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IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD

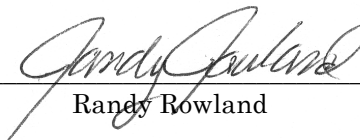
Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


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Date Received: March 13, 2016

TOWARD HEALTHIER CONGREGATIONS
IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

THOMAS R. ACTON
MARCH 2016

ABSTRACT

Toward Healthier Congregations
in The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
Thomas R. Acton
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2016

This project was designed to assist pastors and members of declining congregations in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod address membership loss and then realize a statistically verifiable increase within three years. Risen Savior Lutheran Church, located in Byron, IL, eighty-eight miles west of Chicago, was the test congregation. Byron is a modern, urban community with a population of 3,753. The congregation experienced the sudden resignation of its first full-time pastor in 2014 after serving twenty-five months. Beginning as a mission in 2005, it slowly grew to a membership high of sixty-two in 2013 and then began to decline not only membership, but also worship attendance and revenue. After relocating three times in its brief history, it remains served by part-time pastors who offer only a Sunday sermon.

Walking alongside the leadership and part-time pastors, the facilitator developed a relationship of trust to benefit the congregation's ministry throughout the community. Beginning with the creation of a healthy environment to stop declining membership the facilitator studied the congregation. This included church history, demographics, consultation with current leadership, the former full-time pastor, and pastors who served on a limited basis.

Pertinent literature, both theological and biblical, was identified for a doctrinal framework that accounts for the confessional subscription of a Lutheran Church Missouri Synod congregation, as well as the scriptural practices and change dynamics that shape member congregations. Common practices of healthy parishes, as well as a Lutheran understanding of healthy worship provided for the goal and plan for implementation. To implement the desired change, significant training, mentoring and expository preaching are vital. Reversing the statistical decline of the test congregation involves numerous volunteers, as well as the cooperation of the pastor and other leaders. An evaluation following field-testing will lead to replication additional declining congregations.

Content Reader: Randy Rowland, DMin

Words: 293

C. S. Lewis wrote, “The perfect church service would be the one we were almost unaware of, our attention would have been on God.”¹ However, we are distracted when the pastor mangles a word, a microphone fails, a note is sounded in error, or a child cries. When one’s focus is occupied on the worship mechanics then one risks making those very mechanics superior to God. Naturally, those in worship will seek to lay blame on the pastor for their discontented mind, a sacrament that no longer meets their expectation, and the abundance of empty seats. For the pastor who humbly serves the local parish each week, who tirelessly visits the sick, counsels the troubled, and administers the Word and sacraments, this project is dedicated. On this side of heaven, you serve with little recognition, often sacrifice your health and family relationships for the sake of others, and are the target of the tempter’s constant deception. To you brothers and sisters, remember your calling, *Christo et Ecclesiae*

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly On Prayer* (New York: Mariner Books, 2002), 29.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my wife and family, my friends, various church boards, Fuller professors and staff, and not the least, my editor. To you I owe a debt of thanks that can never be repaid. To my hematologists and nurses who served as God's instruments to manage a cancer that threatened to end my life, I owe you the deepest gratitude.

To Nathan and Isaac,
"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might"
(Ephesians 6:10).

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INTRODUCTION

“And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other”
(Acts 15:39).¹

The sustainability of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) is an open question and though it is the target of this paper, the denomination is not alone in its peril. It is estimated that 1 percent of all U.S. congregations, approximately 3,500 to 4,000 churches, disband annually. An overwhelming majority of American churches (80 to 85 percent) are on the declining side of a typical bell curve life cycle.² According to the *New York Times*, “Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension, and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.”³

The LCMS noted that only 59 percent of the total number of Synod congregations reported their statistical data for the year 2013. Acknowledging that the data may be misleading due to low reporting participation, the Synod stated that baptized membership for 2013 declined by 33,090 (or 1.51 percent) from 2012, Sunday school enrollment decreased 13,921, and the total number of LCMS congregations remained flat despite a

¹ All Scripture, unless otherwise noted, is quoted from *The Lutheran Study Bible, English Standard Version* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, October 2009).

² Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2003), 10.

³ Paul Vitello, “Taking a Break from the Lord’s Work,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/nyregion/02burnout.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed October 14 2014).

renewed emphasis on new starts. Fewer children were baptized in 2013 (-3,599), fewer teenagers were confirmed (-2,593) and only 8,442 adults professed their faith,⁴ a decrease of 16.735 percent from 2012. The average attendance at weekly worship services of congregations for 2013 versus 2012 remained virtually unchanged, though it actually increased by three (154 versus 151).⁵

The LCMS is an aging church; that does not bode well for its long-term survival. According to the Pew Research Center's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of 2008, only 11 percent of the adult membership is between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age. This compares to the total national population of 20 percent. In the next age group, thirty through forty-nine, the LCMS average age falls at 32 percent while nationally, 39 percent of the population is in the age group.⁶ The trend reverses as age increases. The LCMS records 31 percent compared to 25 percent nationally between ages fifty and sixty-four with 26 percent of its members age sixty-five or older compared to 16 percent nationally.⁷ Overall, Mainline Protestant churches as a group reflect the national population much more favorably. Mainline Protestant churches also include American Baptist Churches in the USA, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

⁴ Profession of faith refers to a confession of faith typically spoken by a former member wishing to return to membership.

⁵ Joe Isenhower, Jr., "Lower Response Clouds 2013 Statistics for Congregations," *Reporter*, September 3, 2014/Updated September 17, 2014, <http://blogs.lcms.org/2014/2013-statistics> (accessed October 10, 2014).

⁶ The Pew Forum, "Religious Landscape Survey, Religious Beliefs and Practices, Diverse and Politically Relevant: Detailed Data Tables," [pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2008/06/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf), June 2008 accessed <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2008/06/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2014).

⁷ Isenhower, "Lower Response Clouds 2013 Statistics for Congregations."

America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.⁸

Even more telling are the unresolved theological issues within the LCMS. These issues have caused decades-long divisions, which have contributed to the Synod's decline, taken the focus off spiritual pursuits and exasperated clergy, lay leadership and members of local congregations. A review of literature will show that resources exist that can help clergy and congregations reverse decline and that resources exist that actually may contribute to the decline.

I am a LCMS pastor of thirty-five years who has witnessed not only much of the aforementioned decline, but also God at work through the local church. The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to help pastors and members of declining congregations in the LCMS address membership decline, realizing a statistically verifiable membership increase within three years. To implement the desired change, significant prayer, mentoring, training and teaching is needed.

Though the sustainability of the LCMS is an open question, it stands to reason that the Synod will grow proportionally if local congregations are healthy, growing spiritually, reaching the unchurched and adding to their baptized memberships. This project is designed to provide resources, as well as a skilled, experienced pastor to walk alongside one specific congregation in decline so that the experiences/results from the project may be used to help pastors and members of other declining congregations in the

⁸ Barna Group, "Survey Reveals the Life Christians Desire," July 21, 2008, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/congregations/29-survey-reveals-the-life-christians-desire#.Vp1dj6T2aM8> (accessed April 25, 2015).

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. A detailed analysis of the test congregation will present significant historical experiences and geographical trends, which can be subsequently identified in other declining congregations. Providing resources that will enable accepting clergy and their congregations to reverse the declining trend is viewed as a God-pleasing solution with direct application to many Christian churches experiencing similar trends.

The district president of the Northern Illinois District of the LCMS invited me to provide pastoral counsel and, God willing, affect a turnaround at Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Risen Savior) in Byron, near beleaguered Rockford, IL. I began walking alongside this congregation in July 2014. The congregation subsequently adopted the district president's suggestion and agreed to my services *pro bono*. A sound relationship has been established.

This project is rooted in first-century Christianity. St. Luke ends his narrative of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 by reporting that three thousand people accepted St. Peter's message and were baptized (Acts 2:41). Immediately afterwards he describes a life centered on the apostles' teaching, fellowship at the Table of the Lord (breaking of bread) and prayer (42). It is a new life with communal care for each other (44-45). Luke further describes satisfied hearts that praise God and win the favor of all people (47). R.C.H. Lenski, a Lutheran theologian of the last century, wrote a highly-regarded commentary series on the New Testament. He writes, "Here we have a brief description of the religious life of the first century Christian congregation. All the essentials are present and are in proper order and harmony. The church has always felt that this is the model. One wishes that Luke had said more. The dominating feature is the teaching

(Word) and the Sacrament.”⁹ In other words, viewing this pericope as the New Testament definition of a healthy church is appropriate.

It is proposed that a strategy be implemented that will enable Risen Savior to reverse the trend of recent years and growth numerically as well as spiritually. Spiritual growth cannot be stressed enough. Luke records, “The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied” (Acts 9:31). Referring to the entire Christian Body, the Church as a whole is encouraged by the Holy Spirit and “it multiplied.” A successful strategy for growth must recognize the power of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus spoke to the Apostles shortly before his ascension, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Once equipped with the power of the Spirit the community of believers is to witness their faith in the broader community. The congregation will understand that they are indeed equipped by the Spirit and are to share the Gospel publically.

The process that will be implemented at Risen Savior can be replicated at other churches. Through regular preaching, teaching and forming relationships, a facilitator will underscore the necessity of evangelism. The facilitator is typically an experienced pastor who can walk alongside the congregation and especially its pastor and leadership as they undergo significant change. The facilitator will work with the pastor and other participants to collaborate as they explore topics or issues. The goal is to encourage all

⁹ R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1934), 117.

participants to think with an evangelical heart in all situations emphasizing salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, through prayer and the facilitator's efforts, participants will learn to articulate key ideas, ask vital questions, uncover variables and find God-pleasing solutions.

This facilitator will provide training for the pastors, leaders and the entire worshipping community. While seeking to emulate the values and behavior of Jesus Christ, the facilitator will set the example in both word and deed for the pastor and other participants. The congregation's goals and values will be integrated into the training as participants see the training as a means to strengthen their effectiveness, as they work to become a healthy congregation.

With an emphasis on Word and Sacrament ministry while recognizing that the Holy Spirit works sanctification, the facilitator will strive to prepare the people to work together as a team with their next pastor. A goal to reverse membership decline within three years will be adopted. The facilitator also will provide a mentoring program to commence for members, leadership as well as future pastors, and leaders. Appropriate training to multiply the ministry is a key component to a healthy congregation.

The necessity of providing coaching in some manner is underscored in an unpublished manuscript by L. Dean Hempelmann, executive director, LCMS Pastoral Education. Hempelmann quotes R. Reed Lessing, associate professor, Exegetical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, as follows:

Eighty percent of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod congregations are stagnant or declining, yet we send [seminarians] out on vicarage to do their evangelism module in these kinds of churches. This is allowing the blind to lead the blind. Our seminaries need to mandate (again) at least one course in parish evangelism. Many, if not most of our graduates do not know how to lead an Adult Bible Class

that is engaging, practical, and attracts new members. Our seminaries need to mandate a class on how to teach adults. Finally, generally speaking, our preaching is all too often canned, shallow, trite, and full of theological language that lacks rhetorical power. It is time candidly to admit this and move in ways that will raise up a new generation of dynamic and faithful preachers.¹⁰

Facilitating a coaching process in the local church can help, but coaching is not a silver-bullet solution. It is not a replacement for the mysterious and essential presence of God's Spirit. As St. Paul reminds the reader, "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tm 1:7). God's power is intimately connected to the Holy Spirit. Coaching can be a method to unleash this power ushering a fresh way of relating and conversing so a church can create new possibilities, take new and intentional actions and reach new places in the journey toward serving Christ and His world.

¹⁰ L. Dean Hempelmann, "Theological Challenges - Preparing Pastors to Shepherd God's People: Putting the Gospel into Practice," <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=726&DocID=1310> (accessed February 6, 2015).

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

COMMUNITY AND TEST CHURCH CONTEXT

Tracing its roots to a midweek devotion in the community room of a senior apartment complex, Risen Savior began worship services on November 20, 2005 under the name Winnebago Lutheran Mission Church. The excited group of believers began full of promise and with great expectations, as one may expect from any new church start. They gathered at the Winnebago Township Hall in a community of 5,200 people, eight-miles west of Rockford. A pastor well known and respected throughout the community from his thirty years of continuous service in the same Rockford congregation officiated at the service. Enjoying support from other Lutheran congregations and pastors in the area, residents from Winnebago Township were encouraged to participate in the inaugural service.

Great expectations continued and the little congregation caught the attention of the LCMS and was the subject of an online article published as a “Witnessing Story” for the Ablaze movement that served as a “global Lutheran Mission movement to encourage

and celebrate witnessing our faith in Jesus Christ.”¹ In the article titled “A Small Church Reaches Out,” Diane Strzelecki, wrote in 2008,

Winnebago Lutheran Mission Church in Winnebago, Illinois, west of Rockford on Hwy. 20, has accomplished much since their first gathering on Sunday, November 20, 2005. What began as a mid-week devotion in the community room of a senior apartment complex has grown to a Sunday service in the Winnebago Town Hall. Attendance has more than doubled, from 18 to 50. They have developed three small group Bible studies: a daytime outreach to women in the Byron, Illinois, area and a men’s evening group and women’s evening group in Winnebago. Small town, small church, small budget, part-time pastor: how does a small mission make an impact in its community in such a way that the church grows?²

This was the first recorded account of the mission. The article described the enthusiasm of the members, which included intentional outreach into the surrounding communities. This passion continued throughout the next two years, resulting in additional members as well as at least two additional significant historic events for the people of the church and community.

Choosing a new name to signify worship attendance growth, the worshipers who consistently attended worship decided to change the name from Winnebago Lutheran Mission Church to Risen Savior Lutheran Church in April 2009.³ This followed considerable discussion and prayer. Various names were subsequently suggested, a list was compiled, and the suggested names were reduced over consecutive Sundays through

¹ Witnessing stories are defined as real faith-sharing stories from Lutheran Church Missouri Synod members and partners worldwide who have shared their faith with family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers, as well as other people God brought into their paths. Ablaze Movement, <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=649> (accessed October 25, 2015).

² Diane Strzelecki, “A Small Church Reaches Out,” June 2008, <http://www.peopleablaze.org/%20PrintPage.asp?PageID=9565> (accessed October 25, 2014).

³ Risen Savior Lutheran Church, “A New Name,” Risen Savior Lutheran Church, April 12, 2009, <http://www.risensaviorlutheranchurch.com/Site/History/Archive.html> (accessed October 27, 2014).

secret ballots. The final vote on the new name was taken following the Easter Sunday service to determine the selection of the majority.

Nearly six years after its founding, the congregation relocated to the city of Byron, having outgrown its original facilities. Byron is seventeen miles southwest of Rockford, alongside the Rock River and is known as the location of the Byron Nuclear Generating station, one of the last nuclear power plants commissioned in the United States. More than 600 people from the surrounding communities are employed at the station.⁴

History of Current Leadership and Pastors

On May 15, 2011, Risen Savior held its first service at the former Byron Public Library. Pictures taken at that service show it was well attended. All of the seats were filled, and some even stood for the hour-long service.⁵ Renting space in the former city library and adopting the mission statement “Real Connections, Real Life” the community of believers at Risen Savior settled into their new location. The congregation drew between twenty and thirty high school students every week for their youth ministry during this initial relocation.

Later that same summer, the mission church intentionally reached out to their new home community through a Vacation Bible School program. With a “goal to connect

⁴ Byron Generating Station, “Home Page,” <http://www.exeloncorp.com/locations?type=major%20locations> (accessed October 25, 2014).

⁵ Records of Risen Savior Lutheran Church Board of Director, May 2012.

with and be a blessing to the community,”⁶ more than thirty youth and twelve adults under the leadership of the vicar with oversight by the mission’s founding pastor conducted “Three Days, Three Random Acts of Awesome for our Community.” Visiting the fire department, library and neighbors, twenty children along with these teenagers and adult volunteers, prepared snacks, cards of appreciation and offered prayers at each location.

The same pastor served the congregation for six years with occasional assistance from a vicar. Attendance records indicate an average worship service of thirty-six the year the congregation moved. However, in 2011, average weekly attendance reached fifty and income was sufficient to call a full-time pastor with a modest grant from the Northern Illinois District.

On Sunday, June 17, 2012, Risen Savior welcomed its first full-time pastor. He was a recent graduate of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, specializing in Community Outreach. The members warmly received the new pastor and his family. Once again, the euphoria that accompanied the beginning of the mission returned. However, this excitement, and commitment to a mission statement with a new pastor in a new location did not result in numerical growth. In fact, the new pastor resigned on June 30, 2014, just two years after his arrival. Attendance, along with income, decreased significantly. Falling from a previous average of fifty, attendance stood at an average of twenty when

⁶ Records of Risen Savior Lutheran Church Board of Director, June 2012.

the pastor resigned. All small-group Bible studies concluded and the youth ministry program, which once counted forty-five active members, disbanded.⁷

It was a faith shaking experience for the members of the still developing church. In less than ten years, Risen Savior went from “great expectations” to a church in drastic decline. An in-depth look at the history of Risen Savior’s leadership offers many clues as to how the decline occurred. As previously stated Risen Savior’s founding (part-time) pastor was experienced and approaching retirement age. Shortly after changing its name to Risen Savior, the church entered into a new venture in August of 2009 that would provide them with a greater pastoral presence at their fledging congregation. They reached a decision to collaborate with a long-established congregation, St. John Lutheran Church, in Pecatonica, IL, approximately nine miles northeast of the Winnebago Township building where Risen Savior was meeting at the time. Both congregations would share a vicar, a seminary student who was serving a one-year internship. The worshipping community of Risen Savior anticipated that “the mission benefits from young, enthusiastic leadership in outreach.”⁸

Partially funded through an Ablaze Mission Outpost Grant, the vicar was selected by the Northern Illinois District’s Mission Facilitators together with St. John’s Lutheran Church pastor, “both for what he can bring to Risen Savior’s and St. John’s outreach goals, but also for his potential to be a mission planting pastor wherever the Lord calls

⁷ Information drawn from the official records of Risen Savior Lutheran Church, Board of Ministry Directors meeting minutes, May 2012 to July 2014.

⁸ New Starts New Believers, “Risen Savior Partners with St. John in Vicar Program,” August 9, 2009, <http://www.ni.lcms.org/Index.asp?PageID=10978> (accessed October 7, 2014).

him in future ministry.”⁹ Significantly, Risen Savior’s congregation was not consulted in the selection process.

The following summer (June 2010) five representatives of the mission attended the Church Planting Essentials Workshop. This two-day seminar designed for new church plants assisted in the development of a detailed Mission Initiation Plan for participants.¹⁰ The vicar, along with the founding pastor, his wife, and the congregations’ president attended the meeting. There is no record of any formal activity following this conference. The anticipated development of a formal mission initiation plan did not occur.

After worshipping in the Winnebago Town Hall for five years, the mission congregation outgrew its facilities. With an active youth group of twenty-to-thirty students from the nearby community of Byron meeting weekly, Bible studies in Byron that collaborated with the local community organizations in a program called “Random Acts of Awesome” and a significant number of regular worshipers living in Byron, the decision to move to a larger facility in Byron was obvious. In addition, no other LCMS congregation is located in the vicinity that would cause offense if members from the established congregation began to attend the mission congregation.

Following completion of the yearlong vicarage, the seminary student left the mission to complete his final year of formal education. On July 24, 2011, the mission leadership who offered prayers as well as gifts on his behalf organized a farewell

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Center for United States Missions, Irvine, CA, <http://www.centerforusmissions.com/Services/Seminars/ChurchPlantingEssentials/tabid/263/Default.aspx> (accessed November 11, 2014).

gathering. A video tribute was prepared for this event, which marked the end of the first part-time worker's service for the mission.

Another video tribute was prepared in October 2011, the traditional Pastor Appreciate Month, for the mission's founding pastor in recognition of his years of service to the mission. The mission also sponsored an entry into the Byron Museum Christmas Tree Contest the next month. Decorated with gauze, red and green ribbons with bandages and lifesaver ornaments, the tree held a cross with the Scripture, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18) displayed. This Christmas tree with an obvious Gospel message was the final outreach project before welcoming the first full-time pastor, Jacob Dickerhoff.

Having graduated from Concordia Seminary the previous month, Dickerhoff, an inexperienced pastor, a married father of four young children, was installed on Sunday, June 17, 2012, as the pastor of Risen Savior Lutheran Mission. The recorded history of the mission notes the next event in the mission some nine months in the future as Risen Savior Lutheran Mission became an official congregation of the Northern Illinois District Lutheran Missouri Synod. The celebration was held on March 10, 2013 with every member present signing the congregation charter.¹¹ The young mission was now officially Risen Savior.

Dickerhoff attended a Lutheran Church elementary school and De Smet Jesuit High School, a college preparatory school, in suburban St. Louis, for his high school years. He received a bachelor of arts in Theology and Pre-seminary Studies, from

¹¹ Signing the Congregation Charter was possible because the Mission Congregation received approval for incorporation in the State of Illinois and was granted legal status.

Concordia University, Wisconsin and enrolled at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The third year of his studies included an internship at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Edmond, OK. He received the Master of Divinity from Concordia Seminary and began serving Risen Savior shortly thereafter.¹²

Only three pastors have served Risen Savior for an extended time during its ten-year history. Many others have served as guest pastors, leading worship and preaching for one or two weeks. Dickerhoff was the first pastor specifically assigned by the judicatory to the congregation. As mentioned above his term of service began in June 2012 and ended two years later.

Robert Rub, who served as the pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Rockford, IL for thirty-two years (November 1973 through May 2005), was the founding pastor of what was then the Winnebago Lutheran Mission. Beginning in November 2005, Rub has been the single constant figure at Risen Savior, leading worship and preaching more often than any other pastor. Presently, he secures pastors from the larger Lutheran community to lead Sunday Service as he seeks to reduce his influence and presence at Risen Savior due to his advanced age.

The third pastor to serve Risen Savior was actually the vicar previously discussed. Josh Miller, who since September 2012 has served as associate pastor of Community of Life Lutheran Church in Oregon, WI, served Risen Savior from June 2010 to July 2011. Following his service in Byron, he returned to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis to complete his formal education and become eligible for ordination.

¹²The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Directory, <http://www.lcms.org/> (accessed November 20, 2014).

Throughout its relatively brief existence, there have been a number of significant periods of change. Risen Savior has called three different locations home, two of which are in its present city location. Two full-time church workers led the church. Both left: one as anticipated after the one-year internship and the second unexpectedly after two years. The congregation also underwent a name change. As of this writing, it is without a regular Sunday morning worship leader. During Dickerhoff's pastorate, elected leadership often resigned before their initial term expired.¹³ Sometimes the resignation from the board of ministry directors was accompanied by a resignation from the congregation. For example, three board members resigned during a meeting on September 29, 2013, and two of them resigned from the congregation.¹⁴

The current president of the congregation is Glenn Becker. He assumed office when the previous president abruptly resigned. Subsequently, a controversy developed over congregation confirmed membership. When votes were necessary during a congregation meeting to elect officers, some people assumed they were confirmed members because they signed the congregation charter some eighteen months previously. The dilemma before the young congregation concerned the question of the elected leadership's legitimacy to hold office. If the officers were elected into office improperly through votes cast by people unqualified to be members and thus not entitled to the right of the franchise then any decision reached by the voter's assembly and board of ministry

¹³ Secretary, Board of Ministry Directors Meeting Minutes, January 5, 2014, 1.

¹⁴ Secretary, Board of Ministry Directors Meeting Minutes, September 29, 2013, 4.

directors was invalid.¹⁵ The Constitution and Bylaws of Risen Savior offer the following definitions and requirements of membership:

- A. Confirmed members are all baptized persons within the congregation who have received a course of instruction in Christian doctrine that meets with the approval of the Board of Ministry Directors.
- B. Persons seeking to attain confirmed membership may do so through the following ways:
 - 1. Transfer from another congregation of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
 - 2. Reaffirmation of faith following a period of noninvolvement in The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
 - 3. Profession of faith from a non-Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Lutheran Congregation
 - 4. Adult confirmation for those from a non-Lutheran background¹⁶

Dickerhoff was formally requested by the board of ministry directors to provide a list of members per his responsibilities as detailed in the bylaws: “(The Board of Ministry Directors shall) Exercise with the Senior Administrative Pastor discipline within the congregation with respect to all matters of membership of the congregation as provided in the Constitution and Bylaws.”¹⁷ Future minutes from the board of ministry directors do not indicate that Dickerhoff complied with the request. During the first year of Dickerhoff’s tenure, average weekly attendance declined from fifty-five to twenty-eight.

As discussion continued regarding membership requirements as well as the authority of board action over the previous eighteen months, and a significant membership decline, the Northern Illinois District of the LCMS initiated a process of mediation between the board, Dickerhoff and representatives of the Northern Illinois

¹⁵ Secretary, Board of Ministry Directors Meeting Minutes , January 5, 2014, Exhibit 1, 4 ff.

¹⁶ Constitution and Bylaws of Lutheran Church Article 2.A.B.

¹⁷ Ibid., Article 11.A.8.

District Mission staff along with the Northern Illinois District President. Spending a day in an informal mediation session discussing the issues resulted in three requirements for continuation of the Northern Illinois District grant that subsidized Dickerhoff's salary and expenses.

The district president required, "The Board of Ministry Directors is to receive Policy Based Training, and implement the same during their meetings." In addition, "Pastor Dickerhoff is required to receive Pastoral Leadership Training," and finally, "A Pastoral Support Committee is to be established."¹⁸ This was an extraordinary request from the district president. All three directives targeted the young pastor with specialized training. No additional actions were taken to assess the health of the congregation and provide support if necessary. It was clear to the pastor that in the eyes of the district president, the majority of the fault fell to him. It is certainly more efficient to change the direction of one individual rather than an entire church.

The unhealthy, dysfunctional nature of the congregation continued. Offering Policy Based Governance Training to the board and pastor through observation of a governing board at another congregation did not occur. Instead, the pastor and the board president visited with a pastor skilled in Policy Based Governance for an afternoon. Insights from that training were subsequently shared with the board as a whole.

A form of Pastoral Leadership Training began four months after the mediation when the district president invited me to provide pastoral counseling to Dickerhoff. Meeting bi-monthly for six months allowed Dickerhoff the opportunity to walk alongside

¹⁸ Secretary, Board of Ministry Directors Meeting Minutes, September 5, 2014.

a colleague with substantially more experience. Through prayer, discussion, confession as well as directed intervention, Dickerhoff independently concluded that resigning as pastor of Risen Savior was in the best interests of his family and career. The pastor recognized that for him to continue serving the congregation he would need to make significant changes. The ministry decisions he made in his brief tenure were often in conflict with the lay leadership.

After resigning from Risen Savior, Dickerhoff along with his wife and four children relocated to her family home in Colorado. With no regular income and no employment for either husband or wife (she was in the third trimester of pregnancy), the relocation presented the young family with significant challenges. Dickerhoff accepted the first position offered and is now serving under the senior pastor at Zion Lutheran Church and School in Brighton, CO on a part-time basis.¹⁹ It was an abrupt ending to a tumultuous period in the history of Risen Savior.

However, Dickerhoff's pastorate was not the only thing that was unhealthy. For example, the Pastoral Support Committee was given the charge by the district president to, "Meet informally and regularly with the pastor to listen and advise." Furthermore, they were directed to be a "sounding board for the pastor," as well as to "alert the pastor to any concerns" and finally provide "for the welfare of the pastor and his family."²⁰ The committee was appointed by the chair of the board of ministry directors but did not initiate any discussion with the pastor.

¹⁹ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Directory, http://locator.lcms.org/nworkers_frm/w_detail.asp?W1140020 (accessed November 20, 2014).

²⁰ Secretary, Board of Ministry Directors Meeting Minutes, September 5, 2014.

Policy Based Governance and the appointment of a Pastoral Support Committee are characteristic of Lutheran congregations. All congregations are organized constitutionally along guidelines established by the “Commission on Constitutional Matters of The LCMS.”²¹ Following the detailed guidelines and submitting the proposed constitution to the Northern Illinois District for review and approval by the board of directors ensured that the constitution provided for a governance structure in line with other constitutions of the sister congregations.²²

The decision-making process at Risen Savior is vested in the Voters Assembly. This assembly consists of all confirmed members, eighteen years of age and older, present at a regular or special meeting of the congregation. Required to meet only once per year, the constitution empowers the Board of Ministry Directors to be the governing body of the congregation and is responsible to administer all of the congregation’s affairs between Voters Assembly meetings. Only four exceptions to this power are noted. The Board of Ministry Directors cannot add or remove a called worker, dissolve the congregation, adopt an annual budget or purchase or sell church property.

The constitution identifies four elected officers of the congregation: president, president-elect, secretary and treasurer. Annual elections occur at the regular Voters Assemble meeting. The Pastor is an *ex officio* member granted the franchise in the event of a tie vote. The Board of Ministry Directors sets policy while the pastor is responsible for policy implementation. While the Board of Ministry Directors retains authority over

²¹ Commission on Constitutional Matters, “Leadership and Structure: Commission on Constitutional Matters,” The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, <http://www.lcms.org/ccm> (accessed October 25, 2014).

²² Constitution and Bylaws of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2.2.1.b.

staff, that authority is delegated to the pastor for day-to-day administrative functions. This governance model is typical of congregations this size. It is not necessarily the best model for growth but it provides sufficient checks and balances for the officers and pastor.

Sustainability of the Test Congregation

The unexpected, quick departure of the pastor and his family brought about significant unhealthy change to the church. Soon the board of directors would reject the former pastor's request to gift him various electronic items including a laptop computer. They elected to save them for the pastor. When he began his ministry these were freely purchased by the same leadership as tools the pastor needed for ministry. The former pastor felt a sense of entitlement. Little, if any attempt, was taken by either party to resolve this difference.

Unfortunately, the office of pastor at Risen Savior has remained vacant since July 2014 when Dickerhoff resigned. At the time of this writing, pastors are invited to lead worship and deliver a sermon on Sunday mornings for the single service. However, the assignment of Dickerhoff to Risen Savior by the district president represents the typical candidate placement at similar congregations. The district and congregation wish to save funds so an inexperienced pastor is likely to be assigned to a congregation that would benefit greatly from an experienced pastor. An experienced pastor would more than likely not consider serving at a small, mission church because he will experience a salary

reduction. Charles Arn of Wesley Seminary noted, “Short-term pastorates essentially guarantee that a church will not grow.”²³

Demographics in the Community

While the young congregation in Byron was experiencing an inconsistent period of growth and decline in its early history, the community of Byron on the other hand, enjoyed a stable population. Following an aggregate 12 percent increase during the last fifteen years, the population is expected to decrease only 0.2 percent in the next decade.²⁴ Faith and religious involvement in the community has decreased 8.1 percent, which compares favorably with the United States decrease of 8.5 percent. However, a greater percentage of the population is involved in a religious activity than the United States average (43.9 percent compared to 38.9 percent). Religious activity is projected to decrease about 8 percent in the next ten years and less than half of the population is projected to view their religious faith as significant to life. It is noteworthy that 62.7 percent of the population expects to worship weekly, which is very similar to the data reported for the entire United States, 65.6 percent.²⁵

Among the surveyed religious traditions, Catholics have the highest number of respondents at 23.7 percent, although this is a 4.3 percent decrease in the last decade.

²³ Charles Arn, “Pastoral Longevity and Church Growth,” Wesley Seminary @ IWU Blog, November 4, 2012, <http://wesleyconnectonline.com/pastoral-longevity-and-church-growth-charles-arn/> (accessed March 12, 2016).

²⁴ US Census Bureau, “Quadrennium Report 6-9,” Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite, <http://missioninsite.com/> (accessed November 1, 2014).

²⁵ US Census Bureau, “Executive Insite Report 5-8,” Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite/MissionInsite, <http://missioninsite.com/> (accessed November 14, 2014).

Those indicating a Lutheran tradition are the second highest at 10.9 percent with a 1.2 percent decrease in the last decade. More than two-thirds of the community (68.1 percent) chose a Christian Religious preference, while 27.3 percent indicate they do not prefer a specific spiritual tradition. This later preference has increased 6.5 percent in the last decade, the greatest change among all the options in the census data.

Twenty-two denominational affiliations are reported in the sample area. Of these, 40.4 percent identify themselves with the Roman Catholic Church, 14 percent with the United Methodist Church and the third highest total is the 9.6 percent of the population who identify themselves with the LCMS. Within a five-mile radius of Risen Savior, there is a population of 11,061. Extrapolating 9.6 percent of the estimated population presents a figure of approximately 1,062 people. Twenty-four currently attend weekly worship service at Risen Savior. However, a significant number of residents within five miles of the church identify themselves as affiliated with the same denomination and do not worship at Risen Savior.

Risen Savior is the only congregation of the LCMS in the city of Byron. In fact, there are no other congregations of the same denomination within thirteen miles of Risen Savior's location. Eleven congregations of the LCMS are located within fifteen miles.²⁶

Census data reports on the multiplicity of the community is shaped by the racial diversity and ethnicity of the people residing in the sample area. This data indicates that the Asian (non-Hispanic), Black, African-American (non-Hispanic), Hispanic or Latino and Pacific Island (including American Indian and others non-Hispanic races) are 5.1

²⁶ Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, "Church Locator," http://locator.lcms.org/nchurches_frm/c_summary.asp (accessed November 14, 2014).

percent of the total population. The largest groups are those identified as Hispanic, which makes up only 2.7 percent of the population. There is no expected change among any of the race and ethnic groups in the next decade. Those who identify themselves as White make up 94.9 percent of the population.²⁷

Risen Savior has a membership that is too small to sample accurately; but those who worship regularly and serve in leadership do appear to represent the census data without significant variation.²⁸ As the census data indicates, most people in the sample area are between thirty-five and fifty-four years old and are classified as “Family and Empty Nesters.” Only two people, a married couple are retired and older than sixty-five. Four children are enrolled in the Sunday school program.

In the next ten years, the number of households is anticipated to remain constant. The population of those households will also remain constant at 2.71 per household. A moderate decline of school-aged children is anticipated while community diversity should remain very homogeneous. White-collar occupations will increase slightly as will median family income. Family homes will remain two-parent households and adults will reach higher levels of education when compared to the state of Illinois. Religiosity will fall in the next decade to “very low” levels.²⁹ The U.S. Census Bureau determines religiosity by measuring religious beliefs and practices as residents choose among five variables. Respondents are asked to self-identify as a Conservative Evangelical Christian,

²⁷ Ibid., US Census Bureau, “Quick Insite Report,” Synergos Technologies Inc., Experian, DecisionInsite, <http://missioninsite.com/> (accessed November 14, 2014).

²⁸ Interviews conducted by the author on September 7, 2014.

²⁹ Ibid., US Census Bureau, “Quick Insite Report.”

a Spiritual Christian, a viewer of religious television programs, one who attends religious services, or finally one who expresses their faith as very important. The estimated percent of residents in the study area for each of the five variables is significantly lower than the estimated percent of people in the State of Illinois in each category.³⁰

The present leadership of Risen Savior consists of men and women who have continued to worship and contribute since the beginning of the mission nine years ago, as well as people that have joined in the past two years or longer. They worship regularly, continue to contribute financially, seek direction and advice from district leaders, exhibit their faith in the workplace and community, and give every indication they are willing to work diligently for the welfare of others.

The long-term sustainability of Risen Savior is at risk when the objective data is considered. Only one full-time pastor who resigned after only two years has served the church. Presently, pastors typically retired or without a church assignment are engaged weekly by the church to officiate the liturgy and deliver a sermon to serve the church. As noted previously, attendance has risen slightly but it remains at half the levels before Dickerhoff began his service.

Risen Savior has an opportunity for growth numerically and spiritually. The demographics suggest that a significant percentage of the population within five miles of the church is of the same denomination. If they are worshipping at a Lutheran Congregation, they are commuting at least thirty miles to and from that church.

³⁰ Ibid., 10.

Bob Whitesel in his volume *Cure for the Common Church* underscores the significance of the present situation and the prospects for long-term sustainability. He estimates “that a church today needs to average about 175 adult attendees in weekend worship for it to have the resources to offer the level of ministry that people expect today. . . . Some estimates are that the average church in North America has only around seventy-five adult attendees each weekend.”³¹ With less than Whitesel’s estimate for average worship attendance attending worship at Risen Savior, intervention of some form appears appropriate for the struggling mission church to flourish.

Lyle Schaller offers a possible remedy in his book, *Discontinuity and Hope*. Noting that religious traditions in America “display a far higher level of trust in the laity to create, own, staff, and operate new ministries. . . . When challenged, when offered the appropriate type of training experiences, when the ecclesiastical structure is encouraging and supportive, and when the assignment is ministry, not administration, the laity are responding in huge numbers and with extraordinary effectiveness.”³² Schaller encourages a planning model based on an abundance of gifted people involved in doing ministry.

In addition, the census data reports that 56.1 percent of the study area is not involved in any religious congregation or community. This population of people with no church involvement is expected to grow 6.5 percent in the next ten years. The historic, mainline Protestant denominations, including the LCMS are expected to grow only 3

³¹ Bob Whitesel. *Cure for the Common Church: God's Plan to Restore Church Health* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012),

³² Lyle E Schaller, *Discontinuity, and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 48-51.

percent while the Catholic and Orthodox congregations are projected to decrease 4 percent.³³

St. Paul wrote St. Timothy from his Roman prison cell awaiting execution. He knew that since his life would soon end, he needed to encourage young Timothy in the midst of ongoing opposition. Paul's words are appropriate for the leadership of Risen Savior also: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tm 1:6-7). The leadership has the ability and power to succeed. Through the power of the Holy Spirit as well as a consultation process, the church can most certainly grow.

Through this detailed analysis of the test congregation, significant historical experiences and geographical trends were uncovered. These will subsequently be identified in other declining congregations regardless of church body. Unresolved theological issues within denominations such as the LCMS combined with an exasperated clergy of recent decades have contributed to its unhealthy nature. If clergy and congregations are provided the means to reverse unhealthy declining tendencies, their congregation may experience actual numerical and spiritual growth. Applying these same principles in other Christian denominations will serve the common good.

³³ US Census Bureau, "Quadrennium Report, Graph View."

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theological Foundations and Confessional Subscription

This project requires a broad range of resources that will provide congregations and consultants the direction necessary to address issues of declining churches in the LCMS. Often unresolved theological issues within the denomination and exasperated clergy as well as laypeople in recent decades have contributed to this decline. Reviewing literature that offers solutions as well as additional literature that may actually contribute to the decline is necessary. Moreover, providing resources that will enable willing clergy and their congregations to reverse the declining trend is essential and a God-pleasing solution. These resources also have direct application to the wide range of Christian churches experiencing similar trends.

***The Book of Concord* by Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert and James Schaffer**

Kolb, Wengert, and Schaffer provide a collection of documents from the fourth through sixteenth centuries in which Christians elucidated their doctrine in detail. Many Lutherans hold *The Book of Concord* in such high regard only the Bible takes

precedence. It contains what Lutherans refer to as the confessions, that is, ten statements of faith that Lutherans use as official explanations and summaries of what they believe, teach and confess publically. The three creeds, the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed, comprise the initial section of the book. Significant writings from the period of the Protestant Reformation follow. Composed by individuals that identified themselves with the teachings of Martin Luther, these documents are required readings in the seminaries of the LCMS. “The Augsburg Confession,” the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” “Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms” and the “Formula of Concord” are included in *The Book of Concord*. First published in 1580, the Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles were written by Martin Luther. A close associate of Luther, Phillip Melanchthon, wrote the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and the Treatise. Other notable figures from the Protestant Reformation including Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, Nicholas Selnecker, David Chytraeus, Andrew Musculus and Christopher Koerner brought the ten documents together into its final form.

Members of the LCMS (including congregations, pastors, and teachers) consent to the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant word of God. Its members also subscribe unconditionally to all the confession documents as compiled in the Book of Concord, “as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.”¹ Members regard

¹ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Constitution of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Article II.2.

the doctrinal content of the Book of Content as authoritative for all pastors, congregations and other rostered church workers of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.²

At the ordination of every pastor in the LCMS and at every subsequent rite of installation, when any pastor begins service in another congregation, the district president or his designate will direct a number of questions during a public worship setting to the pastor. This dialog includes the historic language of confessional subscription:

Do you believe and confess the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice? Do you believe and confess the three ecumenical Creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and do you reject all the errors, which they condemn? Do you confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to be a true exposition of Holy Scripture and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? And do you confess that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Authority and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord—as these are contained in the 1580 Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this one scriptural faith?³

Each of the above questions includes the following prescribed answer for the candidate to be ordained or installed in a new setting following ordination: “Yes, I make these Confessions my own because they are in accord with the Word of God.”⁴

Ordination is required for anyone seeking to hold the office of pastor in the LCMS.⁵

² The Lutheran Confessions, The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, <http://www.lcms.org/lutheranconfessions> (accessed November 15, 2014).

³ The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 160.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Constitution and Bylaws of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Article 2.10.1

Congregations are required to engage pastors that are members of the LCMS if they wish to retain their own membership in the Synod.⁶

Initially the Confessions were offered to bring unity and harmony (concord). In fact, they have often become the subject of controversy and even conflict. For example, the Lord's Supper is one of only two sacraments in the LCMS. Yet, admittance to receive the sacrament has been a point of much contention among clergy in spite of the documents bringing clarity to this central doctrine of the church.

In 1997, the Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS affirmed "the right of its pastors and congregations to welcome to the Lord's Table those who, regardless of denominational affiliation, share our confession of Christ and our conviction of what He freely offers in the Eucharist."⁷ This resolution expressed the spirit of a prior document circulated in the district, *A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice*, namely: "Scripture imposes no denominational requirement on baptized Christians who accept the real presence and are able to examine themselves and desire to receive the body and blood of Christ offered in the Lord's Supper."⁸

The 1998 convention of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod asked the Commission on Theology and Church Relations⁹ to provide, "in a timely fashion, a

⁶ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Convention Handbook 2013* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014) Bylaw 2.5.2., 57.

⁷ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings, 1998* (St. Louis: Office of the Secretary, 1998), 115-16.

⁸ Committee for a Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice, *A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice* (Boca Raton, FL: Bishop and List Interests, 1996), 253.

⁹ The Commission on Theology and Church Relations provides study documents, opinions and statements on theological issues. Established in 1962, the commission provides guidance and leadership in

careful response to *A Declaration of Eucharistic Understanding and Practice*, with special emphasis on pastoral oversight and the role that agreement in the public confession of faith participation in the Lord's Supper entails." This response, directed the convention, should be beneficial "as the basis for study and discussion of this issue throughout the entire Synod."¹⁰

After ten years of study, the Commission published its findings in a sixty-four-page document entitled, *Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching*. The response was a clear denunciation of the Florida-Georgia District. It indicates:

There are *two* (SIC) reasons why people can be refused admission to the Lord's Supper. The first has to do with faith and discerning the body. Those who do not have such faith and discernment would commune in an unworthy manner and thereby receive God's judgment. But the second reason has to do with the need for a fitting confessional unity among those who commune together. Roman Catholic Christians, for example, may be perfectly prepared to receive the Lord's Supper in their own churches in a worthy manner and so to their own great blessing. But it would be unfitting for them, as confessors of their church body's error, to receive the Sacrament in our churches.¹¹

In comparison, Luther in his Small Catechism, one of the confessional documents subscribed to by the clergy of the LCMS, included in the *Book of Concord*, includes a brief section titled, "The Sacrament of Holy Communion." Luther indicated that faith is

the areas of theology and church relations. Constitution and Bylaws of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 3.9.2.

¹⁰ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 1998 Resolution 3-05 "To Reaffirm Our Practice of Admission to the Lord's Supper," *Convention Proceedings*, 115.

¹¹ The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, "Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching," November 1999, 54.

the sole requirement for admittance to the sacrament. He begins in typical fashion with a question and then follows with an answer. *The Book of Concord* indicates:

Luther said, Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily? Fasting and bodily preparation is, indeed, a fine external discipline; but a person who has faith in these words, “given for you” and “shed for you and the forgiveness of sins,” is really worthy and well prepared. However a person that does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.¹²

The question over admittance to Holy Communion has not been settled in the LCMS in spite of confessional doctrines and convention resolution. In May 2007, Clint Stark, a pastor in the LCMS, surveyed 6,000 pastors concerning worship practice. He discovered that 50.2 percent of the pastors in the Synod actually restrict communion to those with whom the Synod has declared fellowship. Over a third (35.53 percent) of the pastors will commune anyone who believes that the body and blood of Christ are present in the sacrament (Real Presence).¹³

The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel by C. F. W. Walther

Daniel Preus, son of Robert Preus, former president of Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne, IN (1974-1989), and a nephew of Jack Preus, former president of the LCMS (1969-1981) and grandson of J.A.O. Preus who served two terms as governor of Minnesota (1920-24) is the current Third Vice-President of the LCMS. For more than

¹² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 363:9-10.

¹³ Clint Stark, *What is Going on in the LC-MS? A Worship Practice Survey* (Fort Wayne, IN: Unpublished Thesis Concordia Theological Seminary, 2007) 21-27.

150 years, the Preus family has been leaders among strictly orthodox and even moderate Lutherans. In recent years, their influence has expanded to a national impact.¹⁴

Daniel Preus describes Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm (C.F.W.) Walther (1811-1887) as “arguably the most important theologian the Lutheran Church in America has ever had.”¹⁵ Walther served as the first president of the LCMS (1847-1850, 1864-1878). Described as a man who sacrificed his homeland, his health and nearly his life for the freedom to speak freely, to believe freely and to live freely, Walther held several key positions in the LCMS including forming its first seminary in 1839.¹⁶

Walther was a prolific writer who edited several periodicals including *Der Lutheraner* (*The Lutheran*) and *Lehre und Wehre* (*Doctrine and Defense*).¹⁷ *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* is a transcript of Walther’s Friday evening “Luther Hour” lectures, delivered at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, from September 12, 1884 to November 6, 1885.¹⁸ Preus believes this represents perhaps Walther’s greatest contribution to the church. He writes,

What may be his best work . . . is the reproduction of student notes taken by a stenographer from Walther’s lectures on Law and Gospel while he was a

¹⁴ Robert Ylvisaker, *Preus Family Shaped U.S. Lutheranism*, *Metro Lutheran*, August 29, 2001, <http://metrolutheran.org/> (accessed November 15, 2014).

¹⁵ Daniel Preus, “Law and Gospel and the State of the Church Today,” *Confessional Lutherans* (undated manuscript), <http://www.confessionallutherans.org/papers/lawgospl.html> (accessed November 15, 2014).

¹⁶ Lutheran History, “C.F.W. (Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm) Walther (1811-1887) Papers, c.1828-1887,” <http://www.lutheranhistory.org/collections/fa/m-0004.htm> (accessed March 14, 2013).

¹⁷ Thomas Egger, “Walther and his Manuscripts: Archiving Missouri’s Most Enduring Writer,” *Concordia Journal* 37:3 (Summer 2011): 208-9.

¹⁸ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing, 1986)

professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. In fact, the book was not even published until ten years after Walther had died. The lectures were given on the basis of thorough notes, which Walther had prepared ahead of time and there is little doubt that the stenographer was completely faithful and accurate in reproducing Walther's presentation on this topic.¹⁹

Lutheran theology recognizes two distinct scriptural teachings: the Law and the Gospel. The law is a: "divine doctrine, in which the righteous, immutable will of God is revealed, what is to be the quality of man in his nature, thoughts, words and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God."²⁰ On the other hand the Gospel:

Is properly a doctrine which teaches what man should believe, that he may obtain forgiveness of sins with God, namely, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the curse of the Law, has expiated and paid for all our sins, through whom alone we again enter into favor with God, obtain forgiveness of sins by faith, are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and eternally saved.²¹

This distinction between the Law and the Gospel is the essence of Lutheran teaching. It is the foundation of Lutheran worship. In practical terms, the believer hears what they have done wrong, sins of commission (as well as sins of omission) and they receive the promise of forgiveness through the work of Jesus Christ.

Walther's *Law and Gospel* demonstrates the many ways both the law and the Gospel can be applied. A pastor in the LCMS has strong roots in this homiletical application through seminary instruction. The pastor is taught to develop sermons with clear law and Gospel themes and long-time members of Lutheran congregations have become accustomed to the formula in sermons. As Walther writes:

¹⁹ Preus, "Law and Gospel and the State of the Church Today," 115.

²⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 584.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 585.

A preacher must be able to preach a sermon on faith without ever using the term faith. It is not important that he din the word faith into the ears of his audience, but it is necessary for him to frame his address so as to arouse in every poor sinner the desire to lay the burden of his sins at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and say to Him: “Thou art mine, and I am Thine.”

Here is where Luther reveals his true greatness. He rarely appeals to his hearers to believe, but he preaches concerning the work of Christ, salvation by grace, and the riches of God’s mercy in Jesus Christ in such a manner that the hearers get the impression that all they have to do is to take what is being offered them and find a resting-place in the lap of divine grace.²²

This influential volume by a recognized authority of the LCMS is yet another important resource for pastors and laypeople of congregations in decline. *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* demonstrates that Scripture may be properly explained and understood in terms of law and Gospel.²³ If the two doctrines are intermingled with one another with the result that the merit of Christ is obscured and people are not comforted through forgiveness, which they otherwise have in the Gospel, then the desire to participate in the local congregation is minimized as people face the “trials against the terrors of the Law.”²⁴ If the pastor has experienced a change in one’s personal doctrine, perhaps unintentionally and gradually, reviewing this classic collection of traditional Lutheran Doctrine will provide insights into the pastor’s future vocation decisions.

²² Ibid., Preus, “Law and Gospel and the State of the Church Today,” *Confessional Lutherans*, 260.

²³ Ibid., Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, 123-25.

²⁴ Ibid., Kolb, *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 581.

Theological Practices Shaped through Conflict by James C. Burkee

Originally, a Northwestern University dissertation, Associate Professor of History at Concordia University, Wisconsin, James C. Burkee authored a volume that traces the history of the LCMS from 1938 through 1983. Too young to be a participant in the conflicts he researches, Burkee provides a near objective account of the schism in The LCMS. He documents how this changed the denomination and offers speculation on how much the events changed American culture and Christianity. From the author's perspective, things have gotten worse. In 1970, membership in the Missouri Synod peaked at nearly 2.8 million members. Since then the church has lost over 500,000 members;²⁵ "a once thriving church . . . had become an also-ran, struggling for existence and relevance even as it continued the fight to define itself."²⁶ Burkee attributes this loss to the contentious spirit of the LCMS during the decade of the 1970s.

It is no coincidence that a church that had grown almost continuously since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century began . . . to hemorrhage membership. Moreover, the dramatic exodus from Missouri defied religious trends in America during the same period, when biblically conservative churches largely flourished. The Southern Baptist Convention added nearly six million members between 1960 and 2000.²⁷

George Santayana, an American/Spanish philosopher, essayist, poet and novelist who died in 1952, wrote, "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."²⁸ As a

²⁵ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Statistical Yearbook of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1948-1995) 410.

²⁶ James Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod: A Conflict that Changed American Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 183.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁸ George Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense: The Life of Reason*, Vol 1, VIII, 184-204 (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1980).

significant historical source of the conflict that reshaped the LCMS and gave birth to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988, Lutheran clergy today can learn from their denomination's struggles of the past. Largely a battle fought by and among clergy, the clergy who struggled for control of the Synod were frustrated by the lack of interest they found among laypeople. Pastors were able to gather signatures on petitions, but laypeople were not drawn enthusiastically to either side of the conflict. Conservatives could not get laypeople to care about their issues, and moderates could not get laypeople to leave the Synod when the conflict was over. Laypeople in 1970 wanted less conflict in the LCMS, not more. They wanted to see Lutherans more united, not less. As Burkee writes, "This was not a movement of laypeople; in fact, its greatest effect was to drive laypeople from their Synod."²⁹

The wounds from the schism are obvious among the elder faculty of both seminaries and in turn, influence seminary students. Leaders from the past remain hurt and nostalgic. One is reminded of a couplet from the poet John Greenleaf Whittier and Maud Muller work, "For all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'"³⁰

In an interview with his publisher in late 2010, Burkee was asked, "What does this book offer the church and what are your hopes for its reception and effect?"

I hope that the book raises some eyebrows and gets people thinking about the political polarization that has consumed our churches. The conservatism of the Religious Right has overtaken the LCMS, just as politics of the left largely dominate the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America clergy. Can you be an

²⁹ Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod*, 179.

³⁰ John Greenleaf Whittier and Maud Muller, *Yale Book of American Verse* Thomas R. Lounsbury, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1912), 76.

environmentalist, a Democrat, and a Missouri Lutheran? If not, it suggests that something has fundamentally changed since 1970 in American Lutheranism. Hopefully, people will begin to ask why and whether the changes have been positive or negative.³¹

The lessons for today's clergy are invaluable. People involved in conflict, even conflict within the local church, may experience ramifications that can fundamentally change the church for decades. Conflict within the church does not grow the church. Typically, clergy become highly invested in the conflict. They will defend their personal position, going to great lengths, even resigning when the conflict does not turn in their favor. Laypeople lack the desire to become enthusiastically involved in the conflict, as they prefer their church remain the same familiar place as it has been for generations. When clergy become so assured of their righteous stand and convinced of the errors of the opposition, then a disastrous outcome is all but guaranteed. Repentance, forgiveness and healing may become rare commodities among those embroiled in conflict.

***Spiritual Leadership* by Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby**

In 2005, The Barna Group conducted a nationwide survey among a representative sample of Protestant pastors to determine the most influential books in their profession. Several key findings came from the survey including the fact that influential books for pastors often fail to make the bestseller lists. Barna also learned that a comparatively small number of authors have the most consistent influence on pastors. It follows then that only a dozen or so books have the most widespread impact during the measured

³¹ James C. Burkee, Interview with Fortress Press Interview, December 14, 2010, <https://www.facebook.com/fortresspress/reviews> (accessed November 15, 2014).

period. *Spiritual Leadership* by Henry and Richard Blackaby was chosen as one of the most helpful books and its authors were chosen from dozens of writers as among the most influential.³²

Spiritual Leadership discusses how God develops, guides and empowers spiritual leaders. The 2011 revision is preferred for this project because it includes more information on a leader's decision-making practices, as well as character traits, challenges and leader influence. Assuming that this project will work with the pastor as well the lay leadership, this resource will assist both to identify God's vision for the congregation and lead people along the path God desires. The Blackabys state, "It is therefore critical that leaders base their choices firmly on biblical principles that will protect them from mistakes."³³

Identifying three major issues that "the church must overcome if it is to thrive in the future,"³⁴ the Blackabys quotes George Barna. They write, "The American Church is dying due to a lack of strong leadership. In this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence. The primary reason is the lack of leadership. Nothing is more important than leadership."³⁵

³² Barna Group, "Survey Reveals the Books and Authors that have most Influenced Pastors," May 30, 2005, www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/178 (accessed November 15, 2014).

³³ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: B and H Publishing Group, 2001), 230.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ George Barna, ed., *Leaders On Leadership: Wisdom, Advice, and Encouragement On the Art of Leading God's People* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1998), 18.

The second issue the Blackabys identify for the Church to overcome in the future if it intends to flourish is “Religious Consumerism.”³⁶ As society is flooded with incentives and promises from the corporate world, the Church conducts itself in a similar manner offering members everything to satisfy their needs without mentioning the challenging aspects of Christian faith such as sin. Some congregations will “strive to be politically correct, changing their doctrines with every shifting wind in society.”³⁷

To conclude this list of three issues impeding church leadership as well as growth, the Blackabys identify opposition to the Church through public discrimination and ridicule. Churches that express opinions contrary to publically accepted norms will find themselves the subject of increasing displeasure. Churches that once served the community through a strong social presence find that “the welcome mat has been decisively yanked from under the Christian Community.”³⁸

The goal of *Spiritual Leadership* is to help Christian leaders, both men and women, who are discouraged and often on the verge of a career change to maintain their hold on a sincere desire to serve God effectively. The authors walk alongside these leaders to help them find encouragement and direction for their lives. They may be serving in an agency of the Church, in the business community and conceivably volunteering in the local church. The authors direct their efforts to those who have not

³⁶ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 16.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

entered full-time ministry although there are obvious benefits for any person serving in vocational ministry.³⁹

The strength of this book lies in the fact that the principles presented have application for all Christians. Spiritual leadership is not conferred on a person simply by virtue of holding a leadership position in a Christian organization. They write, “Spiritual leaders are people who seek to lead God’s way, regardless of where they serve him. They are as essential in the marketplace as they are in the church.”⁴⁰

Particularly appropriate for the framework of this project is the section dealing with “The Leaders Pitfalls: What Disqualifies Leaders?”⁴¹ Noting that catastrophes are often the result of one’s own making the authors share “ten of the most common pitfalls that cause spiritual leaders to fail.”⁴² Reading like a list of special commandments for clergy that Moses carried down from Mt. Sinai, they include pride, sexual sin, cynicism, greed, mental laziness, oversensitivity, spiritual lethargy, domestic neglect, administrative carelessness and prolonged position holding.⁴³ An awareness of these pitfalls is only the first step to avoidance. Placing safeguards in place to provide protection for God’s servant when tempted or vacillating is necessary for the spiritual leader.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁴¹ Ibid., 313.

⁴² Ibid., 314.

⁴³ Ibid., 313-347.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 347.

The authors put forward that understanding spiritual leadership in light of God's calling in life will equip one to lead effectively. Quoting Scripture, the Blackabys remind readers that God is not necessarily looking for leaders, He is looking for servants (Is 59:16; Ezk 22:30). They write, "When God finds men and women willing to be molded into his servants, the possibilities are limitless. People are looking for someone to lead them into God's purposes God's way. They need leaders who truly believe God will do what he says. People will follow spiritual leaders who understand God's agenda and who know how to move them on to it."⁴⁵

Missional Map-Making by Alan Roxburgh

Alan Roxburgh has more than thirty years of experience in church leadership development, missiolog, and network formation to encourage missional formation. He is a well-respected director in leadership formation throughout North America, Europe and Australia. Using the analogy of outdated maps being ineffective to bring people to their intended destination, he provides insight into the skills necessary for local church leaders and denominations to become missional map-makers. Defining maps as an "internal understanding of how things ought to work and the habits and practices we develop over time based on these inner understandings."⁴⁶ Roxburgh recognizes that as the Global Positioning System on a vehicle can occasionally fail, "many of the maps we have internalized what it means to be the church and how to shape churches in our culture no

⁴⁵ Ibid., xiv.

⁴⁶ Roxburgh, *Missional-Map Making*, xi.

longer connect with or match the dramatically changing environments in which we are living. Because of this we find ourselves in a situation where we have to become map-makers in a new world.”⁴⁷

Missional Map-Making further develops the theme that culture becomes common sense in the ways people live. People take much for granted and those who share a culture validate the common map that gives their world organization. When the environment changes, the equilibrium that all enjoyed now comes to an abrupt end as the systems of the past are no longer effective.⁴⁸ Roxburgh additionally suggests that the “process of strategic planning in the church is structured by modernity’s map and . . . the ways it is practiced actually undermine what God is about in the world.”⁴⁹

A church that relies on the traditional linear map model may produce organization change but not missional change. “Becoming missional is not a simple matter of organizational alignment but much more like herding cats,”⁵⁰ Roxburgh states. Organization change alone does not produce the growth desired in a declining church.

Identifying eight currents of change Roxburgh notes that propel the Church into new territory, he notes that this change will require new maps as well as new map-making skills. These new missional maps will benefit leadership in declining congregations. However, change will not come expeditiously. Forces including

⁴⁷ Ibid., xii.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 69-72.

globalization, pluralism, rapid technological change, postmodernism, staggering global needs, loss of confidence in primary structures, democratization of knowledge and return to romanticism will interfere if not unsettle the change process.⁵¹

The challenge for leadership in a declining congregation is to develop the skills of missional map-making. The author presents four steps to enable the local church in this process. These include assessing how the environment has changed in the local context, focusing on redeveloping a core identity, creating a parallel culture and forming partnerships with the surrounding neighborhoods and communities.⁵²

Instructed through the seminary in strategic planning, many clergy in the LCMS will find support among linear-thinking business leaders in their congregation to set forth a systematic process leading to expected outcome. Unfortunately, this common process may be a factor in declining attendance and other measurements of the church. As Roxburgh argues, becoming missional is creating new maps as the church lives and experiences participating in God's mission in the world.

Leadership That Works by Leith Anderson

Leith Anderson pastored one of the nation's largest churches in Eden Prairie, MN for thirty-four years. Wooddale Church enjoyed significant growth under his leadership and through his humble servant attitude and example, he became a beacon of hope for clergy and church leaders struggling through temptation, uncertainty and an ever complex world. During Anderson's tenure, Wooddale Church began a number of new

⁵¹ Ibid., 87-110.

⁵² Ibid., 127-142.

congregations. Supplementing these new ventures by asking current members as well as leaders of Wooddale Church to leave and facilitate new congregations Wooddale assisted in the development of new congregations outside its own denominations doctrinal beliefs.⁵³

Anderson brings hope to leaders in today's complex world. His unabashed writing brings the reader into the front lines of the challenges today's leadership faces as well as debunking various commonly held leadership myths. These myths often leave the leader with misconceptions of leadership that work to undermine the work of God in the Church. Anderson presents a detailed analysis with concrete ideas to become a more effective leader.

The leader of a declining congregation will learn from Anderson why pastoral leadership is so difficult. Such leadership Anderson contends is complex and the stress of competition with the burden of unrealistic expectations contribute to this challenge. Providing hope for the pastoral and lay leader as well as action that can followed by leaders will in the end, allow pastors to finish well. Anderson set such an example in his retirement.

An example of Anderson's practical application for a pastor or congregation leader dealing with interpersonal conflict is included in the chapter "Stress, The Weight That Holds Us Down."⁵⁴ He recognizes that every leader deals with conflict,

⁵³ I attended Wooddale Church occasionally from 2001-2008. He also studied under Leith Anderson and consulted professionally with other pastors of the church.

⁵⁴ Leith Anderson, *Leadership that Works: Hope and Direction for Church and Parachurch Leaders in Today's Complex World* (Bloomington, IN: Bethany House, 1999), 145-160.

disagreements and criticism. Anderson advises, “Follow Jesus’ guidelines, de-escalate, use caution when writing, choose your fights wisely, don’t hesitate to ask for help,” and “maintain margins.”⁵⁵

Perhaps the church pastor or lay leader of a congregation in decline will find the concluding chapter difficult to read. Anderson discusses finishing well and for the pastor in distress, the circumstances may indicate anything but an end to a career that reaches the finish line with the same eloquence that it began. *Leadership that Works* includes a section in this final chapter that may seem out of place at first reading. “Trust in Tragedy”⁵⁶ discuss how life’s greatest leaders are often shaped through the opportunities brought through tragedy.

Diagnosed with incurable cancer, Anderson includes a story that describes a pastor who announced to his congregation, “When I came here, I thought it was to teach you how to live; as it turns out, I came here to teach you how to die.”⁵⁷ Today’s pastors will learn from Anderson that they can be shaped, strengthened and empowered through the experience of a declining congregation even as they become the leader necessary to effect change. Anderson brings the reality of the parish ministry to the pages of his book and into the mind of the reader.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 157-160.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 206.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 210.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A HEALTHY CONGREGATION IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH MISSOURI SYNOD

Summarizing its beliefs and practices, the LCMS unabashedly declares, “Our congregations accept and preach the Bible-based teachings of Martin Luther that inspired the reformation of the Christian Church in the 16th century.”¹ Luther’s principal teachings include the Bible as the central source of religious authority and salvation being attained through faith and not deeds. These shaped the core of Protestantism. His most significant contributions to theological history include his insistence that as the sole source of religious authority, the Bible must be translated and accessible to everyone. In his era, this was truly revolutionary.² Luther’s New Testament was printed in forty-three different editions between 1522 and 1525 totaling 80,000 copies. No other publication of the same period came even close. Roland H. Bainton, a specialist in Reformation history, was the Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale

¹ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, “Belief and Practice,” <https://www.lcms.org/belief-and-practice> (accessed October 5, 2015).

² Martin Luther and E Theodore Bachmann, *Luther’s Works Word and Sacrament II: Vol 36: 036 (Luther’s Works (Augsburg))* by Martin Luther (1959-01-01) (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress (1959-01-01), 1656), 181-202.

University for forty-two years. He wrote an authoritative biography of Martin Luther in 1950, *Here I Stand*. Kenneth Scott Latourette, former president of the American Historical Association and professor of missions and Oriental History at Yale University, called Bainton's biography of Luther "A superb combination of accurate scholarship based upon a thorough knowledge of the sources and secondary works with insight, vivid, readable literary style, and reproductions of contemporary illustrations."³ Bainton notes that,

Luther's influence extends so far beyond his own land. Lutheranism took possession of Scandinavia and has an extensive following in the United States, and apart from that, his movement gave the impetus, which sometimes launched and sometimes helped to establish the other varieties of Protestantism. They all stem in some measure from him. And what he did for his own people to a degree, he did also for others. His translation, for example, affected the English version. Tyndale's preface is taken from Luther. His liturgical reforms likewise had an influence on the Book of Common Prayer.⁴

This significant influence did not come without controversy. Numerous religious disagreements emerged between the Vatican and Protestants. Luther and others regularly appealed to Pope Paul III asking that he request a council of the Church. However, in 1536, when the Pope ordered a council at Mantua in May of 1537, he did so for the express purpose of "the utter extirpation of the poisonous, pestilential Lutheran heresy."⁵

It became apparent to Luther that no general council including the reformers would be forthcoming. Therefore, Luther composed Schmalkaldische Artikel (*The*

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of Christianity, Vol.ii* (New York: Prince Press, 1997), 703.

⁴ Ronald Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1950), 385.

⁵ F. (Friedrich) Bente, ed., *Concordia Triglotta - Die Symbolischen Bücher der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche. Concordia Triglotta-Libri Symbolici Ecclesiae Lutheranae. Triglot Concordia - The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), XI: 47.

Smalcald Articles) for a meeting of the Schmalkaldic League, an alliance of Lutheran princes within the Holy Roman Empire. These articles are a summary of the Protestant position. Luther introduced the articles by reminding the reader that he “compiled these articles and presented them to our side, which has unanimously accepted and confessed them. We have resolved to present these publically to set forth the confession of our faith. Perhaps the pope with his supporters would be so bold as to hold a truly free Christian council, seriously and in good faith, as is his duty, without lying and cheating.”⁶

Influence of Martin Luther on Local Church

In *The Smalcald Articles* Luther defines the Church as “the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”⁷ Luther followed these articles, which proved to be a summary of Lutheran doctrine with the treatise, *On the Councils and the Church* in 1539. This treatise is an ecclesiological study of the Christian Church that also detailed his frustration with the Pope’s continual delay to hold the council. Perhaps most familiar is the third part of this treatise. Luther leaves the matter of calling a council and authors a positive exposition of the true marks of the Church as he defined them previously during the Leipzig Debate of 1519.⁸ These marks are the external indications to distinguish the Church. Recognizing these seven marks today as criteria for a healthy church are diverse religious groups such as “conservative, orthodox evangelicals in the

⁶ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions – A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2007), 259.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁸ Eugene F. A. Klug, “Luther’s Understanding of ‘Church’ in his Treatise on the Councils and the Church of 1539,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 44:1 (January 1980): 27-38.

Reformed and Presbyterian family of Churches”⁹ and Gnesio-Lutherans who trace their origin to Reformation following Luther’s death and have followers today in the United States. Originally formed to defend the doctrine of Real Presence, today the Gnesio-Lutherans adhere to a staunch defense and practice of the reformer’s teaching.¹⁰

Luther believed the seven marks of a church to be people who possess the Word of God, practice baptism, celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar, practice confession and absolution, select pastors, pray and are recognized by the “holy possession of the sacred cross.” Luther amplifies this seventh point as Christians who must “endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh by inward sadness, timidly, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ.”¹¹

To conclude his discussion of the marks of the Church, Luther argues that matters exist in the Church, which he identifies as *adiaphora* and rites, which are neither commanded nor prohibited by God. These do not define the Church. He writes,

For instance, certain holidays and certain hours, forenoon or afternoon, for preaching or praying, or the use of a church building, or a horse, altar, pulpit, baptismal font, candlesticks, candles, bells, priestly vestments, and the like. These things have no more than their natural effects, just as food and drink accomplish no more by virtue of the grace the children say at the table, for the ungodly or rude folk who don't say it, that is, who neither pray to God nor thank him, grow just as fat and strong from food and drink as Christians do. To be sure, Christians could be and remain sanctified even without these items, even if they were to preach on the street, outside a building, without a pulpit, if absolution were pronounced and the sacrament administered without an altar, and if baptism were

⁹ Carl Truemen, “Seven Marks of a Healthy Church,” The Aquila Report, <http://theaquilareport.com/seven-marks-of-a-healthy-church/> (accessed October 5, 2015).

¹⁰ Bente, *The Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 102.

¹¹ Helmut T. Lehman, *Luther's Works, Volume 41: Church and Ministry Iii (Luther's Works (Augsburg))* (New York: Fortress Press, 1966), 164.

performed without a font—as happens daily that for special reasons sermons are preached and baptisms and sacraments administered in the home. But for the sake of children and simple folk, it is a fine thing and conducive to good order to have a definite time, place, and hour to which people can adapt themselves and where they may assemble, as St. Paul says in I Corinthians 14 :40, “All things should be done decently and in order.”

Luther’s seven marks of the Church stand alone as his definition of the Church. There is abundant latitude for local practice and tradition but theologically, there is no room for compromise.

Today, Lutherans who accept the doctrines taught in the *Book of Concord* of 1580 (the Lutheran confessional documents) in their entirety (*quia*) believe the documents are completely faithful to the teachings of the Bible. While most Lutheran denominations find the basis of their faith in the *Book of Concord*, Confessional Lutherans maintain that faithfulness to the Confessions requires attention to how that faith is taught and practiced. Confessional Lutherans believe that this is a vital part of their identity.

Other Lutheran church bodies also subscribe to the *Book of Concord*. However, their confessional subscription differs in a significant manner. For a majority of the world’s Lutherans, the confessions contained in the *Book of Concord* are viewed as authoritative (*quatenus*), insofar as it faithfully describes the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible; admitting the possibility that the *Book of Concord* might contradict the Bible. For example, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), which represents 72-million Christians in 98 countries, confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and norm of its doctrine, life and service. However, the LWF views the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as a pure exposition of the Word of

God when they are in agreement with the Bible.¹² With the broad philosophical and linguistic developments in recent centuries, the field of biblical hermeneutics allows for a plethora of exegetical approaches. Therefore, the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century reformation appear in a new light. The interpretation accepted by the church fathers of the sixteenth century is not necessarily the same as the twenty-first century interpretation. If the condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the Church of the twenty-first century, the seven marks of the Church described by Luther may not be required.

Being a Sixteenth-century Confessional Lutheran in a Twenty-first Century World

In the light of this situation, the question to address in historic Lutheran terms is, “Can a pastor of the LCMS, a confessional (*quia*) church body, remain confessional Lutherans in today’s world?” In principal, one would answer in the affirmative. Remaining faithful to the fundamental principles of sixteenth century Lutheranism including scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), faith alone (*sola fide*) and grace alone (*sola gratia*), should end the discussion. However, this question must be addressed in light of the relevant issues created and cultivated from our contemporary ethos.

Robert D. Preus identified two closely related and hotly debated articles of faith today, namely, church and ministry. Four controversial issues emerge from the practice of church and ministry and become doctrine; these are church pulpit and altar fellowship,

¹² Lutheran World, “The Lutheran World Federation,” www.lutheranworld.org/ (accessed October 5, 2015).

open communion, the office of the ministry and women pastors.¹³ Preus predicted that confessional Lutheranism would be reduced to “a few little islands peeping out in a great ocean and at the same time reduce the LCMS to a nondescript mainline church like the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”¹⁴ His response, typical of a confessional pastor called for “confession and teaching the whole counsel of God and, like the confessors, bearing in mind always that the Gospel and the salvation of souls are at stake.” The former president of the seminary encouraged rejecting all four issues.

The relationship between a healthy church and a confessional pastor must be explored. The Confessions were written for a nominal Christendom without immediate frontiers. They were not written to define how to reach the non-Christian population. The New World was just being discovered. The Sunni orthodoxy of the Ottoman Empire, with its capital in Istanbul, controlled much of southeastern Europe, almost all of the Middle East and Egypt. The Shiites occupied Persia while the Moghul Empire covered the greater part of India.¹⁵ There also were no large minorities of explicit non-Christians within Christendom. Literally, a twenty-first century confessional pastor is *a priori* anti-missional.

The Confessions were written to defend the new Evangelical faith against a Roman Christianity, which was organizing to resist the Reformation. They were written

¹³ Robert Preus, “Confessional Lutheranism in Today’s World,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54:2 (July 1990): 99-117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁵ Center for Middle Easter Studies, “Expansion of the Islamic World to 1500,” <https://cmes.uchicago.edu/sites/cmes.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/Maps/Map%20-%20Islamic%20Expansion%20to%201500.pdf> (accessed September 14, 2015).

in a time when the main work of the Church was not seen as evangelization or global missions. It was the education of nominal Christians, which motivated Luther as seen in his preface to the *Small Catechism*.

The deplorable, miserable condition, which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare [publish] this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good God! What manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! Many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach. . . . Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the [common] holy Sacraments. Yet they [*do not* understand and] cannot [*even*] recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs; and yet, now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all liberty like experts.¹⁶

Recent Convention Action Pertinent to Local Congregation and Pastoral Health

The LCMS, which subscribes unconditionally to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God,¹⁷ meets in convention every three years. This national convention provides an,

Opportunity for worship, nurture, inspiration, fellowship, and the communication of vital information. It is the principal legislative assembly, which amends the Constitution and Bylaws, considers and takes action on reports and overtures, and handles appropriate appeals. It establishes general positions and policies of the Synod, provides overall program direction and priorities, and evaluates all such positions, programs, policies, directions, and priorities in order to provide responsible service for and on behalf of its members.¹⁸

¹⁶ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 347.

¹⁷ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, "The Lutheran Confessions," <http://www.lcms.org/lutheranconfessions> (accessed October 5, 2015).

¹⁸ Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *Handbook Constitution and Bylaws Articles of Incorporation the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 80.

At the most recent convention held in St. Louis in 2013, the convention continued to promote the use of the *Small Catechism* when it adopted Resolution 3-14A, *To Encourage Daily Family Devotions*. In this resolution adopted by voice vote without discussion, pastors “are to inquire into the devotional life of the home and to teach and encourage the families in their daily prayers” as they visit homes of members.¹⁹ This resolution continues Luther’s directive to pastors to provide instruction to Christians who lack strong doctrinal training.

The convention also adopted without discussion Resolution 2-08 *To Challenge Congregations to Engage in Works of Mercy in Their Communities*. Referring to Galatians 6:10 (So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith) congregations are encouraged to “engage purposefully in extending Christ’s ministry of mercy in their communities.”

These acts of mercy include:

Intentional study of the Lutheran Church’s theology of mercy, careful examination, in consultation with the community, of their ministry contexts in order to discover God-given opportunities for merciful service, preparation and implementation of a plan of service in the community, while seeking opportunities, when possible, for cooperation with other community agencies in carrying out this ministry.²⁰

It is significant that three of the four actions called for in this resolution involve study, careful investigation, and research. Following this resolution, a congregation desiring to

¹⁹ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, “Convention Proceedings 2013” (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 124.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

implement the convention action will only become involved in actual acts of mercy after significant deliberation and education.

The convention also recognized that pastors are “often called upon to make difficult decisions in complex and critical situations.”²¹ In the resolution titled, *To Respect One Another and Put the Best Construction on All Things*, the convention recognized that media, electronic and traditional “afford the means to give and receive both direct and indirect offense . . . slanderous behavior hurts individuals, and the proclamation of the Gospel to those outside the Church.”²² Citing the Eighth Commandment and its explanation in the Small and Large Catechisms, the convention resolved to “put the best construction on the words and actions of others” and,

When there is disagreement with the words and actions of a pastor, congregation, or official in such situations, members of the Synod admonish one another to address those differences personally and privately before making our disagreements public or bringing formal charges against each other, even when there seem to be clear violations of God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions, that harsh characterizations be avoided and that these issues be addressed in a spirit of gentleness.²³

The final resolve noted that even when clear violations of God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions occur, “hard characterizations be avoided and that these issues be addressed in a spirit of gentleness.”²⁴

The convention did address the issue of church health. In resolution, 3-08A the 2013 convention adopted *To Reaffirm Faithful Church Revitalization as a Priority of the*

²¹ Ibid., 116.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 117.

Office of National Mission. This resolution included a reference to the 2007 LCMS convention which adopted resolution 1-01A, *To Support Revitalization of LCMS Congregations*; “The 2007 resolution directed The LCMS to adopt a goal of praying and working for the mission revitalization of at least 2,000 existing LCMS churches by 2017.”²⁵ Without any action to report to the 2013 convention from the 2007 resolution, the 2013 convention resolved to “reaffirm church revitalization as a priority of the Office of National Mission.”²⁶ The convention also directed the two seminaries “to review, evaluate, and recommend faithful resources.”²⁷ To underscore the importance of this resolution, the convention directed the Office of National Mission to report the progress of its efforts at the next convention in 2016.

One significant resolution concerning the health and wellbeing of the congregation’s church workers including its pastor received floor action at the last convention. The Synod’s congregations were encouraged to give thanks to God for their church workers, pray for their well-being, provide salaries that meet or exceed established guidelines, establish a worker wellness committee and find ways “informal and formal, of expressing appreciation to their church workers for the sacrificial service they offer.”²⁸ The Office of National Ministry was directed to provide guidelines and resources to accomplish these tasks in resolution 3-11A., *To Support Church Workers*.

²⁵ Ibid., 140.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 122.

Relationship between a Healthy Pastor and a Healthy Congregation

The relationship between a healthy pastor (church worker) and a healthy congregation is not without biblical support. St. Paul discusses this relationship when he writes to the “saints who are in Ephesus” (Eph 1:1). Those who hold the office of the ministry are Christ’s gifts to the Church: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11, 12). The first two callings listed by Paul may belong to the first generation church only. This includes the apostles who represent the foundational calling as well as the prophets who in this instance are more than likely not those of the Old Testament but rather those identified in Acts 12:27-28 as “prophets (who) came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.”

Evangelist is the same title given in Acts 21:8 to Philip who went from city to city preaching the word. Acts 8:4 and 40 say, “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word . . . But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the Gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.” Philip apparently did not have the authority of an apostle, nor the gift of prophecy, and was not responsible for pastoral supervision over a portion of the flock. The authors of the four Gospels are known as evangelists, or itinerant preachers.

Shepherds are those caring for the flock as defined in Acts 20:28, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

Scripture contains the image of a shepherd frequently; they are the guardian of the flock,

carrying the animals that cannot keep up, and “gently lead(s) those that are with young” (Is 40:11).

Finally, Paul adds the role of teacher so that pastors will understand that teaching (*didaskalos*) belongs to their office. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul writes, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil” (2 Tm 2:24). The purpose of the pastoral office is “for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12b) much like equipping a soldier for conflict (Eph 6:10-17).

Paul further elaborates on this relationship between a pastor and a congregation:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Tm 3:1-7).

The word overseer is translated from the original *ἐπίσκοπος*. According to Strong’s Concordance, the word is used as an official title, “especially with reference to the supervising function exercised by an elder or presbyter of a church or congregation.”²⁹ Paul chooses a word that quite literally means the one called by God is to “keep an eye on” their flock to provide personalized care and protection. Timothy is instructed that the overseer, bishop, deacon or pastor shall have conduct, influence and example that is a living embodiment of God’s Church. The pastor is the existing example of the grace of

²⁹ James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Leicester, UK: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 1158.

God and must hold to these virtues. One with a poor reputation, a tainted past, is not qualified.

In an article published for the Christian Reformed Church, Lis Van Harten writes, “A healthy congregation doesn’t just happen. It takes intentional effort on the part of many within the congregation. And one congregation won’t necessarily do exactly what another one does in order to obtain and maintain that health. However there’s one common factor that healthy congregations share—a healthy pastor.”³⁰ Paul’s directive to Timothy defines the healthy pastor. In *Studying Congregations*, the authors note that leadership involves three major tasks. These include helping the congregation gain a realistic understanding of its particular situation, developing a vision and helping the people exemplify that vision. Ammerman notes

The pastor, rabbi, priest, imam, or other central religious leader may have primary responsibility for these tasks, they are not hers or his, alone but appropriately shared with other leaders in the congregation. Clergy leaders in particular have multiple demands—priestly, pastoral, educational, and administrative—laid on them in the congregation. The demands are often more than any one clergy-person can handle.³¹

Most congregations in North America average approximately seventy-five attendees each week. When asked how many people “regularly participate in the religious life of your congregation” 42.7 percent indicated 50 or less.³² Whitesel in *Cure for the*

³⁰ Lis Van Harten, “Healthy Congregations Need Healthy Pastors,” *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* (May 2006):1, http://www2.crcna.org/pages/may2006_van_harten.cfm (accessed September 15, 2015).

³¹ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations a New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 192-193.

³² Duke University, “National Congregations Study,” http://www.thearda.com/ConQS/qs_295.asp. (accessed September 15, 2015).

Common Church, states that a church needs 175 attendees for it to have the level of staff and ministries that most people have come to expect for churches today.³³

In his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren recounts a study he made a few years ago of the hundred largest churches in the United States. He writes,

Although I discovered that large, growing churches differ widely in strategy, structure, and style, there were some common denominators. My study confirmed what I already knew. . . . Healthy, large churches are led by pastors who have been there a long time. I found dozens of examples. A long pastorate does not guarantee a church will grow, but changing pastors every few years guarantees a church won't grow.³⁴

Warren is not the first, nor the only observer of church life to note the correlation between pastoral tenure and church health.

William Easum, in *The Church Growth Handbook* observed, "The longer the pastoral tenure, the more growth is likely to occur."³⁵ He goes on to note, however, that long pastoral tenures require two things. The first is "longer and more flexible time away from the church." The second is a pastor who experiences "regular personal growth so that the church does not outgrow them."³⁶ Easum concludes that these two components are related to one another. In fact, a pastor with time away from the church will experience personal growth necessary for a healthy relationship between pastor and congregation.

³³ Whitesel, *Cure for the Common Church*, 16-18.

³⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 31-32.

³⁵ William M. Easum, *The Church Growth Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 57.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

The Division for Ministry and Board of Pensions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a sister church of the LCMS, completed a study in 2002. Titled “Ministerial Health and Wellness 2002” the study found that during a one-year period, 16 percent of male clergy, and 24 percent of female clergy suffered from depression compared to 6 percent of U.S. men and 12 percent of U.S. women. It also says that nutrition, high blood pressure and heart disease are areas of concern.³⁷

The report grew out of concerns raised by the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and LCMS group. Gwen Halaas, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America member and physician who directs the Ministerial Health and Wellness project, says the study was conducted to better control the cost of health benefits. She writes, “It may cost a little bit initially to develop health and wellness resources. But in the long run, we will see health-care savings and an improved effectiveness and functioning of our pastors.”³⁸ The report describes a clergy’s job as sedentary, including leading worship, and visits done by car that are often associated with quick, often unhealthy nourishment. The report noted that stressors are high in the ministry, salary is proportionately lower, hours are longer and the work is more demanding.³⁹

A similar study by the Clergy Health Initiative at Durham-based Duke Divinity School interviewed over 1,726 United Methodist pastors in North Carolina and found that

³⁷ Gwen W. Halaas, “ELCA Studies the Health and Wellness of Its Ministers,” Evangelical Church in America, <http://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/4542> (accessed September 15, 2015).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

the clergy depression prevalence was 8.7 percent and 11.1 percent respectively, significantly higher than the 5.5 percent rate of the national sample. The study also showed that the anxiety rate among clergy was 13.5 percent, and more than 7 percent of clergy experienced both depression and anxiety.⁴⁰

Thom Rainer, president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, identified eight of the greatest struggles pastor face based on nearly 200 separate communications he received from various social media interactions, emails and phone calls. These included criticism and conflict, family problems, stress, depression, burnout, sexual problems and financial problems. “Expectations of pastors can be unrealistic,” Rainer wrote. He continues:

Pastors are often expected to attend multiple meetings, to visit countless congregants, to prepare sermons with excellence, to provide ongoing strategic leadership, to conduct weddings and funerals, and to be involved in the community. Many pastors don’t know how or when to say “no” and many are not good at delegating, or they really don’t have anyone who can handle some of their responsibilities.⁴¹

Paul’s Advice to Timothy

Scripture is not silent on the topic of maintaining a healthy lifestyle for pastors. For example, in Paul’s first letter to Timothy (3:1-7), he directs Timothy to see that the offices in the congregation, which already existed, are staffed with properly qualified persons. He wrote:

⁴⁰ Anugrah Kumar, “Nearly 3 in 4 Pastors Regularly Consider Leaving Due to Stress,” *Christian Post* (June 21, 2014): 1, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/nearly-3-in-4-pastors-regularly-consider-leaving-due-to-stress-study-finds-121973/> (accessed September 15, 2015).

⁴¹ Thom S. Rainer, “Eight of the Most Significant Struggles Pastor Face,” ThomRainer.com, <http://thomrainer.com/2014/03/eight-of-the-most-significant-struggles-pastors-face/> (accessed September 15, 2015).

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Tm 3:1-7).

Paul indicates this it is a faithful (*πιστός*⁴²) statement that he as an apostle makes about the pastoral office. He writes that if one seeks the office of bishop or episcopal (*ἐπισκοπή*) they desire an excellent task. He then lists the qualifications of the bishop and in so doing indicates the office is valuable and desirable. Only those above criticism (*ἀνεπίληπτος*) can rightfully hold the office. Paul continues with four personal qualities that must be considered. First, the bishop must be one wife's husband. It is plain that Paul does not say that only the married men may enter the ministry or that that every pastor must be married. Rather, one who is not faithful to his one wife is disqualified. However, he does not prohibit remarriage. The second quality is sober-minded (*μὴ πάροινος*) describing one who is not a drunkard or violent and the third is self-controlled (*σώφρων*) designating a sensible, prudent leader. The final quality of this group is to be well ordered (*κόσμιος*). This original meaning of this word is more than being a refined and courteous person. Well-ordered in this sense is best described as "a pastor's whole make-up should be orderly, spiritually, mentally, and in his habits."⁴³

⁴² Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: The Institute for New Testament Textual Research, 2012).

⁴³ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 581.

Not only must the overseer have these marks of personal character, Paul insists that the pastor impart hospitality. Travel was common throughout the empire and Christian hospitality was a great blessing to victims of religious persecution and others in need including the poor, sick, widows and orphans. The Christian who practiced hospitality had one quality for being an elder.

Διδακτικός refers to those with proficiency in teaching. If one required much teaching and was incompetent to instruct then they were excluded from the office. He also excludes those who linger long beside wine (*πάροινος*), as well as the quick-tempered (*πλήκτης*). On the opposite side, Paul lists the gentle (*ἐπιεικής*), peaceable (*ἄμαχον*) and one is not loving money (*ἀφιλάργυρος*) as desirable qualities.

The elder will guide or superintend (*προϊσταμαι*) their family and children will be in obedience, submission (*ὑποταγή*). Paul does not indicate that elders must have children, only that the children do not reflect poorly on the elders. Finishing this qualification with a rhetorical question, Paul compares the elder's own household and God's Church with guiding and taking care of (*ἐπιμελέομαι*) both.

The sentence ends with a warning that elders not be newly planted or novices (*νεόφυτος*) so that they will not become puffed up or conceited (*τυφώω*) and fall into the very judgment that was pronounced upon the devil. The conceited novice elder might easily fall in their pride if they were elevated to the office in a church that was already fully established, with prominent elders already in positions. Paul then continues with the word testimony (*μαρτυρία*). He expects the elders to give excellent testimony about their lives since conversion. Failing to do so leads to disgrace (*ὄνειδισμός*) and the devil's

snare. Those desiring to be elders are reminded of the devil's deadly power of a snare traps animals, catching and killing them.

Mandate to Evangelize

Those who qualify as Elders fall under a mandate to evangelize as Jesus himself directs in the following Scriptures:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Mt 28:18-20).

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Jesus approaches His disciples and tells them that all authority (*ἐξουσία*) has been given to Him. Lutherans historically understand this as,

Divine omnipotence, power, majesty, and glory, which is peculiar to the divine nature alone; but it shines, manifests, and exercises itself fully, yet voluntarily, in, with, and through the assumed, exalted human nature in Christ. Just as in glowing iron there are not two kinds of power to shine and burn [as though the fire had a peculiar, and the iron also a peculiar and separate power of shining and burning], but the power to shine and to burn is a property of the fire; but since the fire is united with the iron, it manifests and exercises this its power to shine and to burn in, with, and through the glowing iron, so that thence and from this union also the glowing iron has the power to shine and to burn without conversion of the essence and of the natural properties of fire and iron.⁴⁴

With this authority, Jesus commissions the disciples to evangelize the world (*μαθητεύω* cause to become disciples). This is about results and Jesus follows with two Koine Greek participles that state how all nations are to be made into disciples: baptize (*Βαπτίζω*) and teach (*διδάσκω*). Jesus does not connect these two actions so both are not required. Either baptism or teaching is necessary for the individual as circumstances warrant.

⁴⁴ Kolb, *The Book of Concord*, 629.

Luke records the great purpose of Jesus—to seek out by the Gospel that saves the lost (Lk 19:10). Faith and salvation would be impossible with this work of Jesus. Being far from God is to be lost (*ἀπόλλυμαι*). Following through on the commission from Matthew 28, these lost ones are to be made disciples. This is the unmistakable work of disciples. When Jesus told His disciples, “You will be my witnesses,” (Acts 1:8), he was making a statement, not a request. Luther’s commentary on 1 Peter 2:9 states it well and plainly, “We live on earth only so that we should be a help to other people. . . . For this reason, however, He lets us live that we may bring other people also to faith as He has done for us.”⁴⁵

Conflict Resolution

It is unfortunate, but not unanticipated, that some among those called to such honorable work will become entangled in conflict. Such an example is recorded in the book of Acts. Cultural factionalism broke out, threatening the Church’s unity, when an early version of social service failed to provide for the widows of Greek speaking Jews. It is written:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther’s Works the Catholic Epistles Vol 30* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 64.

The apostles' deal with complaints about the relief of the Church's poor by instituting the office of deacon. Seven men of good repute, reflecting the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13 are selected to serve the poor. While the people chose the deacons, the apostles instituted their office. By instituting the separate office of deacon, the ministry of directing the practical affairs of the Church especially relief of the poor, is entrusted to a different set of office bearers. Though Christ alone had authority to establish the apostolic ministry (Matthew 10:1), the apostles could establish other offices according to the Church's needs. The conflict was resolved, the seven deacons were consecrated with prayer and the laying on of hands.

Yet one more example of conflict resolution appears in Matthew 5:24 when Christ instructs the disciples to “leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” The first priority for a worshiper is to seek reconciliation with an offended believer. In the preceding verses, Jesus teaches that not only murder but also anger makes one liable to the hell of fire. He urges His disciples to seek reconciliation with fellow believers who might be angry with them. Whatever offering presented to God, whether prophecy, teaching, prayer, a psalm, a hymn, whatever spiritual gift occurs to the mind, it cannot be acceptable to God, unless it be sustained by sincerity of faith. Such faith is incompatible with anger as Jesus says, “everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Mt 5:22).

Being Accountable

Conflict also occurs when the believer is not held accountable. James, writing to brothers and sisters who are scattered throughout the Mediterranean world (Jms 1:1),

reminds believers to be accountable to the word of truth. In James 5:19-20 it says, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” The implication here is that the wanderer is sought out and then restored through confession and forgiveness. The person who remains in the state of wondering, or left in sin, will die in sin. In a real sense, James is calling the entire congregation to repentance. The Lord provides a community of believers to hold one another accountable. Returning to faith will cover a multitude of sins, more than can be numbered.

A final Scripture reference to encourage pastors to maintain a healthy lifestyle is from Peter, who was with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry; he was a witness of all of its phases, including the climactic events of His suffering (*πάθημα*) and he shared in the glory (*δόξα κοινωνός*) of the transfiguration and the resurrected Christ (1 Pt 5:1). He writes,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pt 5:1-4).

Pastors are to shepherd (*ποιμαίνω*) the flock of God, offering spiritual insight as under-shepherds to Jesus the chief shepherd (*ἀρχιποιμένος*). All pastors serve gladly and willingly under His authority and ministry, not under compulsion. As it is written in *The Book of Concord*, “Truly good works should be done willingly, or from a voluntary spirit,

by those whom God's Son has made free."⁴⁶ Peter expects pastors to model the faith as well as teachers of the church with the promised reward of the unfading (*ἀμαράντινος*) wreath (*στέφανος*) of glory.

Understanding Healthy Congregations in other Traditions

Even in a healthy church, such as the one in the Philippi, conflict was a problem. Paul wrote, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phil 4:2-3). Two prominent women, who had been Paul's co-workers in ministry, were in such conflict that they needed intervention. Scripture offers clear evidence that conflict in churches dates to the very beginning of the New Testament. A brief survey of healthy congregations (or the lack thereof) outside Lutheran tradition in the twenty-first century is appropriate. To understand healthy congregations in a multiplicity of traditions, Judaism, Pentecostalism, and the Orthodox Church, were selected.

Orthodox

The Orthodox Church in America numbers some 700 parishes, missions, communities, monasteries and institutions throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. It traces its origins to the arrival in Kodiak, Alaska of eight Orthodox missionaries from the Valaamo Monastery in the northern Karelia region of Russia in

⁴⁶ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 579.

1794. Orthodox churches have consistent worship, belief, practice and ministries while local culture influences language and musical traditions.

At the 2013 Orthodox Church in America Parish Ministries Conference, Equipping the Saints for Worship, Learning and Service, the Very Reverend Thomas Hopko⁴⁷ prepared a “teaching distributed as spiritual preparation in advance of the conference.” Titled, “Personal Examination for Clergy and Church Workers,” the teaching includes ten self-reflection questions with additional comments each with the preface “the saints tell us.”⁴⁸ The questions cover topics including daily prayer, Scripture reading, addictive behaviors, confession, worship participation, silence, acts of mercy, sexual addiction and church leadership.

Hopko’s teaching may be compared to the ten characteristics identified by Stephen Macchia in his book, *A Healthy Church*. For example, Macchia writes, “The healthy church provides training, models, and resources for members of all ages to develop their daily spiritual disciplines.”⁴⁹ Hopko also identifies spiritual disciplines as necessary for the church worker when he writes, “The saints tell us that reading the Bible, especially the New Testament writings and the Psalms, is our spiritual food;”⁵⁰ and later, “regular, heartfelt, and responsible participation in the Divine Liturgy and Holy

⁴⁷ Hopko (1939–2015) served as Dean of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary 1968-2002.

⁴⁸ Thomas Hopko, “Personal Examination for Clergy and Church Workers,” oca.org, <http://oca.org/parish-ministry/parishdevelopment/personal-examination-for-clergy-and-church-workers> (accessed September 20, 2015).

⁴⁹ Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1999), 59.

⁵⁰ Hopko, 2.

Communion is an essential element of Christian life.”⁵¹ Hopko also encourages the church worker to:

Practice silence before God’s face and in His presence every day, at least for ten or fifteen minutes . . . the saints teach us that we cannot be human, let alone Christian, unless we purposefully practice silence . . . that if we are especially busy and engaged in especially responsible church work, our silent times should be longer since they who cannot be silent must never speak because they will have nothing to say.⁵²

This is echoed in Archibald Hart’s book, *The Success Factor*, when he writes, “Much of what we experience as spirituality is in the realm of the mind. By controlling how and what we think and discipline our minds we can free ourselves from neurotic tendencies.”⁵³ Hart identifies four thought control techniques, thought stopping, thought redirecting, thought substituting and thought flooding each of which includes a time of silence.⁵⁴ For example, when dealing with a difficult colleague, Hart recommends, “Relax wherever you are, standing or sitting, and think for a moment about the words that are bothering you. Say stop silently to yourself . . . then immediately begin to think about your colleague. Think how human he is, no better than you but also no worse.”⁵⁵

Judaism

While the Orthodox Church traces its origins to the New Testament church, Judaism developed among the ancient Hebrews especially Abraham, Moses and the other

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

⁵² Ibid., 6.

⁵³ Archibald Hart, *The Success Factor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79-83.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 81.

Hebrew Prophets. Judaism has no dogma, no formal set of beliefs that one must hold to be a Jew. In Judaism, actions are far more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief within Judaism. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, known as a “Rambam” from the acronym RMBM, is a medieval Jewish scholar who developed thirteen principals of faith that is a widely accepted list of Jewish beliefs. Judaism focuses on relationships: the relationship between God and humankind, between God and the Jewish people, between the Jewish people and the land of Israel and between human beings.⁵⁶

Reform Judaism magazine was the official voice of the Union for Reform Judaism. It ceased publication in 2014. In the final issue, Ron Wolfson, co-founder of *Synagogue 3000/Next Dor*, an institute designed to catalyze excellence in synagogue life, was interviewed for an article titled, “Creating a Healthy Congregation.” Wolfson has worked in the field of synagogue transformation for more than 20 years.⁵⁷

When asked about the biggest change he has seen in the field of synagogue transformation, Wolfson notes, “Congregations have made worship become much more engaging through music.” When pressed further on this topic, he said, “The bottom line in all this is congregational leadership. I’ve seen significant progress in synagogues where the clergy, staff, and lay leaders are honest with each other, build trust by

⁵⁶ Tracey Rich, “What Is Judaism?” *Judaism* 101, <http://www.jewfaq.org/judaism.htm> (accessed September 20, 2015).

⁵⁷ Ron Wolfson, “Creating a Healthy Congregation,” *Reform Judaism*, Summer 2014, 1, <http://rjmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3365>, 20 (accessed September 20, 2015).

performing candid assessments of what's succeeding and what's not, consider worship renewal and service quality seriously, and work together as partners.”⁵⁸

Wolfson's observations are echoed throughout Jon Katzenbach's *Real Change Leaders*.⁵⁹ While Katzenbach writes for secular society, the concepts presented also are observed in the religious. The change from traditional staff satisfied with the status quo to a staff that continues to “take on stretch targets with a sense of collective responsibility”⁶⁰ as noted in *Real Change Leaders* is reflected in Wolfson's assessment of the congregation “leadership's unwillingness to try something new, to take risks, to change.”⁶¹

Wolfson comments further on the two dangers to avoid in the congregation, namely, “too much talking and not enough doing and not hearing every voice in the congregation.”⁶² He warns leaders to “beware of the temptation to believe your own rhetoric and become insular.”⁶³ Carl George and Robert Logan were co-authors in the book, *Leading and Managing Your Church*.⁶⁴ They effectively deal with similar skills for operative ministry management and provide practical applications to build the leadership team.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Jon Katzenbach, *Real Change Leaders* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 42-45.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁶¹ Wolfson, “Creating a Healthy Congregation.”

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Carl George and Robert Logan, *Leading and Managing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 70-112.

Pentecostalism

After considering how the Orthodox Church and Judaism understand healthy congregations, consideration is directed to a modern movement within Christianity, Pentecostalism. With roots in the Holiness movement of the mid-nineteenth century in the Methodist Church, a major focus of Pentecostal churches is Holy Spirit baptism as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Approximately 740 recognized Pentecostal denominations plus a significant number of independent churches that are not organized into denominations are in the United States. A quarter of American Christians identify as charismatic or Pentecostal.⁶⁵

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA, offered the following advice to Pentecostal pastors at their biennial council in 2011: “You don’t need to change any of your Pentecostal practices.” He urged the ministers not to abandon their use of spiritual gifts, but “What you do need to do [instead] is explain them. Do not compromise what God has called you to do; simply make it explainable.” He told the pastors that healthy churches focus on five purposes (worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism), and suggested that Pentecostal church health also means a sixth focus: “to be Pentecostal.”⁶⁶

Michael Clarensau is the senior director of the Healthy Church Network, an on-line resource for the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal denominations in

⁶⁵ Audrey Barrick, “Survey: 1 in 4 U.S. Christians Identify as Pentecostal,” *Christian Post Politics*, March 29, 2010, 1, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-young-christians-embrace-spiritual-gifts-lack-theological-depth-44505/> (accessed September 20, 2015).

⁶⁶ Robert Crosby, “Rick Warren’s Surprising Advice to Pentecostal Churches,” *Patheos*, November 08, 2011, 1, <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Rick-Warrens-Surprising-Advice-to-Pentecostal-Churches-Robert-Crosby-11-08-2011> (accessed September 20, 2015).

Springfield, MO. In an article for *Enrichment Journal*, he provides five recommendations from the Early Church and modern reality to access Pentecostal church health. Clarensau lists an urgency for Spirit baptism as the first measurement for a health church. Second, he recommends the congregation shorten the time between faith and experience to move people from salvation to water baptism and the pursuit of Spirit baptism to increase effectiveness for both discipleship and missional involvement. Increase contact with the unchurched, emphasize a life of missional activity and most importantly the congregation should dedicate its best energy to new horizons, new people, new ministry efforts and new church plants to find new vitality.⁶⁷

Gospel Publishing House is the publishing arm of the Assemblies of God Pentecostal Church. My Healthy Church and One Hope are imprints of the publishing house that reaches over 30,000 churches comprised of nearly sixty different groups and denominations. My Healthy Church provides distinctive resources to equip the church for a complete, robust ministry with the “choicest, most relevant and effective materials from an impressive array of quality providers.” The sixty-four page catalog lists an impressive selection of materials for the congregation concerned about its health.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Michael Clarensau, “The Healthy Pentecostal Church: Measurements and Best Practices,” *Enrichment Journal*, Spring 2014, 1, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201402/201402_094_Healthy_Church.cfm (accessed September 20, 2015).

⁶⁸ “My Healthy Life,” My Healthy Church, <https://myhealthychurch.com/store/index.cfm> (accessed September 20, 2015).

PART THREE

PRACTICE

CHAPTER FOUR

GOALS AND PLANS

The initial step in formulation of a ministry plan is to answer the questions, “Does God want the church to grow? Specifically does God want to grow healthy churches?” From the words of Jesus, this question can be answered in the affirmative. Christians are called to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20). When Jesus told His disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8) he was making a statement, not a request.

The original, ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες is in the predicate nominative sense. It is clear that in the Greek, Jesus is saying, “you disciples will receive power to be witness throughout the world.” Jesus in fact calls each believer to be a witness of Him and His love. Ultimately disciples of all nations will be gathered together in heaven, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands” (Rev 7:9). In the intervening time, God is working through His Body, the Church, to gather His

children, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). As the local Church grows, the global Church grows as God promises.

If the definition of a healthy church includes numerical and spiritual growth, then a high responsibility rests upon its leaders who will give account. Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” A person obeys when agreement is reached and is persuaded of its correctness and profitableness; one submits, gives up, when agreement is not reached.¹ Anyone inclined to leave Christ is to give up this opinion and obey his or her faithful leaders. Ἀὐτοί is emphatic: “They are the ones who are watching over your souls” so that these may not be lost or even endangered. As God set the prophets of old as guards over Israel, he sets pastors as ones watching over souls.²

God wants the Church to grow, but under responsible leadership. To be held accountable for more souls when one is not being faithful with the souls God already entrusted to the pastor’s care is certainly unhealthy. Those who are called to watch are to give the alarm at the approach of danger; they are to give it early enough so that those who are watched over may meet the danger or may escape it. When an appointed watchman proves unworthy of the responsibility, calamity results. They cannot take their responsibility lightly. The prophet Ezekiel recorded, “So you, son of man, I have made a

¹ RCH Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and James* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 490.

² *Ibid.*, 489–490.

watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me” (Ezk 33:7).

Whitesel in *Organix* offers a prescription for a healthy church with leadership drawn from the millennial generation. He envisions a healthy church with healthy people, spiritual health resulting from personal and communal efforts, as well as volunteer health rising from a network of small groups.³ Whitesel sees church health starting with getting the church’s foundational components healthy. The components are the people. Healthy congregations arise from healthy people according to Whitesel. When organizational health takes precedence over the individual component, that is the people, the church’s health will suffer. The organization does not make the people healthy.

Whitesel also states that there has historically “been a poor distinction between organization and organism.”⁴ Theologians such as Emil Brunner have suggested that the early church viewed the Church as an organization that must be led and managed.⁵ Whitesel on this hand cites Scripture such as, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it,” (1 Cor 12:12, 14, 20, 27). Healthy people are indeed necessary to form a healthy

³ Bob Whitesel, *Organix: Signs of Leadership in a Changing Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 42.

⁴ Ibid, 43.

⁵ Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 2003), 15-18.

organization. The organization rises from a healthy organism with an emphasis on people, not the organization.

Ministry Plan to Grow Healthy Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Churches

At first glance, it may appear that the LCMS is a large, top-down organization with an autocratic leadership and a chief executive officer reaching independent conclusions. While comprised of two auxiliaries, five entities, twenty recognized service organizations, five Inter-Lutheran entities and thirty-six partner churches around the world, the LCMS is the second-largest Lutheran church body in North America and the eighth largest Protestant demonization in the United States. It is comprised of 2,163,698 baptized members, 6,136 congregations, 6,285 ordained ministers, 15,702 educators, 163 deaconesses, 547 directors of Christian education and 492 missionaries. There are also thirty-five regional districts judicatories. The numbers alone suggest a staggering organization.⁶

However, in 1970, the LCMS membership peaked at 2,788,536. In 2014, the Synod had a membership of 2,163,698. This is a loss of 624,838 people in forty-five years.⁷ At the last two conventions, the Synod adopted a series of measures that brought about realignment and position changes. In 2010, twelve executive positions were eliminated with a reduction of an additional three positions in 2013. The various boards and committees of the Synod were also reorganized to bring about “a new emphasis and a

⁶ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, “LCMS Fact Sheet,” <http://www.lcms.org/cic> (accessed September 23, 2015).

⁷ ALPB Forum Online, “Membership Decline in the LCMS,” <http://www.alpb.org/forum/index.php?topic=4915.0> (accessed September 23, 2015).

new look for the church.”⁸ This reaction to declining members is reflected in Whitesel’s work when he writes, “When faced with a need to marshal the troops, modern leaders often fall back on an emphasis on organization over people. Their aspiration is to foster a healthy organization in hopes that it will trickle down and foster healthy people. The problem is that unhealthy components will never make a healthy organization.”⁹

The Synod has also responded with a strategy to increase its outreach efforts. Known as the “72,” this strategy is based on Luke 10:1-2, where Jesus appointed “seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go,” and told them, “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” The strategy is a partnership with the various districts throughout the country and provides resources to help congregations witness to others. Teams, made up of two to four people, help train members of congregations to reach out to people in their communities and to involve them in the life of the church. The training is designed to help congregations establish effective outreach ministry goals; organize publicity and promotional events; and welcome and include guests into the worship and life. No data is available that indicates the number of people touched through this strategy.¹⁰

In *Missional Map-Making*, Roxburgh, provides insights for organizations such as the LCMS that desire to reverse their declining numbers. He discusses strategic planning

⁸ Vicki Biggs, “A New Emphasis and a New Look for the Church,” Reporter Online, <https://blogs.lcms.org/2010/restructuring-begins-12-positions-eliminated> (accessed September 23, 2015).

⁹ Whitesel, *Organix*, 44-45.

¹⁰ Melanie Ave, “Individuals and Congregations Sharing the Faith,” LCMS Witness and Outreach Ministry, <http://www.lcms.org/witness-outreach> (accessed September 23, 2015).

at length and cautions that it “makes assumptions that contradict some basic Christian conventions about what it means to be human and about how human communities engage in transformation.”¹¹ He calls the reader’s attention to the concept that “strategic planning uses objectification to achieve ends. . . . There can never be any justification for turning any human being into an object of someone else’s goals and vision in the social community formed by the Spirit of God.”¹²

The LCMS Mission Statement reads, “In grateful response to God’s grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacraments, the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities and the world.”¹³ Today, the Synod operates the largest Protestant parochial school system in America through its congregations and has relationships and active mission work in nearly ninety countries around the world. It has adopted six mission priorities. These include to plant, sustain and revitalize distinctly Lutheran churches, support and expand theological education and perform human care in close proximity to Word and Sacrament ministry. Additional mission priorities include collaborating with the Synod's members and partners to enhance mission effectiveness, nurture pastors, missionaries and professional church

¹¹ Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 62-75.

¹² *Ibid.*, 76.

¹³ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, “About Us,” <https://www.lcms.org/aboutus> (accessed September 26, 2015).

workers to promote spiritual, emotional and physical well-being and lastly enhance early childhood, elementary and secondary education and youth ministry.¹⁴

Through the mission statement and the six mission priorities the traditional roles of pastoral care, including performing marriages, conducting funerals, administering the sacraments and preaching are underscored as the vehicle “to plant, sustain, and revitalize distinctly Lutheran churches.”¹⁵ Roxburgh takes issues with this approach, “As important as these skills may be, I don’t believe that mission-shaped leadership is simply about caring for people without any concern for cultivating environments and imaginations of mission-shaped life. The leadership required in local churches today calls for the kind of creative thinking that moves beyond these traditional duties.”¹⁶ This brings to mind the question, “What kind of leadership and planning is necessary to maintain doctrine and yet become a leading example of a life shaped by mission?”

Goals

If the declining membership in the LCMS is to be reversed, the leadership needs an understanding and desire to practice healthy decision-making. Equipping leadership with these skills and encouraging their practical application so they will be examples throughout the church will help to turn the decline around. However, such changes apart from God will prove futile. The spiritual life of pastor, leadership and members must grow and be blessed. As the Psalmist writes, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 77.

counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers” (Ps 1:1-3).

Macchia, in *Becoming a Healthy Church*, list ten traits of a vital ministry. These traits are the results of visiting one hundred churches and gathering information through a questionnaire. The first common indicator of a healthy church, which is also central in all ten characteristics, is God’s Word and prayer. Scripture and prayer remain highly valued as demonstrated in a recent survey from the Pew Research Center:

More than half (55%) of Americans said they pray every day, according to a 2013 Pew Research Center survey, while 23% said they pray weekly or monthly and 21% said they seldom or never pray. Even among those who are religiously unaffiliated, 21% said they pray daily. Women (65%) are more likely than men (46%) to pray every day. Older people (60%) are more likely than younger adults (45%) to say they pray daily.¹⁷

While God’s Word and prayer are highly valued, Macchia says they are more often promoted than practiced. He calls for congregations to be reinvigorated with greater biblical literacy and “introduce prayer into every context of the ministry.”¹⁸

Roxburgh in fact calls upon Christian churches to create a parallel culture. He calls upon church leaders “to create an environment where people begin to understand and challenge the ways their lives are controlled by values in the larger culture.”¹⁹

Referencing Romans 12, he calls upon Christian leaders to be committed to practices that

¹⁷ Michael Lipka, “Five Facts About Prayer,” Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/06/5-facts-about-prayer/> (accessed September 26, 2015).

¹⁸ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 18.

¹⁹ Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 161.

shape missional environments in the midst of spasmodic change. As Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom 12:2, 3).

The Content of the Strategy

An approach or strategy to restore health to declining congregations in the LCMS begins when the Congregation will understand that they are to share the Gospel throughout their community. Since the congregation belongs to a Synod that views Scripture as God’s word, is the foundation of faith and is infallible, a period of teaching and preaching would be in order. The following is drawn from a doctrinal statement of the Synod that is a good study document for a congregation and its leaders:

We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration. . . . We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith. . . . Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters.²⁰

Through preaching, teaching, and forming relationships, the facilitator will underscore the need for evangelism. Many congregation leaders may wish to embark on a

²⁰ Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1932), 4-5.

building program or a revitalization of a ministry that is not serving the community but is self-serving. An outward focus is included in a list of ten characteristics of a healthy church, Macchia's study, *Becoming a Healthy Church*. Scripture is awash in pericopes that stress the importance of evangelism. For example, from the Old Testament, the Psalmist writes, "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!" (Ps 96:3). Jesus instructs His disciples in the Gospel of Mark: "Go into all the world and proclaim the [G]ospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). The facilitator will also consider Matthew 24:14, Matthew 28:19-20 and Revelation 14:6-7.

The facilitator will be wise to provide training for the pastor, leaders and others. Seeking to become an agent of transformation as Sherwood Lingenfelter describes in his thesis for Christian workers, the facilitator will seek biblical transformation, not social cultural change. The struggling congregation is not to find its way to health through materialist assumptions.²¹ Scripture speaks clearly when Jesus says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:33). Mary Louis Gifford describes the turnaround at Wollaston Congregational Church in Massachusetts: "The fruits of the turnaround at Wollaston church are many, but perhaps none is greater than our witness to the transformative work of God's Holy Spirit in our midst. Through grace we have been led to pass the church on to another generation of believers."²²

²¹ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 262-263.

²² Mary Louise Gifford, *The Turnaround Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), 94.

When a pastor takes a grave misstep that results in a dramatic moral failure, a tragedy occurs for the pastor, the parsonage family, the local church and even the community. Even if there is no moral failure, but the pastor leaves in an untimely manner or is asked to leave because of conflict, church health suffers. Therefore, it is vital that the facilitator will seek to be Christ-like, striving to set an example in both word and deed for other leaders, possibly including a remaining pastor or pastors. Kurt Senske, in *Executive Values* writes, “Being a Christian leader means living under God’s guidance and according to Christian principles, and always asking the question, am I building people up or am I building myself up and merely using those around me?”²³ In this book written for the Christian leader in the secular world, Senske reminds readers, “People are not the means to an end, they are the end. People matter.”²⁴ Leith Anderson speaks forthrightly to leaders, “Don’t do anything stupid.”²⁵ After all, the reason for the congregation’s present condition may be due to a previous leader’s foolishness. Any facilitator would be wise to form an accountability group. With trusted and skilled advisors not associated with the congregation in question who listen, observe and advise, a facilitator will be encouraged to set a Christ-like example.

The facilitator will do well to remember that the primary purpose of the Church Universal is the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. With an emphasis on Word and Sacrament ministry, and recognizing that the Holy Spirit works

²³ Kurt Senske, *Executive Values: A Christian Approach to Organizational Leadership* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 11.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 76.

²⁵ Anderson, *Leadership that Works*, 208.

sanctification, the church decline will be reversed within three years. Luther writes about sanctification in the *Small Catechism* in his explanation to the Third Article of the

Apostle's Creed:

The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life.²⁶

The facilitator does not work faith, does not assume responsibility for the past errors of the church nor accepts the unreasonable expectations God's people may anticipate. While hesitant to set any numerical goal on the work of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, the church will see a reversal within three years or it may die. Based on the work of Rainer, the largest numbers of pastors leave their church in the third year of their ministry. Rainer notes some common themes about the third year including members who become disillusioned and dissatisfied.²⁷ The facilitator is to enable a change process and this process will threaten some members. Therefore, the relationship between the church and facilitator should end after three years, if not earlier due to success.

Christian Schwarz in his work with Natural Church Development writes that the true fruit of the apple tree is not another apple, but another apple tree, and then the true fruit of a facilitator is not only a healthy congregation, but also other facilitators.²⁸ A

²⁶ Kolb, *The Book of Concord*, 355.

²⁷ Thom S. Rainer, "The Dangerous Third Year of Pastoral Tenure," Thom S. Rainer, entry posted June 14, 2014, <http://thomrainer.com/2014/06/dangerous-third-year-pastoral-tenure/> (accessed September 26, 2015).

²⁸ Christian Schwarz, *The 3 Colors of Leadership* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2012), 33.

mentoring program for new facilitators, pastors and leadership will be offered to multiply the ministry. Walking alongside the facilitator, as it is reasonable and agreeable to all participants will prove to be beneficial for one called to effect change in another unhealthy congregation.

Target Population and Leadership

For the purposes of this project, the Northern Illinois District president and staff chose a test congregation. Initially asked by the district staff to offer pastoral counsel to the congregation's pastor who was struggling with his first assignment out of seminary, his congregation became the test congregation when he resigned his ministry. The remaining leadership asked for assistance to reverse their declining membership, finances and participation in the community.

In the future, district staffs who are familiar with those congregations that are declining and yet desire to change will make the selection of congregations. It is important that the congregation truly be ready to change and not simply know that growth may be realized if they change. Kegan and Lahey describe a medical school that agreed on what and how would be best to teach future doctors—but they did not do it.²⁹ Overcoming group-wide immunity to change is successful when individual immunity to change is also overcome. Church members must be willing to change not only the direction of their church but individual change is necessary also.

²⁹ Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2009), 109-124.

It also follows that pastors of congregations desiring to participate in the project need to be inclined to remain in that parish while displaying a willingness to learn, change and lead people to a new future. It is probable that the pastor whose congregation is struggling is also struggling personally as well as professionally. The benefits of walking alongside a seasoned pastor who can offer professional advice and an empathic ear are immeasurable. Certainly, God may have other designs for the congregation's pastor that would preclude remaining in place. In consultation with the district staff, a solution in the best interests of the congregation is preferred.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

As previously discussed, Risen Savior Lutheran Church of Byron is in the process of moving from an unhealthy, declining congregation to a healthy, growing congregation. From its humble start as a mission church, it enjoyed only a short period of growth, harmony and vision that it hopes to soon enjoy again. Eventually relocating to its present location after a series of temporary homes, Risen Savior now has a long-term rental agreement in place. Not only settled in an accessible location in the heart of Bryon, the church's property owner even attends worship occasionally.

Though a young church, Risen Savior already has a tumultuous history. Shortly after settling in Byron, the congregation engaged its first full-time pastor. After an initial period of rejoicing and thanking God, neither the congregation nor the new pastor and his family were adequately prepared for the changes both would experience. A new pastor arrives in a new town fresh out of the seminary, with no experience. He brings his wife and four young children, all of whom must also assimilate to a new home, town, congregation and family dynamic. He comes to a relatively new congregation as their first full-time pastor. There is no one to mentor him, or the congregation, during what

could be the largest transition of his life. No one consistently walked alongside the pastor, his wife and the congregation's leaders as the most significant change in this church's young history developed.

Timeline

The facilitator became involved with Risen Savior when he began to offer pastoral counsel to the young pastor as he prepared to leave the congregation. Meeting once every two weeks for an extended session, the pastor shared a great deal of frustration and anger directed at church members, leaders and district officials. Furthermore, the young pastor also shared his feelings of betrayal. It became obvious to the facilitator that either the pastor would be resigning within a year of his arrival, or through prayer and divine intervention, he would choose to seek mediation and be willing to offer forgiveness as well as accept it. The status quo was no longer a possibility.

After the pastor announced his resignation, the facilitator received permission from the district president to secure permission from the leadership of Risen Savior to consult at least through the transition and work began. Three immediate goals were on the agenda for the facilitator: establish a fact-finding mission find out if the former pastor and his family are financially and emotionally secure; seek permission from the leadership to serve as a facilitator for the transition and possibly beyond; and finally, begin an immediate process of de-briefing the congregation's leadership.

It was determined that the former pastor had relocated to a family home in Colorado and was seeking employment. Their fifth child was born as this time, presenting some additional financial concerns. Working with the district president and

Synod officials, an emergency grant was provided to the pastor and his family by the facilitator from the national and district office of the LCMS.

Throughout their relatively brief history, the congregation has received advice from a number of pastors including the founding pastor, at least two different district mission staff executives and the district president. The congregation's leadership also attended a number of conferences and other district events. However, this is the first time one person will walk alongside the leadership at every meeting and provide additional opportunities for the entire congregation to grow through various assessments, discussions and Bible studies.

The leadership of Risen Savior voted unanimously to invite the facilitator to assist during this time of transition. Certainly, this level of support is encouraging as the facilitator begins to walk alongside the congregation. Providing an opportunity for the leadership to share their frame of mind and work through any grief was a necessary initial step. In a sense, the previous pastor rejected their leadership through his untimely resignation. The leadership will be vital in the months to follow as unhealthy practices are identified and change is implemented.

This leads to the question, "How will this change succeed?" Whitesel references research by management scholars that indicated a "measured, prudent, conciliatory, harmonizing process of introducing change is necessary for change to succeed."¹ Several steps for bringing about change in a congregation were identified. These include: not

¹ Bob Whitesel, *Preparing for Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in Your Church* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008), 165.

getting too excited too soon, go to reticent members, get permission for the change, go slowly and focus on unity in diversity.² In essence, the research Whitesel identifies reveals that change should be introduced slowly, with consensus building and time to prepare for success. Through discussion with the Risen Savior Board of Directors, it was obvious that most leaders wanted to proceed with filling the pulpit vacancy immediately. The facilitator conducted extended discussions including an intentional debriefing to review members' experiences with the Dickerhoffs' unexpected departure. In subsequent meetings, the facilitator also led the leadership through a brainstorming exercise with Post-it-Notes and a SWAT analysis.³ After three months, leaders began to accept a measure of responsibility and a desire to change, although a quick change was preferred.

Risen Savior lacked one aspect the project did not anticipate. A resident pastor was expected to be involved with the unhealthy declining congregation. The lack of such a pastor posed a complication for some members of the leadership. In order to resolve the issue, it was mutually agreed that the facilitator would attend monthly board of directors meetings and also lead another monthly meeting for the board of directors but open to any member that wished to attend. These new meetings became known as "Think Tanks" among the leadership, reflecting a description of their actual experience. Designed to build and strengthen relationships, work through transitional issues and provide for spiritual growth, half of those attending weekly worship typically attended "Think Tanks."

² Ibid., 165-168.

³ The SWOT analysis helps organizations assess issues within and outside the organization. Made up of an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities and threats from competition, the analysis provides an outline for strategic decision-making.

The facilitator interviewed key leaders during the closing weeks of 2014, the year Dickerhoff left the congregation. In order to develop a systems understanding of the congregation, he asked each leader to describe their family's experience at Risen Savior, their personal faith and to share what they felt were problems of the congregation. After some conversation with each leader, it was possible for the facilitator to identify one overall thread. To confirm the hypothesis and bring about a measure of healing, each leader was asked to tell a detailed story describing their felt problem. The facilitator listened empathically, took notes and remained non-judgmental. The stories shared confirmed a common thread. This is summarized simply as the previous pastor lacked an ability to work effectively with others.⁴

Evaluation Process

Two assessment instruments were used to determine the strengths of individual leaders, as well as their effectiveness as a team. Strengths Finders 2.0⁵ was chosen because it is designed to help people do more of what they do well and manage their weaknesses effectively. When the leadership team mutually agrees to share identified strengths with the entire team, as occurred in this instance, the team benefits as the focus is on each member's strengths. Tom Rath, who helped to develop Strength Finders in 1998 with other Gallup scientists, includes well-documented explanations and action steps for each strength. Reviewing these as a team encouraged more storytelling and team building.

⁴ Senge Peter et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Publishing, 1994), 87-108.

⁵ Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 15-29.

The facilitator and leadership also selected the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument as an additional assessment tool. This tool is familiar to professionals involved in conflict resolution over the past forty years, and helps people discover different conflict handling styles. Those different styles affect interpersonal and group dynamics. The instrument assesses an individual's typical behavior in conflict situations and describes it along two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is described as what extent a person tries to satisfy his or her own concerns. Cooperativeness is the extent to which they try to satisfy the concerns of another person. Five different conflict-handling modes are detailed which enable an individual to be effective in conflict situations.⁶ At Risen Savior, results from the assessment indicated a tendency among the leadership team to be unassertive and uncooperative in conflict situations. The leadership also tended to accommodate (the opposite of competing) while demonstrating an unwillingness to compromise. One can easily conclude that an inexperienced pastor may find it difficult to work with a leadership team that is uncooperative and unwilling to compromise.

An additional instrument would be beneficial if a resident pastor was present. The Cattell Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire⁷ is used to assess personality in a variety of situations. Archibald Hart, senior professor of psychology and dean emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary, offers a desirable personality scale for the well-faceted pastor. Using the Cattell instrument with Hart's scale will give the facilitator great insight in the

⁶ "Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument," *CPP The People Development People*, <https://www.cpp.com/products/tki/index.aspx> (accessed October 1, 2015).

⁷ Raymond Cattell, *Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire Administrator's Manual*, 5th ed. (Champaign, IL: Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, Inc., 2002), 7-13.

pastor's personality. The Cattell instrument includes a social desirability index that is beneficial when working with a pastor who may be in a conflict situation. The facilitator also may use the instrument in counseling, for example, with the pastor and spouse. It will provide support for vocational guidance if indicated. The Couple's Counseling Report includes a narrative summary of results to share with the couple. The relationship between the test items and the traits measured by the instrument is not obvious; therefore, it is difficult for the test-taker to tailor responses to achieve a desired outcome.

At Risen Savior, the facilitator assembled an oral history during leadership interviews and during the counseling sessions with the former pastor. The facilitator also interviewed the founding pastor in order to listen to his stories. The congregation lists key events on their website. Demographics were gathered through MissionInsite of Irvine, CA. In meetings to educate and inspire the leadership, the facilitator has used this data regularly.

During May 2015, the facilitator requested that the leadership plan a church picnic at a local public park with the intention of bringing all members of the church together for worship, fellowship and discussion about the future of Risen Savior. The picnic was held on June 28, 2015, with all families attending except one. The facilitator preached using various parables of Jesus, concluding with the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20) to emphasize salvation through faith and the command to baptize and teach all nations. Following worship, the congregation joined in a meal and an additional time of prayer. Lastly, the facilitator led an open discussion to solicit comments about the future of the church. In short order, the people agreed that they wanted to remain open, grow in membership and have a resident pastor. There was no discussion about the previous

pastor or any of the issues and conflicts raised during his ministry at Risen Savior. The facilitator reminded the members that engaging a resident pastor does not guarantee growth; rather this is the work of the Holy Spirit. The people heard that the Spirit works through all the members as they support their pastor and together reach out to the non-believers of the community. The facilitator cited various Scriptures from Acts.

At this meeting of the congregation, a consensus was reached that a pastor should be identified who could serve them part-time. Financially they felt incapable of providing an adequate salary for a full-time pastor. Subsequent to this decision, the facilitator was informed that a pastor who intends to retire is serving another congregation, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lindenwood, IL. This congregation has also been declining in recent years. In 2010, worship attendance peaked at eighty-three but fell to seventy-one in 2014. There is approximately fifteen miles between Risen Savior and Immanuel Lutheran Church and the congregations are separated by a natural boundary, the Rock River. The facilitator is currently exploring the option of forming a dual parish. In this arrangement, both congregations will share a full-time pastor and costs: salary, benefits and expenses. While Risen Savior is open to this possibility, Immanuel is still considering the option. If there is agreement, both congregations must then agree on calling a single pastor, a job description that serves the needs of both churches, specify preferred worship styles and meeting times to allow one pastor to participate and be accommodating with the pastor's time as necessary. The pastor will also be challenged to serve as an evangelist for both locations and not succumb to the temptation to maintain the status quo.

During October and November 2015, Risen Savior will proceed with the steps necessary to engage a part-time pastor. They will adjust their plans when and if

Immanuel Lutheran Church agrees to enter into a dual parish arrangement. The immediate steps for Risen Savior include formulating an interview committee, developing interview questions, completing a self-study to determine their strengths and weaknesses, composing of a job description that will meet their needs and determining the qualities and gifts desired in their next pastor.

A realistic goal for the congregation is to complete the self-study, conduct interviews of prospective pastors in November and December and prayerfully call their next pastor in January. If Immanuel Lutheran Church chooses to enter into a dual parish arrangement, the goals should remain the same but additional steps will be required to develop one job description to serve both congregations. The timeline would be pushed back a minimum six months with the new pastor in place by July 2016.

The facilitator will continue to walk alongside Risen Savior throughout the process of engaging a new pastor. He will attend all leadership meetings and take a lead role in Bible Study at the leadership meetings including leading prayer, devotions and offer advice and training as necessary. The congregation must be prepared for the transition to a new pastor. The facilitator will encourage all members to assist the pastor and anticipated family with the move into the community, since this helpful gesture was overlooked with the former pastor's arrival. The congregation will be encouraged to provide for an orientation to the community for the new pastor, donate food and entire meals, as well as other gifts. As Peter writes, "show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt 4:9-10).

Resources

The facilitator has approach the church leadership to begin formulating a plan to continue the work designed to improve the health of the congregation after the pastor's arrival. This plan will be shared with the new pastor shortly after installation to continue the change process. With approval to continue, the facilitator envisions setting regular private meetings with the pastor as well as continuing to meet with the leadership using the now familiar "Think Tank" model. To work effectively with both groups it is suggested that an applicable third-party resource be used as a discussion starter. For example, Craig Groeschel's book, *It: How Churches and Leaders can get it and Keep It*, can be used with the board of directors and pastor reviewing a chapter each month at their meetings. Groeschel provides open-ended discussion questions designed to elicit conversation and creative thought.⁸

Another possible resource is Whitesel's, *Cure for the Common Church*. Offering assessment tools that volunteer leaders can administer to identify church problems as well as cures. Whitesel's book has wide application for congregation of various sizes and traditions. A "Quick-Start Guide"⁹ is provided as well as an annual questionnaire with detailed instructions not only for administration but also for follow-up to address the issues uncovered in the assessment.¹⁰

⁸ Craig Groeschel, *It: How Churches and Leaders Can Get It and Keep It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 25.

⁹ Whitesel, *Cure for the Common Church*, 11-17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 160-167.

The use of these tools will provide the new pastor and congregation with four-month goals to address whatever issues prevent Risen Savior from becoming the healthy church God desires. The facilitator will advise the leadership to formulate a plan that will put in place action steps and implement the plan within six-to-nine months after the pastor's installation. Four months after the plan is implemented, the leadership including the pastor and facilitator come together and shares their progress, holding one another accountable. After eleven months, the team will administer a quick check-up survey followed by an annual check-up. The quick check-up is designed to give direction to the annual check-up, identifying areas that need further examination. The leadership team following the template Whitesel suggests may develop these instruments.¹¹

If the assessment tools in *Cure for the Common Church* are not used, the congregation may consider Rainer's *Church Health Survey*,¹² Schwarz's *Natural Church Development*,¹³ J. Russell Crabtree's *Church Assessment Tool*,¹⁴ or any similar assessment. The Florida-Georgia District of the LCMS offers a *Pastoral Evaluation Tool for Congregations* designed to assist congregations and pastors to engage in regular evaluation of their ministry.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., 162.

¹² The Lawless Group, "Church Health Survey," <http://www.thelawlessgroup.com/Content/Default/3/9/0/our-services/church-health-survey.html> (accessed October 2, 2015).

¹³ Schwarz, "Welcome to NCD."

¹⁴ J. Russell Crabtree, "The Promise of Clarity," Holy Cow Consulting, <https://holycowconsulting.com/get-started/churches/> (accessed October 2, 2015).

¹⁵ L. Lloyd Behnken, "Pastoral Evaluation Tool for Congregations," FLGA District, <http://flgadistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/evaluationtool.pdf> (accessed October 2, 2015).

The challenge for Risen Savior, as well as any congregation who recognizes that their church is not healthy, is to keep the momentum flowing. Evaluation, analysis and future ministry projections including goal setting, planning and implementation are vital aspects of the change process. Dedicating sufficient time for this process is the only way the implementation will occur. This is underscored in the secular world as Peter Senge notes in his *The Dance of Change* his follow-up book to *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*.

In it he writes:

Every successful learning initiative requires key people to allocate hours to new types of activities: reflection, planning, collaborate work, and training. “Core teams’ must take the time to design the next stages of the initiatives. Work groups need a day or two every month for ‘skillful’ discussions about business issues. Being a part of the network of committed people can take up a great deal of time, not just in meetings but in conversation, e-mail, and reading. Without enough time to spend on regular practice of conversation or systems thinking skills, profound change cannot occur, even if there is a strong interest.”¹⁶

Identifying and training leaders to implement change process is certainly necessary. However, this raises a few questions: What will be the role of the new pastor? Will the lay leadership appoint a chairperson to lead the initiative or will the pastor? If training is necessary to implement the change, will the pastor provide the training or will that come from the facilitator and qualified district staff? Kevin Ford in *Transforming Church*, labels leadership as a verb: “Leadership as a verb connects people and problems in the active context of stepping out in faith and up to the plate. Its work never ends. In the same way, leading adaptive change is an ongoing quest with no guarantee of ever

¹⁶ Peter Senge and George Roth, *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in a Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 67-68.

getting to the finish line.”¹⁷ He continues to note, “Leadership is about the leader mobilizing others for ministry.”¹⁸ As a verb, leadership is not about the one who makes the decisions.

Additionally, Bolman and Deal identify good leadership from two divergent perspectives. They write, “One asserts that all good leaders must have the right stuff—qualities like vision, strength, and commitment. The other holds that good leadership is situational; what works in one setting will not work in another.”¹⁹ Bolman and Deal see truth in both views. Citing one body of research that suggests shared characteristics including vision, strength and commitment is preferred for effective leadership while another body of research points to situational variables that determine the best leadership.²⁰ The facilitator will do well to assess the leadership traits of the volunteers as well as the pastor and while defining leadership, will assertively assist the congregation to appoint qualified leaders in influential positions.

An abundance of resources is available for the congregation as it moves through the change process and becomes a healthy growing church in the community. Two books are suggested that will have wide acceptance in a Lutheran setting. First, *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship: Reclaiming Our Heritage of Diversity* examines the challenges of multiplicity in worship. Authored by David Luecke, a LCMS pastor and former synod

¹⁷ Kevin Ford, *Transforming Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁹ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 345.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 346.

vice president and associate professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, the book answers the question, what is Lutheran Worship: “To be Lutheran is to subscribe to the Confessional of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. But the confessions . . . declare themselves to only be an interpretation of the starting point, Scripture. If scripture did not take a position . . . they said so and left the matter open for differences in practice.”²¹ This book is invaluable for the recent seminary graduate who may have a narrower view of German Lutheran Worship, as well as for a congregation that is receiving visitors unfamiliar with the Lutheran Divine Service a term derived from the German *Gottesdienst* (“God's service”).²²

An additional resource is a book that grew out of an exhaustive study of Lutheran congregations that showed an increase in baptized membership, average worship attendance and adult conversions. Further study for each congregation and determining a regional as well as demographic representation, fifty congregations were selected and their pastors were interviewed. The book that came from the study, *Courageous Churches*,²³ not only tells the story of these congregations’ growth, but also identifies common themes. Reflecting on the themes and their application for Risen Savior will be a beneficial exercise.

Moving Risen Savior to become a healthy growing congregation will require an intentional decision-making process that follows Christ’s directive to go, disciple, baptize

²¹ David S. Luecke, *The Other Story of Lutherans at Worship: Reclaiming Our Heritage of Diversity* (Tempe AZ: Fellowship Ministries, 1995), 60-61.

²² Paul Grime, *LCMS Liturgical Glossary* (St. Louis: LCMS Worship, 2011), 7.

²³ Paul T. Heinecke, Kent R. Hunter, and David S. Luecke, *Courageous Churches: Refusing Decline, Inviting Growth* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub House, 1992), 15-22.

and teach (Mt 28:19-20). Possible future personnel hires may assist with new worship formats and internet marketing to share its mission throughout social and print media. The leadership will be encouraged to support and enable personnel committed to the change process in the congregation and gifted for their specific area of responsibility. The facilitator will provide resources for additional training of support personnel as necessary.

Direct observation of the congregation is also available through the Circuit Visitor (a pastor elected by the neighboring churches to offer pastoral assistance during vacancy), the Northern Illinois District staff and the facilitator. In addition, the facilitator will conduct personal interviews of worshipers, seeking out “old” members as well as visitors. Using a set of questions developed to address the concerns of Risen Savior, interviews will be scheduled shortly after the pastor is installed and again one year later. Pre- and post-interviews will be conducted in order to compare the responses and note areas of improvement as well as concern.

Following the assessments and interviews, a report summarizing the findings as well as recommendations for the future goals and action steps will be prepared under the guidance of the facilitator, with input from the pastor and local leadership. This report will be for distribution to the congregation and district leadership. A similar annual report on the anniversary of the plan implementation is wise for the first three years of the new pastor’s tenure.

Additional Field Testing

With the district president’s approval, this project will be field tested in additional congregations. The original proposal envisioned the facilitator walking alongside an

unhealthy congregation with a pastor in place. Identifying declining congregations and implementing the project following the previously described process involving the Northern Illinois District staff will be beneficial to the congregation, pastors and district staff. Informing other districts of this project with an invitation to participate is the next logical step.

The facilitator will be equipped to work with the declining congregation's pastor. It is highly likely that the church has experienced conflict that contributed to its decline. Two resources are recommended for the facilitator to use in the event of church conflict. William Ury's *Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations* is a practical approach to conflict resolution through negotiations. Ury founded the International Negotiation Network with former president Jimmy Carter. While the book is written to deal with an employer, difficult customer or a deceitful coworker, the principles apply in the congregation setting and provide discussion points for a pastor involved in conflict.²⁴

In addition, future facilitators should be familiar with Cosgrove and Hatfield's *Church Conflict*. Written specifically for the Christian Church, the authors use family systems theory to expose the intricacies of congregational dynamics. *Church Conflict* looks beyond the leadership of the local church to "a family-like system, which powerfully determines the way that church members relate to one another, do business together, care for one another, and fight with one another."²⁵ Cosgrove and Hatfield work to enable the church family to better deal with internal conflicts within family dynamics.

²⁴ William Ury, *Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations* (New York: Bantam, 2007), 3-19.

²⁵ Charles Cosgrove and Dennis Hatfield, *Church Conflict: The Hidden Systems Behind the Fights* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 5.

All leaders, including pastors, whether or not they experience conflict should read Max De Pree. *Leadership Is an Art* and *Leadership Jazz* will familiarize the pastor with the struggles faced by those who sit in the pews week after week. *Leadership Is an Art* deals with themes of integrity, building and nurturing relationships and the crucial nature of community building in, a pastor will do well to read the chapter titled, “Some Thoughts for CEO’s.” De Pree asks questions every pastor asks, especially when their church is not thriving including, “Does what I do count?” And, “Does what I do make a difference to anybody?”²⁶

Leadership Jazz is filled with common sense advice that all leaders, especially pastors, can neglect as life presents its challenges and goals are neglected. De Pree writes, “The organization expects the leader to define and express both in writing and especially through behavior the beliefs and values of the institution. . . . A leader is responsible for lean and simple statements of policy consistent with beliefs and values, vision and strategy.”²⁷ The pastor of an unhealthy church may need to be reminded about behavior reflecting the church and speaking in clear simple statements.

As the project continues field-testing, the facilitator will continue to report and seek input from the congregation, pastor and district staff. In the spirit of De Pree, the facilitator’s behavior will exemplify the beliefs and values of the Christian/Lutheran Church. The facilitator will be encouraged by the Proverb, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed” (Pr 15:22).

²⁶ Max De Pree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Crown Business, 2004), 121-128.

²⁷ Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazz - Revised Edition: The Essential Elements of a Great Leader* (New York: Crown Business, 2008), 19-20.

Success for the project will look very different from success in modern business. Measuring the number of people that come to Sunday worship or how much money was received does not tell if a church is truly succeeding. The measurement has to come from factors that can be difficult to quantify, including spiritual growth and development. Also very relevant is how the people of the church are doing on Monday, not just how they act on Sunday. One may ask, “If the church closed its doors, would the community notice?”

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Memories of a suburban Chicago church linger in my mind. These are pleasant recollections of times with family, inspiration and commitment. Times of sadness and despair were mitigated through relationships with people and pastor. Members of Risen Savior may have similar memories in years to come. However, this particular suburban Chicago church has changed and so have most churches. The doctrine is timeless and still preached weekly. The sacraments continue to be administered. Nevertheless, something else is different. A long-term pastorate of twenty-seven years ended with retirement. The next pastor called to replace the retiring pastor left the pastoral ministry within a year, following a family tragedy. A new pastor came and served for six years. He left under less than ideal circumstances, and now serves two urban congregations each averaging twenty-five in worship. In the last ten years, attendance at this suburban church steadily declined to 163 from 400.¹ The elementary school enrollment reflects the attendance pattern with only seventy-eight total students, including thirteen in kindergarten. An experience pastor, who resigned his previous call, has remained to serve the congregation for the past eight years. The church recently installed an assistant pastor. Regrettably, though the details may be different, the reality is not all that far removed from what happened at Risen Savior, a notably younger church.

This particular suburban church played a huge role for thousands of people in the last 150 years. It is interesting to explore what happened. A safe gathering spot for German immigrants for fifty years, it was a place with familiar language symbols and

¹ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, LCMS.org.

culture for people fleeing persecution. The church is where the children attended elementary school and learned English when their native German became suspicious following World War I. People remained with the church from birth to grave, receiving their earthy remains in the church cemetery adjacent to the sanctuary.

There are obvious changes to consider when analyzing the decline of this, or any, church. For example, unimagined technological advances have provided the means for today's pastor to communicate instantly with members of a congregation or even the public. Research tools, available only in select seminary libraries in the past, are now readily accessible to pastors serving rural congregations. Sermons and Bible studies are available in moments through the internet. Gone are the days of pastors making visits to homes on dirt streets in a used car donated by well-intentioned members. Visiting members is efficient today with improved roads and communication. Quality medical care and reputable retirement communities are readily available.

Shifting the focus from churches to people shows that something else has also transpired. My seminary graduating class is reduced to thirty-five active pastors from the ninety-eight placed into congregations or missions in 1979. Some received their crown of glory, others retired, but many did not finish well and left involuntary. Moral failure, including two felony convictions, interrupted many careers. Some pastors simply stepped down when they were no longer able to meet their congregation's expectations. Today's church is ill. Its health is poor and the prognosis is dubious at best. According to the

Hartford Institute of Religion Research,² more than 40 percent of Americans “say” they go to church weekly. As it turns out, however, less than 20 percent are actually in church. In other words, more than 80 percent of Americans are finding more fulfilling things to do on weekends.

In addition, somewhere between 4,000 and 7,000 churches close their doors every year. In an article entitled “13 Issues for Churches in 2013,” Rainer puts the estimate higher. He says between 8,000 and 10,000 churches will likely close this year.³ Between the years 2010 and 2012, more than half of all churches in America did not add a single member. Every year, nearly 3 million previous churchgoers enter the ranks of the “religiously unaffiliated” in census data.

The purpose of this doctoral project is to help pastors and members of declining congregations in the LCMS. Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, is one of two seminaries to prepare pastors in the LCMS. In recruitment literature the seminary states that it prepares pastors to be a:

Shepherd for God’s people in the church. He cares for them in the midst of suffering, pain, and even death. He comes to them time after time with God's Word and feeds them with Christ’s Body broken and His Blood poured out for them. He confronts the man secure in self-righteousness and comforts those burdened by the weight of their own sin with the proclamation of forgiveness.⁴

² Toni Ridgaway, “Statistics Don't Tell the Whole Story when it Comes to Church Attendance,” Church Leaders, <http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/170739-statistics-don-t-tell-the-whole-story-when-it-comes-to-church-attendance.html> (accessed October 13, 2015).

³ Thom S. Rainer, “Thirteen Issues for Churches in 2013: Issues 7-13,” Thom S. Rainer, <http://thomrainer.com/?s=13+Issues+for+Churches+in+2013> (accessed October 13, 2015).

⁴ “Concordia Theological Seminary-Admission,” ctfw.edu, <http://admission.ctsfw.edu/?dest=mdivwho> (accessed October 14, 2015).

This recruitment literature signals the seminary's intent—the students are well prepared to maintain the status quo in the congregation with a clear emphasis on the Sunday spoken word. However, people are leaving the local church, attendance is declining, and the church is ill-equipped to deal with the challenge. This project seeks to address membership decline and provide the local congregation, its leadership and pastor with tools to reverse the decline, realizing a statistically verifiable membership increase within three years.

Three resources are available now to the local congregation through the LCMS. If the congregation is in conflict, they may see the assistance of their circuit visitor who is a pastor chosen by a circuit of congregations to assist during times of vacancy and discord. Additionally, the district president may offer advice. However, if the pastor fears that personal performance issues may be contributing to the decline, inviting one's supervising pastor or even the circuit visitor may be difficult if impossible for some pastors.

A third resource is the Ambassadors of Reconciliation, which is an international ministry founded to help Lutherans and their churches to live, proclaim and cultivate lifestyles of reconciliation. They seek to make peace in troubled situations. Staffed with trained and certified counselors, this successful ministry has been worthwhile in many situations. If conflict has led to the decline, a congregation may seek their guidance. Unfortunately, a declining congregation often has declining revenue and engaging the Ambassadors of Reconciliation may not be within their financial means.⁵

⁵ “Ambassadors of Reconciliation,” <http://www.hisaor.org/> (accessed October 13, 2015).

This project proposes a senior, experienced pastor, ideally with additional training in interpersonal relationships or a related field, who will walk alongside a declining congregation. A congregation with steadily declining attendance, a lack of new members, few if any adult or child baptisms, and ever-declining revenue, likely has unhealthy practices. The pastor is very likely at risk to also develop unhealthy behaviors and consider leaving the church, or even the pastoral ministry. Without intervention, this congregation is likely to join the thousands of other congregations that close their doors permanently every year.

The senior, experienced pastor will become a facilitator for the declining congregation. Developing relationships with the leadership, especially with the pastor, and becoming an impartial confidant who maintains confidentiality, the facilitator will seek to uncover the practices and behaviors that keep the congregation from growing. Using a variety of instruments including specific books, Bible studies and occasionally preaching, the congregation receives tools to grow spiritual and resilient in God's Word.

The facilitator currently serves pro bono and will continue to do so. The facilitator also agrees to be excluded as a candidate for the pastoral office at the congregation receiving assistance. The work should remain unencumbered by any possible personal ambition. In fact, both the facilitator and the pastor of the congregation should agree to remain committed to the change process until the decline is reversed. It could easily require a three-year commitment.

Initially the facilitator will seek to create a healthy environment in the congregation so that its declining membership trend is reversed, or at least reduced. A healthy environment is dependent upon developing relationships and trust among the

people and pastor. Recognizing theological practices and change dynamics that shape congregations, the facilitator will prepare a framework that does not sacrifice confessional subscription of a LCMS Congregation and its pastor.

To implement the desired change, significant training and mentoring, as well as teaching and expository preaching, will be vital. The facilitator will be responsible for involving numerous volunteers as well as securing the cooperation of the pastor and other leaders. A regular evaluation process will provide feedback as the project in the local congregation matures.

The entire project is adaptable in other congregations and settings in the LCMS and in other church bodies. Its strength rests in its simplicity, because at its heart the focus is on building relationships. With continuous evaluation, the project can be adjusted for improvement and adapted to unique situations. Experienced pastors with a wealth of invaluable knowledge from years of service will serve in a unique and vital ministry. Pastors whose careers are in jeopardy will be the recipients of non-threatening advice and counsel from trusted colleagues. The congregation struggling to maintain itself in an age of great changes and perhaps on the verge of closing its doors receives the opportunity to have a new life, to remake itself, as it seeks to bring the unchurched to Christ.

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