

4-1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Werning, W. J. (2007). My Pilgrimage in Church Growth. *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth*, 18(2), 65-75. Retrieved from <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/jascg/vol18/iss2/7>

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My Pilgrimage in Church Growth

Waldo J. Werning

A Christian pilgrimage involves faith and purpose. The telling of a pilgrimage requires that however one has ministered, there is no question that all that was accomplished was by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

By the Spirit's strength, various teachers and mentors shared truths and life applications of God's Word with me to walk the justification and sanctification path Jesus offers with the light that He gives. My pilgrimage in the ministry of church growth that involved both Christian stewardship and church health has been and is one of reflecting Christ, our Savior and Lord, and learning from teachers, mentors, leadership networks and informative books that provided a healthy diet of God's Word.

It started on an Iowa farm in Newhall (near Cedar Rapids), where Lutheran elementary school training was followed by a European academic high school curriculum in St. Paul that offered all the basic studies plus German and Latin as a freshman, adding Greek as a junior. After Concordia College in St. Paul, Concordia Seminary in St. Louis offered classes to be a confessing Lutheran Christian with a zeal for discipling God's people for ministry and mission, and for sharing the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ in the community, nation and world.

My Vicarage was not an ordinary seminary experience, as I, with others during the war years, was encouraged to teach in a Lutheran school. Concordia University-Chicago, offered "six-week instant teacher" courses, but the lasting result was meeting my bride of 62 years, Ruth Keinow of Milwaukee, mother of our five children, with ten grandchildren and one great grandchild. This teacher vicarage together with my first pastoral call in rural Lockwood, MO (being pastor and teacher of an eight class school) strongly influenced my way of communicating God's

Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, Spring 2007

Word so that young children can also understand. One other result of teaching was the time limits for pastoral activities and even memorization of sermons. Writing extended sermon outlines led to public speaking that facilitated easier preparation for thousands of stewardship and healthy church sermons and lectures for the rest of my life.

Beginning my pastoral ministry at rural Zion Church in Missouri (where I also taught in a one room Lutheran school) already involved experience in church growth by planting a new church in Lamar, and supervising a vicar at a mission church in Nevada. "Public Bible lectures" were conducted in this rural church which drew unchurched and interested visitors that resulted in considerable conversion growth. Discovering that the members' giving was based on budgets and needs, I wrote my first book, a Bible study on the power of the Holy Spirit for the stewardship of service and giving, "Partners with God." Conducting a full 30-minute Bible class, 50-60 members out of 125 gathered together weekly to study God's Word. All my life I have seen God's Word and intensive Bible study as necessary for the spiritual health of God's people and of the church, being the foundation for church growth.

Stewardship efforts in Missouri and in Immanuel Church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma gained the interest of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod Stewardship Executive, which resulted in a call to serve as his Assistant in LCMS headquarters St. Louis in 1952. This changed the entire course of my ministry, offering the opportunity to minister and write stewardship and mission materials while being mentored by some of the great leaders of the LCMS at that time. Several of these were John Herman, Dean of Evangelical Stewardship Executives, Oscar Feucht, author of *Everyone a Minister*, who shared many gems about the priesthood of all believers, and Herman Gockel, executive for the *This is the Life* award-winning television program, and also the writer of evangelism materials. Others shared some basic principles of leadership in order to be both effective and trustworthy. A variety of books were written, *My Job As A Church Officer* (LCMS); *Investing Your Life* (Zondervan); *Come Follow Me* (CPH); and *How To Raise Men and Money In The Church* (ALPB).

Ministry in the Missouri and Oklahoma congregations, and being mentored by great leaders of the church, imprinted in my mind, heart and spirit the sanctity of God's call to ministry. This gave a life-long intense commitment to follow God's call with integrity, making sure through colleagues and confidants that I was walking in God's path, not mine. By the Holy Spirit, I was always assured that when God calls, He qualifies. There has

been a commitment never to pursue personal interests, but to get out of my comfort zone to do what He wants done.

After five years of learning and sharing at the LCMS headquarters, God led me to be Stewardship and Mission Executive of Southern Nebraska and Southern Wyoming, which offered relevant ministries in both those areas. Besides supervising and mentoring pastors in mission churches that received financial assistance, Lutheran churches were planted in Jackson Hole and Green River, Wyoming, and a number of other centers in these two states. Ten years of stewardship mentoring and consulting opened up the vista for stewardship leadership and writing of books, filmstrips and tracts to be used as educational tools in churches.

During these ten years, God opened many opportunities to serve at week-long youth spiritual retreats in the summer as Dean and Bible Study Leader in all sections of the USA. Materials were also written for our LCMS youth program. I served for nine years as Topic Editor for the International Lutheran Women's Missionary League and began ten years of ministry as Chairman and Secretary of the LCMS Board for Missions, which included world missions, USA missions, blind, deaf, and campus ministries, plus evangelism. In 1964, I became chairman of the newly organized Lutheran Bible Translators for its first 20 years.

During this time, as Chairman of the LCMS Board for Missions, I was privileged to become involved in church growth with Dr. Donald McGavran and his colleagues of the Mission Department of Fuller Seminary, that began my official journey in church growth. Both McGavran and Win Arn, who were special mentors, gave of themselves freely to mentor this 45 year old Lutheran Executive. This also offered the opportunity to attend organizational and early meetings of The American Society for Church Growth. That provided learning also from Arthur Glasser, Peter Wagner and Ralph Winter, who also shared hours of mentoring with his unique mission insights and principles. God's great grace gave this special mentoring by these and other great servants of Christ, while at the same time it offered many opportunities to provide leadership in missions and church growth and to conduct workshops and mentor others.

During these ten years, these books were written: *Winning Them Back* (Augsburg), *The Stewardship Call* (CPH), and a book for youth, *Live!* (Church-Craft). Filmstrips were: *Your Pulpit in Life*, *Where Does the Money Go?* and *Seek the Lord First*. (All by Church-Craft)

I became Stewardship Counselor of the South Wisconsin District of the LCMS in 1966, serving for ten years. Being chair-

man and secretary of the LCMS Board for Missions and Lutheran Bible Translators during these years opened many ministry doors and mission vistas for service in the kingdom of Christ world-wide. Active participation in church growth activities in California with Dr. McGavran and other notable leaders led to gaining more resources and networking while mentoring pastors and churches in Wisconsin led to stewardship and church growth workshops in the USA and Canada. During this time, I served on the Stewardship Commission of the National Association of Evangelicals for about 30 years. Together with Ed Hales of the General Baptist Convention, I was co-lecturer for 45 stewardship workshops in 25 states for the NAE. Stewardship messages were also given at NAE conventions, at the National Pastor Conference of the Free Will Baptist Church in Oklahoma City in 1970, a stewardship workshop at the National Pastoral Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America at Rockford, IL in 1972, and three stewardship presentations and a workshop at the American Convocation of Church Growth in Garden Grove, CA in 1975.

It was my privilege to be speaker at the Stewardship Council of America meeting in Chicago, seminar leader on "Family Financial Planning" at the Continental Congress on the Family in St. Louis. I was a participant at the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. During this time, I was also keynote speaker at three national conventions and pastor's conferences of the Association of Free Lutheran Churches.

During these years, the following books were written: *Growing as a Christian* (CPH), *Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church* (Biblical Renewal Publications), and *The Radical Nature of Christianity* (Mandate Press, William Carey Library). My book, *Vision and Strategy for Church Growth*, (Moody Press, 1974, foreword by Peter Wagner), was the first church growth book written by a Lutheran.

The call to Concordia Theological Seminary of Fort Wayne, IN as Director of Development and Adjunct Professor of Stewardship, provided almost 20 years of a growing ministry throughout the United States and the world. Invitations to conduct stewardship and healthy church workshops and consultations led to organizing my Discipling/Stewardship Center in 1980. While learning more from Dr. Donald McGavran and his colleagues, many doors of ministry opened up for me, involving being a part-time stewardship consultant to ten LCMS districts(states) and 13 congregations. I was a participant at the World Congress on Simpler Lifestyle on Hoddesdon, England,

and conducted a workshop at the "Funding the Christian Challenge" Congress in Kansas City.

My overseas discipling ministry in stewardship and church growth began with workshops in Brazil in 1974 and 1976. After that, I conducted discipling training events eight times in Haiti, beginning in 1979 that grew to a Lutheran church that today, through discipling based on 2 Tim 2:2 and Eph. 4:12, has over 150 churches and missions, and 150 schools without receiving any funds from the LCMS, only gifts through three mission societies that were organized in the United States and Canada. The pastors were trained at our seminary in Ft. Wayne. Besides discipling these pastors and lay ministers and church leaders on these visits of 3-5 days, I brought messages at evangelistic services on the streets of suburban Port Au Prince.

A visit to missions on the west coast of Haiti required a trip through tortuous mountain roads in a 4-wheeler van with Haitian Lutheran leaders on roads with large rocks where torrential rains over years washed away the tar that were once smooth roads. When reaching the end of the road where we had the choice of walking five miles to the target village or riding in an ocean boat with men handling six oars, we arrived at Caracas, where our 3-day discipling event occurred. Walking from the beach to the house in which I stayed, our pastor told me that the people said I was the first white man ever to visit there. Conducting evangelistic services on the beach at night from which distant lights of Cuba could be seen, I preached the Gospel to hundreds of people who gathered there.

Memorable was a visit to Indonesia, where on the island of Sumatra, I was invited to give the message at the chapel service of the Batak Lutheran University.

Additional ministry included conducting two stewardship workshops at the 1989 Congress on World Evangelization in Manilla. At this time I served as Secretary of the Board of All Nations Missions (teaching English as a second language).

Hosting mission tours to the Orient, South Pacific, New Guinea, South America, Central America and India gave a deeper perspective of world missions. Ministering extensively in stewardship and church growth, and being author of stewardship, missions and church growth books, opened the door to intensive discipling conferences and workshops from 1979 until the present in 17 countries on 48 occasions: Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, England, Ghana, Haiti, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, India, New Guinea, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, and Sudan. Each of these events was part of a mosaic of discipling events with experiences across cultures

that showed the universality of God's Word and the Gospel in the kingdom of Christ where there is no east or west. Pastors and church leaders were hungry for going deeper into the Scriptures to open their minds and hearts to the guidance and power the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on all these ministry and mission events for church health revealed the amazing grace of God for church and Kingdom growth!

My writing ministry continued with various stewardship and church growth articles written for magazines, including *Christianity Today*, our *Lutheran Witness*, and an evangelism columnist for the *American Lutheran Magazine* for ten years.

Stewardship books published were *Christian Stewards – Confronted and Committed*, foreword by Donald McGavran (a stewardship handbook for spiritual leaders by CPH), *Supply-Side Stewardship* (CPH), *Big Step Forward in Faith* (Neibauer Press), *New Beginnings* (Neibauer Press). *Disciples Aflame!: Turning Donors into Disciples-Breakthrough Giving for Breakaway Funding of God's Ministries* is a manuscript ready for publication, written for stewardship leaders of the LCMS and several other Lutheran Church bodies. Church growth books written were: *Renewal for the 21st Century Church* (CPH), *God Says, 'Move!' – Go Where He Leads*, foreword by Ralph Winter: this is "not a book, it's a handbook" for ministry (Fairway Press), *12 Pillars of a Healthy Church*, foreword by Elmer Towns (Church Smart), and *The Seed-Planting Church: Nurturing Churches to Health*, foreword by Robert Logan (Church Smart).

A manuscript ready for publication at this time is *Churches Aflame!: Christians Moving from the Church Club Door to the Jesus Door*, which offers a balanced view of sanctification with justification, recognizes that possibly 60% of members of most churches go through a church club door of simply sitting in a church pew periodically. This book urges reaching the "lost in the church," members who are given very little primary spiritual care and as many inactives are given basically no care."

Seven years of stewardship series of sermons, Bible studies and booklets with various themes were produced for use in various LCMS Districts. Pastors' conferences and convention presentations and essays were given in various LCMS Districts, including men's and women's groups.

During this time, I served several times as Adjunct Professor, teaching stewardship courses, at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada.

The American Society for Church Growth Conference in Kansas City on November 4, 2006, provided a pleasant surprise with an award of the "DONALD A. MCGAVRAN Award for

Outstanding Leadership in Church Growth." This occasion aroused my memory of God's call to a great variety of mission and ministry events and tasks in which I sought to be faithful in small things, never concerned about big responsibilities. This offered recall of God's amazing grace that when God says "Move!" I sought to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance to go where He tells. My response to this award offered thanks to God for my church growth mentors and that as a true Lutheran, I recognize that this award was "by grace, not by works."

Robert Schuller encourages us in ministry, "Find a need, and fill it." The need for some basic interactive Bible studies for discipling of new Christians and all church members became apparent when observing most church members who settle for a "salvation cocoon" of justifying faith, with hardly a clue of sanctification, spiritual gifts, and every believer's call to ministry. An interactive Bible study, *Spiritual Travel Guide* (Fairway Press), is a 15-week intensive Bible study. It provides a grace message of law/gospel and repentance/forgiveness in Christ based on the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. *Spiritual Fitness Exercise* (Fairway Press) provides 10 weeks of interactive Bible study with participants challenged to adopt the habits of daily devotions, doing some servant activity to help others, and sharing their Christian faith by witnessing – encouraging to adopt these as lifelong activities. A layman's 26-week doctrinal "Systematis," *21st Century Disciples with a 1st Century Faith* (Fairway Press), provides theological discipling for leaders to have a solid foundation from God's Word that is on target Scripturally.

Now at the age of 86, God has called me to three distinctive ministries, all of which tap the spiritual gifts, learning and experience of the past 62 years in aggressive ministry and mission.

1. Writing of "Stewardship of Giving" resources, working with a task force of LCMS stewardship leaders in a massive effort with the aim to kill the budget virus and needs disease that exists in 80-90% of Lutheran churches and others, while offering biblical materials and studies to gain a commitment from God's people for generous, proportionate giving and tithing. The book, *Disciples Aflame: Turning Donors into Disciples*, provides biblical theology and principles of Christian giving that is faith-raising not fund-raising in order to gain BREAKTHROUGH GIVING FOR BREAKAWAY FUNDING OF GOD'S MINISTRIES – STEWARDSHIP ABLAZE! Exposing the crippling stewardship attitudes, giving practices and budget barriers in churches, this biblical process facilitates breakthrough leaders to build

nurturing churches that generate grace giving. This stewardship call starts with the question, "What does God call us to be and do in Christian giving?" This message tells that the Christian steward is *God's steward*, a manager not the owner; God's steward is loved and loving, served and serving. It presents two competing stewardship systems for Christian giving: Maintenance fund-raising versus Grace giving – faith-raising, focusing on what God wants, not on what the church wants, treating members as disciples, not donors. Biblical resources with messages that disciple God's people for generous percentage giving and tithing by God's grace are offered for use in various methods of reaching each disciple.

2. Serving as Administrator for the India Evangelical Lutheran Church in cooperation with the LCMS Board for Missions, I have mentored and facilitated the major biblical renewal process in our partner Lutheran church in India since 1997, and will conclude this ministry with a Leader's Conference in August 2008. This church body with 150 pastors and 300 churches and missions has committed itself to empower and mobilize God's people for effective ministry and mission. The objective is to disciple IELC leaders on all levels to use their spiritual gifts and their training to empower and mobilize India Lutheran pastors and God's people for ministry and mission. The goal is to train leaders who will be able to train others (2 Tim 2:2) and who will prepare God's people for ministry (Eph 4:12), and to provide quality resources for congregations in the areas of education of all ages, stewardship of service and giving, evangelism, and planting the Word through churches. The foundational resource is the new book, *Churches Aflame: Christians Moving from the Church Club Door to the Jesus Door*, which is being translated into Tamil as the main resource in the future. The interactive Bible study course, *Spiritual Travel Guide*, has been translated into two languages and is the basic Bible study to renew the biblical knowledge of all members of the six chief parts of our Christian faith, and to provide spiritual energy for effective stewardship and evangelism.
3. Service to The American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC) with about 80 congregations began on January 1, 2007 as Mentor and Facilitator for building healthy churches and for effective stewardship of service

and giving. This ministry began with 2-day “Healthy Church” workshops at five regional conventions. Involved in the agreement is ministry in 2007-2008 for discipling pastors to equip them to empower and mobilize God’s people for mission, and to help build healthy churches. The two resource books used in India, *Churches Aflame: Christians Moving from the Church Club Door to the Jesus Door* and *Spiritual Travel Guide* are the primary discipling resources in facilitating church health for this body.

Reviewing what I observed in the lives of many pastors and my own experience in varied ministries over my many years of ministry, I submit what I call “Pastoral Ministry 101.” What are the spiritual characteristics and professional qualities of a faithful pastor of the Lord Jesus Christ?

1. Develop an intimate relationship with our creating, redeeming and sanctifying Triune God, and learn how to know His voice. Remember that pastoral ministry involves living relationships with God and with fellow Christians.
2. Have a believing mind and heart to fulfill Christ’s Kingdom vision for the meaning and destiny of your life and ministry of the Gospel.
3. Know your identity in Christ, living in daily repentance and forgiveness, and avoiding sinful habits and bitterness, while showing unconditional love.
4. Recognize your calling to pastoral ministry, and live with confidence that when God calls, He qualifies, and provides strength for the task. Eph. 4:1
5. Don’t get frustrated trying to make things happen. Be committed with joy to the call that God has given you, showing a clear understanding of the ministry God has given you.
6. Show your faithfulness in small and big tasks, seeking the Holy Spirit’s direction and power as He expands your life’s mission.
7. Meet weekly with a small core group of confidants, mentors or colleagues who will help keep you on track and will support and pray for you. You may wish to find a special confidant or mentor who has experience, who believes in you and your ministry, and who is willing to help you to fulfill God’s will in your life.
8. Do not be diverted from your call by circumstances or people, but keep focused on the priorities of your ministry.

9. Attend short-term discipling events that will help you to identify places of ministry, and enlarge ministry where God is moving. Through personal Bible studies, devotions, and reading of informative books, prepare yourself in every area of your life to pursue God's call. Be ready spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally and financially for what God is asking you to do.
10. Do not neglect your family, but care for your wife and children as a pastor's priorities are: God, family, congregation, community.
11. Be motivated for excellence and able to communicate clearly.
12. Think of yourself as a spiritual leader under the authority of Christ. Be committed to discipling, motivating, empowering, mobilizing and guiding members to pursue a vision from God strategically and passionately that the congregation embraces.
13. Recognize that some pastors' seminary training did not adequately prepare them for the culture of the 21st century, but prepared for a ministry that largely no longer exists. Be informed about how fundamental the change in culture has affected pastoral ministry. Do not hunker down on the way to retirement, for statistics tell that 75% of pastors don't finish well, and settle in their comfort zone. Understand the spiritual dynamics in productive ministry. *Just make a difference!*
14. Learn how to grow a church from churchianity to Christianity, and disciple members to be lay ministers and missionaries. Use energy on productive tasks, not on busy work and sideline struggling.
15. Faithful ministry centers on faith and trust. Saving faith with certainty of salvation is joined by trusting faith and the goodness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to empower for effective ministry which results in being a trustworthy pastor.
16. Show love that makes your leadership contagious, drawing from a well of faith that is bottomless because of Jesus' love. Stand firm in the Gospel. Love and lead as Jesus did.
17. Build a vision to work together with God's people to share Christ's love with a Great Commission Passion to develop a biblical church that offers the pure food of the Word, that is spiritually alive, unified in the Spirit, culturally relevant, motivated for productive ministry, sensitive to needs of all people, putting God first in service

and giving, and aggressive in evangelism and church planting here and throughout the world.

18. Remember your call, stay enthused about your place, stay on task, and marvel at God's grace.

By God's grace, my pilgrimage in church growth continues, even with some intensity. What has been and is yet today the top priority and basic priorities in ministry? I see the top priority as being the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, Matt 28:18-20 involving two basic parts: 1. Saving souls by making disciples of Jesus through baptism; 2. Teaching them to observe everything that Jesus has commanded, which includes feeding His sheep and nurturing God's people by preparing them for ministry (Eph 4:12). "Saving souls" (John 3:16) is the *Prism* through which we see the Great Commission in our ministry of the Word. This is the *prism* and *priority* in the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ, to which God has called me.

Writer

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