

An Evaluation of the Vicars-in-Mission-Settings Program

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Objective: Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Vicars-in-mission settings program and present some possible changes or suggestions for the future.

In the summer of 2001, I was asked by the Board for Home Missions to evaluate the vicars-in-mission-setting program (ViM). With very few exceptions the program has been well-received-- "One of the best programs we have," "excellent" "a great program." This makes a classic evaluation of "pros and cons" difficult, simply because I received and heard very few negative sentiments.

Because I anticipated that the general evaluation of the program would be positive, I attempted to angle my survey and interview questions to yield a response. I was not necessarily seeking a negative reply, but I attempted to find honest answers to see what can and should be done with the program. Can we expand the program? What limits expansion? Should the program stay the same? How can we improve on a "great program?" To properly evaluate the program, I have divided this paper into five sections.

- I. Research and Theories behind the Research.
- II. History of the Vicars-in-Mission-Settings Program
- III. Strengths and Areas of Possible Concern
- IV. False Assumptions concerning the ViM
- V. Possible Changes and Suggestions for the Future

Research and Theories behind the Research (Section I)

Students

The purpose of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary vicar program is primarily to benefit the student. Seminary President, David Valleskey, writes, "That vicars will provide a certain measure of assistance to pastors and congregations, especially as the year progresses, is a given; but it is not the primary purpose of the program, which is to provide assistance to the Seminary Student."¹ For this reason, I felt it was important to understand the feelings and experiences of as many former vicars-in-mission-settings as possible. I sent a five question e-mail survey (Addenda p.1) to each of the 61 former vicars-in-mission settings who are currently parish pastors, tutors, instructors or Seminary seniors. Forty-two of the sixty-one men responded or just under 69%. The replies were both informative and enlightening. (A summary of the responses is recorded in the Addenda pages 5-8.)

¹"History and Objectives of the Seminary Vicarship Program." Paper presented at the 2001 Vicarship Supervision Seminar.

Supervising Pastors

I felt it was not as necessary to survey supervising pastors (although some double as District Mission Board Chairman) for the following reasons.

1. The supervising pastors already report to the BHM.
2. Congregations apply for a mission vicar, not the other way around. The most extreme example is 1995 when there were 54 requests and only 16 vicars assigned.
3. Once a congregation receives a vicar, they often continue to apply each year.
4. Finally, there would not be a vicars-in-mission settings program if the congregation and the supervising pastor did not benefit.

District Mission Board Chairman and District Presidents

I did, however, feel it was necessary to survey both the District (or Regional) Mission Board Chairman and the District Presidents. I again sent out an e-mail survey (Addenda p 2,3) to gain their opinion on a number of subjects. I used a seven question survey to find answers to questions I had about the ViM program. I felt I needed the input of these men because, at the very least, they have some understanding of their District, if not the whole Synod. (A summary of the surveys is recorded in the Addenda pages 8-11.)

Statistics

Occasionally percentages and numbers will be mentioned. These are based on my own research. They are based on *baptized* membership recorded in the corresponding WELS Statistical Report.² The most difficult challenge was the dual or tri-parishes. I attempted to make the percentages as accurate to each man as possible. For example, If a man served two small congregations, I only counted that once. If he served both a large and a small congregation, I counted both and let the numbers cancel themselves out. (This situation only occurred with the Eagle River/ Phelps, Wisconsin setting).

Interviews

I included two personal interviews in my research. The first interview was with Seminary President David Valleskey because of his advisory role on both the Assignment Committee, the Board for Ministerial Education and his working knowledge of each Seminary student. The second interview was with BHM Administrator Harold Hagedorn because of his involvement with the vicars-in-mission settings program since its inception in 1988. Both of these interviews were conducted in March of 2002.

I also conducted six telephone interviews. These were mostly fact-finding or advisory.

Personal Observations

Throughout the paper I will offer my own opinion and observations. I believe this is the most beneficial to the Board for Home Missions because, at the very least, my evaluation will serve as a straw man to knock down or start discussion.

² All 2001 numbers are based on the 2000 WELS Statistical Report

Here is my experience. The church of my birth had over 1500 members and a school of almost 300 children. In 1990 my parents transferred to Eternal Love, a mission congregation on the Southside of Appleton, WI. Here I participated and watched a church grow and move from worshipping in a gymnasium to building a sanctuary and classroom addition.

My Seminary early field training (EFT) congregation was at St. Marcus, Milwaukee (the recipient of a vicar-in-mission-setting). I also summer vicared in Santa Maria, California (my supervising pastor was Steven Degner, a former District Mission Board Chairman, and current member of the California mission board.) Finally, in 2000-2001, I was a vicar-in-mission-setting under Mark Birkholz in Thornton, CO.

History of the Vicar-in-Mission-Settings Program (Section II)

Finding an accurate history of the ViM was a bit difficult. Although the BHM archived minutes from each of its quarterly meetings, these minutes are not archival. Basically, this means the minutes record discussions, but the minutes are not updated to record action and results. For example, the minutes *will* record a proposal for \$150,000, but they *will not* record whether or not the \$150,000 was received. The following history is based both on the minutes of the quarterly BHM meetings and telephone or personal discussions with BHM members.

The idea of sending vicars into mission settings is nothing new. Although it is a bit unclear, we can trace the history of this practice as far back as the 1970's.³ During these years men were assigned into mission settings to fill a vacancy or manpower need. Since the primary purpose of these assignments was strictly to fill a manpower need, I would not consider this to be the beginning of our current vicars-in-mission settings program.

To find the beginning our current program, one would have to read the second page of the minutes for the April 1988 meeting of the Board for Home Missions. The minutes record the discussion concerning the bold-faced document below:

Suggested General Criteria for Vicars in Home Mission Situation – Prepared for consideration by the BHM and use by the Priority Committee [Expansion Committee as of 1996].

1. ***Because the vicar year is to provide a positive learning experience,***
 - a) ***the supervising pastor should be an energetic, positive role model***
 - b) ***the supervising pastor should have a philosophy and plan of ministry which emphasizes outreach and nurture***
 - c) ***the congregation should have its form and function driven by outreach and nurture ministry***

³ Telephone conversation with Pastor Peter Kruschel, March 25, 2002.

- d) *the opportunity for a broad stroke ministry experience should be provided if possible.*
2. *Because vicars in Home Mission settings are to enhance viable mission efforts,*
- a) *the mission ministry opportunities, not “rescue” needs, should receive emphasis*
 - b) *it is recognized that relief for DMBs, especially chairmen but not restricted to, and other “helpers” will enhance mission efforts.*

The minutes record a discussion on the floor of the April BHM meeting. Pastor Don Seifert wanted to know, “What criteria, will be used to select these 5 or 6 men for vicars?” “Concern for qualified men with the adaptability to work well in mission situations was expressed by several of the Board members.” Others questioned, “How will we analyze the gifts at Sem?” The answers “focused primarily on the portfolio which accompanies each student through the education years.” The board struggled with exactly how they would use the vicars in the field. It seems like some ~~were~~ men were emphasizing the manpower aspect. “Further discussion on the use of vicars brought Pres. Mischke’s reminder that our emphasis (reinforced by the IRS) is on the training for the Vicar, not so much on the relief that his assistance will bring.”

In that same April meeting, it was determined that there would be instruction for the bishops, “though generally done through written material and common sense, according to Pres. Mischke.” And it was also determined each vicar request would have a complete job description, one development that has helped make the program successful.

May 1988

Between 3 and 6 vicars are assigned to participate in the ViM program.⁴

January 1989 (4 months into the pilot year)

There is little mention of the vicars-in-mission settings program. Of nine items prioritized for the budget, vicars-in-mission settings was number eight, uneventfully following “Office Equipment for the DMBs.” According to the minutes, it was asked how things were working out for the vicar program.

From the bishops [sic] reports after 5 months, they feel that we [have] a very positive program, but we don’t have any reports on how to evaluate the progress of the new program. Some felt it would be advantageous to have the vicars give feedback on the bishops as well [more on evaluation in Section V Possible Changes and Suggestions for the Future]....Also, there was concern on the program plan of congregations who have vicars, that they should have some plan of action for outreach. A bit of a fire was

⁴ I realize this is vague. According to the minutes, there is a proposal for 5-6 men to be assigned to missions. Some of these men were assigned as DMB assistants, but others served under bishops who did not have ties to the mission board. (Telephone interviews did not help to make this clearer).

lit under our Chairman to speak about evangelism training that some vicars received in larger congregations as well.⁵

May 1989

From the BHM minutes, it seems that 1989 was the first year under the zero base budgeting system. Each proposed project is prioritized as it is presented to Synod. According to the 1989 minutes, the BHM would need to receive a 110%-113% increment to place "2 Vicars/2 Summer Vicars." No vicars were assigned to the ViM in 1989.

Besides the obvious money question, it is a bit unclear why the program was not a higher priority. Permit some speculation. That same year six mission openings were on the table. Perhaps the untested vicar program paled in comparison to the concrete "result" of a new mission start up.

1994

The minutes from September of 1994 are very clear. Money is still a concern, but a Middler class of 52 needed places to vicar. This seemed to be an opportune time to implement the suspended vicars-in-mission settings program.⁶ A September 24-26, 1994 issue of *Happenings in Home Missions* recorded the following: "a request to use vicars in Home Mission settings has been placed before the WELS Kingdom Workers. This request has a certain urgency because of the large class at the Seminary which will be eligible to vicar during the 95/96 school year."

Although the large number of available vicars summarized the motive, the actual request to the WELS Kingdom Workers outlined several more reasons why the BHM requested \$150,000 for the vicar-in-mission-setting in September of 1994.

1. Because there is much valuable training for our future pastors when their vicar service occurs in the setting of Home Missions,
2. Because there will be a much larger than normal number of vicars available for assignment for the 95/96 school year,
3. Because the value is set forth well in the attached material to you from the S. Atlantic District Mission Board,
4. Because the budget shortfall of the WELS makes it virtually impossible to provide adequate funding for such valuable service

Reason number three refers to a letter and proposal from the Secretary of the South Atlantic District Mission Board, Danny L. Wehmeyer, to Mr. David C. Timm, the National Director of WELS Kingdom Workers. Wehmeyer writes:

⁵Page 19-20 in the minutes for the Board for Home Missions April 1989 meeting

⁶Pastor Peter Kruschel felt that 1994 was an opportune time to implement the ViM program. He explained that there was uneasiness towards Home Missions in the years prior to 1995. He speculated that the new system to help congregations become self-supporting may have scarred some of the men. In his opinion, more than any other program, the ViM helped make Seminary students more comfortable with a possible Home Mission Call.

One of the most valuable parts of a pastor's 8-12 year synodical education is his vicar year....Based on the feedback of many vicars over many years, it seems that one area that could be improved in most locations is in the area of outreach. Many vicars say that they made few if any outreach calls but were used primarily to visits shut-ins. As I was listening during the installation service of our vicar, I noticed that outreach wasn't even mentioned in the "official" text. Since outreach is half of the great commission, it seems that it might be time to look at our current system and see if we can make improvements." [Wehmeyer goes on to describe the need to place vicars in the] locations where they [vicars] will receive the best possible training. This means bishops that can mentor and congregations in areas that will support a well rounded education. How are vicars assigned? ...it often comes down to who can afford it--not who can supply the best education.

In 1988, two vicars were placed in our district on a one year basis. We feel it was a good experiment and should be tried again.... Conditions are good in our district (and possibly others) to once again put an expanded focus on outreach training for some of our vicars.⁷

1995

It seems WELS Kingdom Workers granted the request because a BHM Executive Committee Report from February, 3 1995 records: "Using the attached 'initial review'⁸ criteria the staff provided a 'long list' of those congregations which will be invited to be considered for the 'short list' of 10-12 or so to be provided to the Conference of Presidents.... After discussion, the dropping of one and the adding of two, the Executive Committee accepted the following list of 18 from the original 54 requests."

Because there would be so many "new" bishops, a "Bishops' Seminar" or a "Mission Pastor and Vicar Orientation and Training" was scheduled. On May 24, 1995, Administrator Harold Hagedorn invited the new bishops to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for a July workshop paid for by the Seminary. During the two day workshop the bishops looked at how they could provide the best possible environment for the vicar. They reviewed and discussed local mission plans with mission consultants. They worked on an "Action Plan" and concluded the workshop with two hours devoted to Personal Witness: Witness approach, teaming, growing in personal witness.

In May of 1995, 16 vicars were assigned to the vicar-in-mission-setting program. This, historically, has been the largest number of vicar-in-mission-setting placed in any given year. In December of 1995, BHM Administrator, Rev. Harold Hagedorn, invited the

⁷ Letter dated September 7, 1994

⁸ This a fairly basic form that helps prioritize requests for vicar-in-mission-setting, the form is designed to measure or rate four items: 1. The supervising pastor, 2. Outreach program, 3. The type and variety of vicar training 4. The congregational commitment and involvement.

Seminary's input regarding the practice of placing vicars into home mission settings. President Armin Panning, responded in a letter that summarized the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty's thoughts and observations.

I did not sense any resistance to the thought that assigning some vicars to home missions settings would provide very useful training for the type of first call that a number of the graduates would receive. With future classes being smaller than the present 52, there obviously couldn't be the same number of such vicar placements as this year, but the idea of having some vicars in mission settings got solid endorsement.

....The advisors' [faculty advisor to the vicars] observation is that the most successful vicarship seemed to be the ones that provide a fairly good balance between smaller mission congregation type of activity and the more organized, traditional activities of the large congregation.... I'm aware that the combination of those two elements didn't just happen; you worked hard to put those two components together in the places you suggested. The faculty's encouragement would be: continue to do that. [Then President Panning summarized his letter:]

All in all, the arguments for putting some vicars in touch with smaller, younger congregations seems to be justified. To us it would appear the idea of combination placements in mission/traditional congregations warrants serious consideration, even in times when the number of vicar candidates may be smaller.

It seems as though the faculty's advice was taken. With the smaller 1996 class, only seven vicars were placed into a mission setting and the majority were assigned to places like Columbia, TN or Thornton, CO, where the "balance" of smaller church and larger church activities was present.

1996 to Present

Already by 1996, the vicars-in-mission-settings program had become an integral part of the Seminary vicar year assignments. The number of vicars in missions each year depends on both the size of the middler class and the number of men recommended by the Seminary for the program. Let me explain.

Each January the Conference of Presidents (COP) informs the BHM how many Vicars-in-mission settings they expect to assign that year. For example, a January 29, 1999 memo reads:

"The Conference of Presidents has determined to ask the Board for Home Missions to prioritize 12 requests for **VICARS** [emphasis because two male staff interns were available] with the understanding that they may not all be filled

through the assignment process. It is most likely that 6-8 will be assigned to the Vicars in Home Mission settings."

The BHM, in turn, receives and prioritizes each ViM request. Then, with the input of the Seminary faculty (students are recommended for the ViM program), the COP assigns vicars to the prioritized locations.

Strengths and Areas of Possible Concern (Section III)

For the Vicar

Strengths

1. Because of the detailed request form and prioritization of the requests, men are placed with exceptional bishops.
2. Men are brought to different areas of the country and learn to adapt to whatever the Lord puts before them, possibly breaking the mental mold of "this is how it is to be done."
3. The program seems to be training outreach minded men. "Already in the classroom it is obvious which men have some understanding when I talk about outreach" – David Valleskey
4. Men experience (some for the first time) the dynamics of a smaller church (worship, organization, fellowship) to which many of the men will be assigned.⁹
5. In a smaller church the vicar will improve his people skills. Not simply a friendly, outgoing spirit, but real people skills—learning to listen and really hear what people are saying. When you hear people you can minister to needs.¹⁰
6. The training of the men is such that the DP's are comfortable assigning graduates to a variety of fields.

Areas of Possible Concern

1. If the congregation is too small, it *may* not give the vicar the broad education we would like (e.g. not many Bible Classes, no Ladies Aid, etc.).¹¹
2. To some degree, it is frustrating to return to congregations that do not seem to be reaching or seeking the lost.
3. To greater degree, it is frustrating to witness congregations led by pastors who seem to focus internally rather than on God's kingdom at large.
5. The over-zealous vicar may have difficulty balancing work and family.

For the Congregation

Strengths

Why are churches lining up to apply for these men? Why do these requests need to be prioritized? There are few possibilities. First of all many of the churches in the ViM

⁹ If the numbers from 1997 to 2001 would continue into the future, 70% of the graduates would be assigned to churches with less than 240 baptized members.

¹⁰ Although this is difficult to prove, one Bishop felt that the vicars gained an appreciation for women. I believe this to be a great benefit. In a time when almost 60% of our church members are women it is vital for our pastors to not only have interaction with women, but also have an understanding of their concerns and issues. In a smaller congregation a vicar has a chance to know both the key men *and* the key women of the congregation simply because there is more time to get to know the people.

¹¹ In 1995, a number of men were assigned to second year exploratories. Although this met a manpower need and supported the exploratory missionary, this practice has ceased because it did not offer the student enough "traditional" opportunities.

cannot afford a vicar without BHM Subsidy. Secondly, this is as specific as vicar training gets. Thus, each of these mission churches receive men that have already exhibited the attitudes and gifts for mission work. This program *fits* men even more than it places men. Thirdly, the majority our ViM churches are outside of the "big three" Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. For this reason the churches benefit by having a connection to the Midwest and the work of *their* Synod. Finally, most, if not all, of our ViM churches are served by one pastor. Although it is not primary, ViM does provide some relief to the pastor. Oftentimes, the program aids men who are serving time-consuming ministries (e.g. District Mission Board Chairman).

Areas of Possible Concern

1. Having a vicar one year does not guarantee a vicar the next year. Some congregations may plan programs around the vicar and then not receive one.
2. People start to associate with a face. If the vicar serves as a second staff person of sorts, the congregation may have difficulty with a new face every 12 months.

For the Board for Home Missions

Strengths

1. Allows for future Home Mission pastors to be trained by some of the best Home Missionaries in the WELS.
2. Through the training of the ViM, all seminary men get some exposure to the philosophy and practices of Home Mission churches in the classroom.
3. Extra manpower in areas where God has blessed our ministries.
4. Provides help in situations where the congregation is not in a position to hire a second staff person
5. Larger pool of men with some mission experience to call to Home Missions.

Areas of Possible Concern

1. In Theory and stated purpose, the ViM program is designed to benefit the student and the BHM, but in current practice the BHM's does not always receive "return" on their investment. (See Question #7 Addenda p. 10)
2. Because the men are trained in the ViM, the BHM may be tempted to assume the men understand all aspects of mission work and leave them out to dry.
3. Upon leaving the mission field, the vicar does not have an opportunity to speak honestly about the program's strengths and weaknesses.

For the Synod

Strengths

1. Program could be a model for the whole WELS vicar program.
2. No matter where the men are placed-- large church, small church or school-- the Synod benefits by having outreach minded men as leaders.

3. The idea and recognition of the WELS is increased in the outlying regions, that may not have a close connection to the Midwest.
4. Each man surveyed agreed that the program benefits the Synod as a whole.

“Teaching outreach and people skills and a self-starter attitude-as I believe is done in the mission vicar program-is a benefit to that vicar and whatever congregation he serves later on.” SA District President Guse

“Benefits the Synod as a whole. Not all the men who have been vicars in missions have been assigned to missions, but they have certainly brought greater outreach awareness and emphasis to the congregations to which they have been assigned.” SEW District President Rutchow

False Assumptions Concerning the ViM. (Section IV)

There are a few assumptions made about the ViM that I believe to be unwarranted. Below I listed five of these assumptions.

Assumption #1 “The ViM does not gain the proper administration skills.”

I asked President Valleskey about this very "problem." He said that this by design, "The student is not the administrator....I used to teach a class on administration, I could go so far and then I could see their eyes glass over." Valleskey believes that administration skills are best learned “hands on.” For this reason, the Seminary removed the class on administration from the curriculum and added it to the “Total Recall” summer seminar.

Assumption #2 “The student cannot receive a broad based education in a smaller church.”

There is some reality to this. The extreme cases would be the 1995 exploratory ViM in the South Atlantic District . The idea, outlined in a letter to WELS Kingdom Workers, was to help exploratory missionaries during their second year, one of the most difficult times in their ministry. Although the vicar gained valuable experience in outreach, his education was limited: the available programs in an exploratory are limited; oftentimes, the people have not even coalesced into a congregation; and the emphasis of this situation seems to be on helping the pastor/congregation rather than the student. In recent years men have not been placed into exploratories as vicars-in-mission settings.

Also to assumption #2, the Seminary curriculum has changed outside of the classroom, I believe for the better. With the introduction of the Early Field Training program (1997-1998) men have opportunities to experience and witness the workings of a larger church. This is a good thing. In conversation with my EFT supervising pastor, he mentioned that because he was a vicar outside of the United States, he had never been to a Church Council meeting until he had to run one! This is simply not true today.

Assumption #3 “Men who are trained in ViM are prepared to be missionaries.”

This could be dangerous. The ViM has done wonders to make zealous Home Missionaries, but zeal is not experience. When I asked the former vicars if they felt prepared for their current ministry, the majority of the of men said they felt prepared, but often added a disclaimer. “How can you ever feel ready?” “I thought I was prepared, but I was not.” For this reason, it is imperative to keep close contact with all new pastors, including the men trained as vicars-in-mission settings. Even the ViM has proved to be an excellent training tool, it is not an end in itself.

Assumption #4 These men are trained to do door to door work.

Here again, it seems the *minority* of the men had some training in door-to-door work, and I would say a *very small minority* had extensive experience in this area. Although this may sound like a bad thing, I don't believe it is. There is more to mission work than specific canvassing training. In a changing world, it's more important to understand outreach and a love for the lost as one of the missions of the church. As far as the practical "how-to" hopefully this is adapted to specific situations.

Assumption #5 Because of the emphasis on outreach, the vicar does not gain experience in in-reach/nurture.

It would, I guess depend on what one means by “in-reach.” I agree that a mission vicar would not have as many shut-in calls or hospital visits. But, even a congregation without shut-ins provides many in-reach opportunities. I believe our best in-reach is worship, Bible class and contact—and every church has these. In fact, I would say the best model of in-reach/nurture I have witnessed was in my congregation in Colorado. In a smaller setting, the pastor has a chance to have personal contact with members, even if it is just saying “hello.”

Possible Changes and Suggestions for the Future (Section V)

What is proposed below is what I believe to be the best settings for vicars-in-mission settings. I present two situations. Of the two I believe the first is the ideal. But first, one assumption.

Again and again, former vicars emphasized the bishop, "I personally think the BHM should not seek to send vicars to mission churches, but seek to send them to mission pastors (supervising pastors) –there is a world of difference. From that supervising pastor come the motive, the zeal, the experience, the love for people that you need to serve in a mission church. There are mission churches that don't have mission pastors.”
The following situations assume an exceptional supervising pastor.

Ideal situation?

First possibility: A church large enough to offer a broad education (functioning church council, multiple Bible classes, youth group, Lenten or Advent worship) yet still small enough to have the dynamic of the small church.

I do not want to get too carried away with size. I would rather focus on opportunities. A church of 400 may have fewer opportunities than a church of 80. I would be a little uncomfortable if we placed vicars in a mission church just because it is a mission church. I would be more comfortable (and I believe we do this) placing vicars in settings with excellent bishops. Yet, I have a few concerns. The ideal church I described is often in the middle of transition. For this reason, I believe it is good to evaluate each setting each year. Perhaps the greatest setting in the whole program one year is in the middle of building project or wrestling with budgeting or staffing issues. I would not say this eliminates that church, but I think we need to consider what is best for the vicar.

Advantages of the first possibility

1. Outreach minded bishop
2. Broad base of education
3. May be money to fund part or most of the vicar cost
4. A vicar can see what can be done with God's people. He may only have 75 people in his first parish, but he saw a glimpse of what God's people can do.

Disadvantages

1. The larger the church, the more it loses the small church feel (somewhat subjective)
2. People associate with a face, and a vicar does not provide the continuity of a second full or part-time staffer.
3. This may be a transitioning point for the congregation. If they are struggling to fund a second a full-time worker the BHM would still have to help fund the vicar.

Second possibility: One church that is established and one church that is exploratory or mission status. This would seem like the perfect setting, but there are some drawbacks that come with the advantages.

Advantages

1. Both traditional and mission setting experiences
2. Cost may be covered completely or in part by established congregation
3. Adapts to life in two congregations

Disadvantages

1. It takes about 3 or 4 months to really get to know people in a congregation.¹² This would take even longer if the vicar is split between the churches.
2. Distance and time spent traveling may be difficult.
3. Difficult for the vicar to answer to two bishops. (This should probably be listed number one.) Because the bishop is of the utmost importance to the vicar's education, one must be chosen as the primary bishop.

¹² I do not mean learning names. I mean getting to know people so they trust you and talk to you. For example, I think I knew 90% of the names in the first month, but I did not feel part of the congregation until close to Christmas.

Possible Changes

1. Make the vicars-in-mission settings program a model for the whole vicar program.

A 2002 evaluation of a vicar program must recognize that we are in transition period. There has been a transition from the vicar filling a manpower need for the congregation to the congregation filling an education need for the student.¹³ One man who vicared almost 30 years ago, said, "We filled manpower needs, many of us had a ministry of shut-ins." That is 30 years ago. But what about 20 years ago? or 10? or even this year? Are our men in the very best places for THEIR education? When dealing with sinful people, there will never be a perfect system. Yet, it seems to me the vicars-in-mission settings is a model for placing vicars in what seem to be the best location for the vicars. These three reasons help assure the effectiveness of the ViM:

1. Because the education of the vicar is primary, mission vicar requests ask what the vicar will do and how the vicar will receive a broad education
2. The bishops are held accountable. Each year each location is prioritized against other requests to determine which situation is the best situation for the both the vicar and the congregation.
3. The prioritized requests insure that our vicars are placed in the best settings.

2. Place the vicars-in-mission settings first on Assignment Day.

Vicars-in-mission settings is as close to specific training as our training program gets. Placing mission vicars first may sound extreme, but it is no different than the German call to Benton Harbor, Michigan or the World Mission calls to Mexico and Puerto Rico. By assigning the ViM first, we assure that a man with gifts for outreach will be placed in a setting where he can use those gifts. In doing so, we also avoid placing men in missions whose gifts may be focused in another area of ministry.

3. Add an exit interview with a BHM representative upon completion of the vicar year.

I believe a sort of "exit interview" would be helpful. Let me explain. The vicar year is extremely important, even vital to the education of our students. During this year, for good or bad, ideas and principles are put into practice and the student has a chance to witness the application of classroom ideas. The exit interview, would allow the student some time to speak candidly about the year-- what was good, what was bad, what could be improved. I think this could be done by sending the vicars a sheet of 20 questions (example addenda 4). The questions could be filled out during the year and would be sent in about the same time as the vicar report. This questionnaire would then be the format for the 30 minute exit interview. I suppose it could be argued that this would be bit time-consuming. To that point-- the vicar year is 365 days and perhaps the most formative of all education to that point. I believe the time and effort of the exit interview would assure that future students would receive the very best education.

¹³ President Valleskey dates the "official" change in the vicar program to a 1985 bishops seminar, when President Armin Schuetze "mentioned a revision of the Purpose and Policies of Our Vicarship Program being proposed by the Conference of Presidents" (Paper presented at 2001 Vicarship Supervision Seminar).

Conclusion

After crunching the numbers, reading the surveys, interviewing and making phone calls, my evaluation is simple: The Lord has blessed a great program. I am now in my 21st year of Christian education. I would consider my vicar year the most important. I am not saying I did not learn anything in college or at the Seminary. Rather, I am saying that my vicar year put theory into practice. I consider it a great privilege to have vicared in this program and under a bishop who understands people and how to meet their needs with God's Word.

To God be all glory,
Jared Oldenburg

Greeting fellow members of God's kingdom,

In conjunction with the Board for Home Missions (BHM), I am currently working on an evaluation of the Vicars in Mission Settings Program. BHM is interested because no formal evaluation has been done since the program's inception in 1995. I am interested in your opinions because this is the topic for my senior church history paper.

I realize you may not be too motivated to answer questions simply for *my* paper. Looking at the bigger picture, your answers will be compiled and presented to the BHM. Obviously, the BHM will not blindly accept my report, but at the very least it will be a "strawman" or starting point for discussion.

When I spoke with Pastor Hagedorn, we figured four opinions of the program would be necessary: former vicars, supervising pastors, District Mission Board Chairmen, and District Presidents.

This is basically why your opinion is necessary for a sound evaluation: We need the opinions of men who have a macro view of the synod so we can determine the program's overall impact on our church body.

History

In 1988 the Board for Home Missions (BHM) approved a pilot program that placed a small percentage of vicars into Home Mission settings. Although the program was well received, it was suspended until 1995. Since the inception the Vicars in Home Mission Settings program, the BHM has yearly invested between \$170,000 - \$283,000, depending on the number of vicars and their location in the country.

According to BHM documents, the board has two main objectives with this program:

- 1. To have vicars understand and appreciate the type and scope of the pastoral ministry in a mission setting and to have them receive the training, skills and experience to better prepare them for possible future service as pastors in mission settings.*
- 2. To achieve maximum outreach with the gospel message in settings which would benefit from the additional manpower.*

The first objective concerns you and that is the angle of most of the following questions.

Name:

Number of members in your vicar congregation:

Name of supervising pastor:

Year of graduation:

Number of members in church you were assigned to:

Type of Congregation you were assigned to:

(Mission, Exploratory, Traditional, Does not apply, other)

1. In what ways specifically did the vicars in mission settings program benefit your current ministry?
2. In what ways specifically did the vicars in mission settings program not prepare you for your current ministry?
3. Practically, after your vicar year, did you feel prepared for home mission work?
4. Do you feel your training in a particular regional setting helped your adaptability or did your training make it difficult to transition to a new mission field?
5. In 2001, 12 of 39 vicars were assigned to home mission settings. In your opinion, should the synod seek to place (more, less or about the same) amount of vicars in home mission settings?

Thank you for your time. Because of the BHM meeting on September 23rd, I would appreciate your responses by Friday September 14th.

In Christ's service,
Jared Oldenburg

Dear fellow workers in our Savior's kingdom,

In the spring of this year I was asked informally by the home mission board to research and evaluate the vicars in mission settings program. This is also doubling as my senior church history paper. The questions below are intended to find your personal evaluation of the vicars in mission settings program. Your answers can be very candid. My primary goal is to understand the effectiveness and worth of the program, not simply to have an e-mail of "gem" quotes. If you would not like to be quoted, please note that in your comments.

History

In 1988 the Board for Home Missions (BHM) approved a pilot program that placed a small percentage of vicars into Home Mission settings. Although the program was well received, it was suspended until 1995. Since the inception the vicars-in-mission-settings program, the BHM has yearly invested between \$170,000 - \$283,000, depending on the number of vicars and their location in the country.

Vicars-in-mission-settings pastors and their first parish assignments:

CALIFORNIA

David Karow (Chino Valley, AZ)
Matthew Vogt (SW Las Vegas, NV)
Matthew Guse (Henderson, NV)
Jon Hackbarth (Garden Grove, CA)
Brian Doebler (Pomona, CA)

MINNESOTA

Darin Aden (Oakdale, MN)
Joseph Johnson (St. Paul, MN)
Jeff Duquaine (Duluth, MN)

SOUTH ATLANTIC

James Borgwardt (Savannah, GA)
Mark Kaesmeyer (Smyrna, TN)
Jonathan Hein (Summerville, SC)
Kent Holz (Greenville, SC)
Pete Prange (Jacksonville, FL)
Jonathan Schroeder (Sharpsburg, GA)
John Gensmer (Tallahassee, FL)
Jason Zahn (Irmo, SC)
Mike Weigand (Holiday, FL)

NORTH ATLANTIC

Michael Geiger (Cary, NC)
Paul Meier (Trumbull, CT)

NEBRASKA

Jon Zabell (Omaha, NE)
John Borgwardt (Kearney, NE)
Dan Heiderich
Mark Hayes (Pueblo West, CO)
Tom Glende (Layton, UT)
Todd Rausch (Multiple, SD)
Steve Helwig (Lee's Summit, MO)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Dan Kramer (Boise, ID)
Tom Spiegelberg (Boise, ID)
Tim Smith (Covington, WA)
Scott Muske (Omak, WA)

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN
Jonathan Zietlow (Lexington, KY)

WESTERN WISCONSIN
Tim Glende (Urbana, IL)
Aaron Weber (Loves Park, Roscoe)

NORTHERN WISCONSIN
Matthew Doebler (Chilton, WI)
Matt Duin (Hortonville, WI)

MICHIGAN
Bart Brauer (Caledonia, MI)
Paul Learman (Midland, MI)

Dakota-Montana
Jeffery Halldorson (Kelowna, B.C Canada)

SOUTH CENTRAL
Heath Butler
Matt DeNoyer (Alexandria, LA)
David Rau (Houston, TX)

According to BHM documents, the board has two main objectives with this program:

1. To have vicars understand and appreciate the type and scope of the pastoral ministry in a mission setting and to have them receive the training, skills and experience to better prepare them for possible future service as pastors in mission settings.

2. To achieve maximum outreach with the gospel message in settings which would benefit from the additional manpower.

1. What is your personal evaluation of this program's effectiveness in producing outreach minded ministers?
2. In 2001 12 of 39 vicars were placed in a home mission setting. Do you think the synod should pursue A. more vicars in mission setting. B. less C. About the same.
3. Does this training only benefit home missions, or does it benefit the synod as a whole.
4. Should we consider sending more vicars to smaller churches since 70% of our graduates from 1997 to 2001 were assigned to churches smaller than 240 members.
5. In 1994, 78% of the churches with vicars were larger than 240 members. From 1995 to 1999 this number dropped to 70% during the Vicars in Mission Setting Program. Is this a good trend?
6. Do you see any specific drawbacks of this program?
7. Do you have any comments that have not been expressed in the above answers?

Since the BHM meets during the first weekend in April (I think), would you please respond by Friday, March 8th. Thank you so much for your valuable time.

In Christ,
Jared Oldenburg

Dear Vicar,

Greetings in the name our Risen and Triumphant Lord.

I trust that your vicar year has been both challenging and rewarding. The primary purpose of the vicar year is to give you, the student, a broad based education. What follows will be the format for an "exit interview" which you will have with Harry Hagedorn (or?) within your first month of the new school year. (Before the September meeting). What we are seeking below is your honest answers and opinions. Please complete the questions during the rest of the year, or immediately after your return.

1. Name, Congregation, Supervising pastor, number of baptized members.
2. What experiences during your year were the most beneficial?
3. What experiences do you feel are unique to your situation?
4. How would you rate your relationship with your supervising pastor? (Rate 1-7)

a. Communication	b. As your pastor	c. As your teacher
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5. What do you appreciate most about being in a Vicar-in-mission setting?
6. In what ways could we improve the program?
7. How would you rate your experiences in the following areas?

a. preaching	b. writing Bible classes	c. teaching Bible classes
d. confirmation	e. outreach	f. door to door work
g. understanding local government	h. youth group	i. working on your own
j. counseling	k. planning worship	l. leading worship
m. working with children	n. shut-ins	o. funerals
p. ministering to the sick or dying	q. leading meetings	
8. Through your training in the vicars-in-mission settings program, do you feel as though you would be ready for mission work?
9. Does anything make you uncomfortable about *possibly* working in the Home Mission Field?
10. Do you feel that you received a broad based education?
11. How would you describe your vicar year experience?

Positive	Both Positive and Negative	Negative
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12. Do you feel as though you had an opportunity for in-reach (nurture of your members) as well as outreach?
13. Do you feel your experience during the year will help you to adapt to cultural, regional changes in your ministry?
14. The vicar program is an internship with a stipend. Was the stipend adequate?
15. Do you feel your congregation should receive vicars in the future?
16. Did you have any contact with your Seminary faculty advisor?

Thank you for your time and your insight.

Xxxx

Survey Responses

As I mentioned earlier, I sent our 61 surveys to the former vicars and received 42 replies. In general the tone of the replies was very positive. Many of the men even thanked me for addressing the subject. Below I listed each of the five questions and summarized the responses of the men. Some of the responses are exceptionally insightful. I decided to include large portions in order for the reader to hear the response rather than simply my summary.

Question #1

In what ways specifically did the vicars in mission settings program benefit your current ministry?

“It gave me a "down-to-earth" approach to my relationships with members. Having grown up in a large Wisconsin congregation, I hadn't experienced the unique bond between members, and between pastor and members that exists in mission settings.

Also I believe it greatly helped my evangelism work, both in the area of knowledge and desire to do outreach. - Jon

“I got hands on experience and behind the scenes views of virtually every aspect of mission work in a congregation. I also had the opportunity to work under a pastor who lived the mission mindset. When you work with someone whose bottom line is always reaching out to lost souls, you see the attitude reflected in their work and it tends to rub off on you. There is a big difference between discussing a mission setting in a classroom and experiencing in real life.”- Mark

”One clear benefit is the broader perspective it gave me. My vicar experience allowed me to see the WELS at work outside of the Midwest. That experience allowed me to see what a joy it is to our members in these outlying areas to gather together with like-minded, confessional Lutherans. They really saw the blessings of fellowship. That experience helped me to grow in appreciating the blessings we share through our fellowship. That being said, I think my current ministry benefits from this heightened appreciation of fellowship.” - James

Question #2

In what ways specifically did the vicars in mission settings program not prepare you for your current ministry?

Again, a wide variety of replies. There did not seem to be one “problem” that found its way into the majority of the surveys. Most of the answers were very positive, “I think I had the perfect setting and couldn't ask for more.” I did, however, find a few themes:

Administration:

“You can go to all the meetings you want, talk to your bishop all you want, but you are not ready for the administration end of things. That especially hurts if your understanding of money does not leave your family budget. Also in the course of 40 year ministry, I would think you will have a land purchase/building project—you are not ready for that aspect.” -Wayne

I found similar responses in about 15% of the surveys. I think we could divide administration into two categories: Administration in general (OPA forms, etc.) and Understanding Local Government (land acquisition, building projects). About the same percentage that did not feel prepared for administration in general felt as though they were very prepared for administration. Not one, however, mentioned they would be prepared for a building project--more on this topic in Section IV False Assumptions Concerning the ViM.

Door- to-Door Outreach:

I would say close to half the men mentioned that they did little or no door to door outreach. This was a bit surprising, since most of the congregations/bishops are considered to be “mission minded men” or places with a solid outreach program. I would say that there is not always a direct correlation between door to door calls and the attitude of the congregation. Here are some examples:

“Since I was in a larger mission setting, which happened to be with a mission board chairman, I didn't get as much experience with door-to-door/cold-call type mission work. While that might sound like a negative or drawback, in reality it led to what I would consider my greatest benefit from being in the mission setting in which I was blessed to serve. Let me explain. I learned well, by seeing it take place, that the best evangelism tool is your people. Having members who were excited and willing to share the Word with their friends and to bring them to church is the way that I saw mission work being done my vicar year. It is the same thing that I've strived to emphasize and instill in the members here in our mission. It's what I've had my ears tuned to listening for from other missionaries in order to see if they have had the same experience. It seems true in many cases, at least here in the West, that indeed the best mission outreach strategy that we can undertake is getting our people excited and willing to share the Word - Friendship Evangelism.” -Tom

“I was assigned to a large congregation...In a congregation of that size, it is not necessary to do much canvass work or prospect identification work. The members give you names of friends and family. Those are your prospects. Therefore, I was not as prepared to do door-to-door survey type work.” - Jon

“During my Vicar year I really didn't do any canvassing and no follow-up work. This is my bread and butter here as it is I believe with most missions. Definitely follow-up would have been a helpful experience since in my experience it is nearly impossible to

reach people without it. As it was I began with no experience in this. The grace of God is an amazing thing.” - Jon

“No weddings or funeral. Ironically, we didn’t do a lot of “go” strategies. For example, I never once did ‘God’s Great Exchange’ my vicar year.” - James

Question #3

Practically, after your vicar year, did you feel prepared for home mission work?

Two responses:

Yes (Majority)

“Not only prepared—but excited as the possibility of participating in home mission work full-time in the future.” - Jason

“Yes. I felt comfortable with it. And with mission work, that’s almost as important as understanding the theology of it.” - Jon

Other

“Yeah, I guess I felt I was, but I really wasn’t. vicar year is all the fun and rewarding parts of ministry, with little of the heavy, difficult, discouraging parts of ministry. No matter where you are assigned, I’m sure there is the initial shock of reality setting in. Talking with some of my classmates and friends following vicar year, I had more experiences that perhaps better prepared me for home mission work than those who didn’t participate in the vicars in missions program.” - Dan (cross-cultural outreach)

“Not really, but I really wanted to do it.” - Jon (exploratory)

Question #4

Do you feel your training in a particular regional setting helped your adaptability or did your training make it difficult to transition to a new mission?

If there would be any consensus, I think it would be on this question. I had only one man say that his situation made it difficult to transition.

“My regional settings as a vicar with thriving areas and growing congregations were completely different than what they are now as a pastor with dying areas and dying congregations. Thus, I would have to say that my training probably made it difficult for a transition to a new mission field.” - Todd

Otherwise, the responses were very positive.

“I believe that serving far away from Wisconsin prepared my wife and me to go anywhere on call day. And I was prepared for the mindset of people outside of Wisconsin, which

has been helpful for me in understanding where my people are coming from.” - Jon (established)

“Getting out of the Mid-west was HUGE. I had spent all my life in the Michigan/Wisconsin/Minnesota area...I saw that things weren't all the same throughout the WELS. People actually did things a little differently. I think I got to appreciate my fellow called workers more than maybe I would have in the Midwest. Things are a little different when there's not a WELS church every 20 miles. It made me appreciate getting together with called workers all that more special. Now being away from the Midwest isn't as unfamiliar territory as it once was.” - Mike

Question #5

In 2001, 12 of 39 vicars were assigned to home mission settings. IN your opinion, should the synod seek to place (more, less or about the same) amount of vicars in home mission settings?

Not one survey said “less.” But the responses for “more” and “about the same” were close to being split down the middle. About ½ said “same” often with the disclaimer that the men of Synod and Home Missions are more capable than they are at making the decisions. About ½ said “more” often with the disclaimer that they are bias and think everyone should experience the mission setting.

Concluding

“Jared, thanks for asking. My view of the vicars in mission is very positive. Even more helpful than walking around knocking on doors, was the honest communication and straining to reach the lost. Process over Product. Mission-mindedness as a way of life. Cross-cultural ministry of some sort is going to be a part of every person that gets assigned out of Sem... I would also add that everyone I know who has participated in the program are carrying out faithful and fruitful ministries, most in exploratories or Mission congregations.” - Dan

District President and District Mission Board Chairman Responses

Question #1

What is your personal evaluation of the program’s effectiveness in producing outreach minded ministers?

Overwhelmingly positive response.

“I think it is very effective.”

“Some of our best WELS home missionaries are in congregation that cannot afford a vicar. By providing funding for the program, the WELS is using mission experienced pastors to train vicars.” – Pastor Steven Degner

Question #2

In 2001, 12 of 39 vicars were assigned to home mission settings. In your opinion, should the synod seek to place (more, less or about the same) amount of vicars in home mission settings?

"While I would like to pursue assigning more vicars to mission settings I do not believe that it is practical, at this time, to do so. There needs to be a balance between traditional vicar settings and the mission settings." - Larry Cross, DP Minnesota District

Question #3

Does this training only benefit home mission, or does it benefit the synod as a whole?

"The entire synod is or should be mission minded. The more graduates are trained in 'growing' the church through evangelism rather than just "running" or administering the church, the better our entire ministerium and synod will be at mission work. - Peter Naumann, DP Dakota-Montana District.

Question #4

Should we consider sending more vicars to smaller churches since 70% of our graduates from 1997 to 2001 were assigned to churches smaller than 240 members?

Answers varied

"This would be a good thing, if more small churches could afford a vicar. Unfortunately, the ones who can 'afford' vicars are usually large churches where vicars assume the role of assistant pastor." - Peter Naumann, DP Dakota-Montana District.

"No. The 'all-around training' received as a vicar in a large congregation will better equip the future pastor for whatever assignment the Lord gives him. It is the larger congregations that often need the help of a vicar. Also...smaller congregations often can not afford a vicar. They are welcome, if they have the funds, to apply for a vicar. Although the vicar program is generously subsidized, we are not prepared to...nor should we subsidize the vicar program in other congregations." - John Guse, DP South Atlantic District

"Once again \$ is the problem. Many small churches can't afford a vicar, so they have to rely on mission \$ to pay for the vicar. If we could work it out financially, I think we should try and send more vicars into smaller congregations. That's what they most likely

will be handed on Assignment Day.” - Jonathan Rockhoff, DMB Chairman Nebraska District.

Question #5

In 1994, 78% of the churches with vicars were larger than 240 members. From 1995 to 1999 this number dropped to 70% during the Vicars in Mission Setting Program. Is this a good trend?

Few comments

Question #6

Do you see any specific drawbacks of this program?

“I don’t think I do.” – David Rutschow, DP Southeastern Wisconsin District

“Since these are the types of congregations (small ones) that will often receive a graduate, I don't think so. There still are plenty of vicars still getting their training in larger congregations.” – Dennis Himm, Michigan DMB Chairman

Question #7

The VHM program started in 1995. Below is a chart that shows the number of VHM graduates in each year. It also shows how many were assigned to Home Missions for their first call.

1997 9 of 11 went immediately to Home Missions

1998 4 of 9

1999 5 of 9

2000 3 of 10

2001 1 of 9

Realistically, with the new budget and pastoral shortage, can this trend stop so we can assign men to the mission field at the peak of enthusiasm?¹

“If it doesn’t stop, we are hurting our goals as a synod to reach the lost.” – Donald Stuppy, North Atlantic DMB Chairman

“These numbers are shocking to say the least. Are these numbers accurate? It seems that larger congregations and district presidents prefer the candidates who have been trained in the mission setting. If the students are not placed into a mission setting, I question the value of the program.” - Pastor Steven Degner

¹ Only one DP received question #7.

“Whether they are assigned to mission congregations or not, they are being trained for mission work. That is the mission of every congregation.” - Dennis Himm, Michigan DMB Chairman

The response of the DP who received the question:

1. I believe the Lord controls what type of call are available on Assignment Day.
2. We are also pleased to have enthusiastic mission minded new pastors in some struggling congregations
3. the fact that a man was a mission vicar does not mean that , after his training and evaluation, he is best suited to serve in a mission.
4. One should also look at the mission vicars that were assigned to larger or established congregations and have since taken mission calls...and vice-versa.

Pastoral shortage???? I do not believe that we have a pastoral shortage and, unless more money becomes available, we will, in a few years of not opening many mission, have a pastor “overage” once again. - John Guse, DP South Atlantic District