right now the School of Outreach would be winding down. It was our intent in 1993 that we would run it until about the year 2000, maybe until 2001, like this spring. And we are now full for all of 2001 and we're already filling up 2002. I think we have just about everything scheduled for 2002.

This train is showing no signs of slowing down.

No, in fact we're getting more. Every so often we'll have a School of Outreach that is lighter. Sometimes we only have six or seven scheduled. Like, for example, in Washington D.C. we had seven churches scheduled, but now one—for whatever reason—had to drop out. So we only have six churches there, which will still make a nice group. But I have four people there because John Huebner will be there because it's his district. So that means that two of the people will only have one church to work with, so they'll really be relaxed.³²

Pastor Hartman expressed the value he saw in the fact that congregations still find the School of Outreach helpful to them in their desire to take the gospel to their neighbors. In the next quote, Pastor Huebner comments on the many values, some being personal blessings to him such as the wonderful Christian fellowship he has shared, and some on the blessings that have been poured on the church by the Lord of the Church.

This is probably one of the longest running continuing programs in the WELS. But I don't know who could verify that. It's been a tremendous blessing for us as individuals. The Lord enriches you when you get to meet that many

³² From my interview with Hartman.

neat people. And the stories you hear from folks... We're in Houston, TX in January 2001 and my dear friend Mark Bitter in the Woodlands, TX brought his large group to the west side of Houston where we are at Neil Hansen's church, Prince of Peace. And the Woodlands brought their group, a wonderful congregation of people doing well in their growth.

And there's this one family that's a very solid family. They have this fellow who's married to this active woman in the church, but he just didn't take Bible Information Class in over eight or nine years of encouragement. They've just never been able to get this guy to take class and really grab on. He occasionally visits church, but hardly ever. And Bob Hartman was the guest preacher because while we're at Prince of Peace we kind of disseminate on Sunday morning. So Bob Hartman was up in the Woodlands that Sunday morning. And it just so happens that this Sunday morning that gentleman was in church and Bible class.

They had Bible class first. And Bob Hartman was in his usual Bob Hartman mode. He's just rolling on telling how we need to think about what's going on in the mind of the unchurched person. He said, 'Most of you, probably all of you, made a decision to be here in Bible class and you know why you're here. You didn't even think about it. You just come to Bible class. Am I right?' One guy raises his hand and says, 'No. I just never come.' So this is this guy. Bob started engaging him in a conversation, 'Why do you think that way?' He just kept listening to his story about why he's uninterested in church, why he's unchurched. Bob basically just witnessed to him. And the whole group is witnessing this—and they know this guy because he's the husband of their members.

Then the sermon comes and Bob has this beautiful, very powerful outreach message. Then the service is over and this guy walks out of church, turns to Pastor Bitter and says, 'You have to call me this week. I have to learn more.' Then later that afternoon [back at the School of Outreach] when Pastor Bitter made that announcement, there wasn't a dry eye. You get a lump in your throat. Here's the gospel working! It's that kind of stuff. We enjoy our School of Outreach and our fun and our fellowship, but you get those kind of things! The blessings that you get to see right up front when you get to do this kind of stuff are just incredible! How the Spirit blesses his gospel you just don't always know, but just to see people on fire for the Lord and doing his work is a blessing.³³

Still Full Speed Ahead—The Ongoing Interest of Congregations in the School of Outreach

Not only has the value been perceived, but congregations have found real value. Look at the wider participation by congregations of our synod. I asked the men I interviewed what they thought would account for the School of Outreach going on so

³³ From my interview with Huebner.

long (relatively speaking) without waning interest. Here is what Pastor Hartman had to say.

I would say it is the fact that congregations have spoken about the benefits to others. Congregations have seen others going and have seen the benefit and heard about the benefits they received. I guess the reputation is what has kept it going.³⁴

Pastor Huebner spoke of the practical value he believes congregations see in the School of Outreach. In a sense we could say that the congregations are being pragmatic and the School of Outreach addresses the practical, the 'how-to,' of evangelism. When people perceive a practical help is being offered to them, they often are willing to accept it. He also added the thought that he believes the congregations are willing to come in because they know they will be treated as brothers and sisters in the faith by brothers and sisters in the faith who want nothing but the best for their outreach ministry in their locale.

What do you believe has kept the School of Outreach going so long (relatively speaking) without waning interest?

You would probably answer that better than I because you were there with a group. My sense is that it has nothing to do with the presenters. I think it has everything to do with the fact that a pastor and his lay leaders can come in and not feel like they're getting shot out of the water and spanked for being naughty for not doing outreach or doing it right. But they can come and they can learn. They can actually go home with something and something happens.

They can just go and do one thing—maybe a 'Christmas for Kids,' maybe Easter outreach. Or maybe they have a five-year plan actually developed because we're touching on things more than just evangelism strategies. Sometimes it's church additions, sometimes it's relocation project. Bob [Hartman] worked long and hard with the church from Huntsville, Alabama for example. That was the turning point when they relocated. That's not just getting on the streets—that was changing their whole [outlook].

But I would say, and this is just my gut sense, that it's just because churches and people there are feeling that they got something they could use and do. I think that's why it just keeps going. Our district coordinators have also played a big role in helping to get these together.³⁵

³⁴ From my interview with Hartman.

³⁵ From my interview with Huebner.

Conclusion

After 14 years, the School of Outreach is still going strong with no signs of slowing down. And really, that should not surprise us. The Lord has blessed our Synod with faithful pastors, teachers, professors, and administrators who have continued to hold before the collective eyes of the Synod that beautiful message of universal, objective justification that frees us to serve him. In the section from 2 Corinthians 5 that I quoted at the beginning of this paper, Paul also reminds us that “[Jesus] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (v. 15). That gospel message has empowered the people of the WELS to seize the opportunities before them to share the gospel. Certainly one could argue that there is room for improvement. There will always be room for improvement in the life of those who are *simul iustus et peccator*. But we also dare not overlook the blessings the Lord has given his church through the School of Outreach either. To him then let us give thanks for blessings received as his church continues to strive to share the message to the best of its abilities—with the strength the Lord himself has promised to give through that same gospel message.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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